STRUCTURAL REALISM & GEOPOLITICS IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA:

USING “WHAT WE HAVE, WHERE WE ARE”; TO EXAMINE THE CURRENT INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Written by Ryan Timothy Jacobs
The University of North Carolina, Wilmington
INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States of America and Russia have utilized the Middle East as a battleground for world domination. In the unipolarity of the international system today, Russia has increasingly made strategic aims towards regaining footing, antagonizing the hegemonic power; that was once it’s equal. Providing both a substantially economic and militaristic geographical location, the region dividing the Western world from its formidable foe of the latter half of the 20th century has been the center of international conflict for approximately three decades. Among nearly countless conflicts that have arisen in the 20th and 21st centuries, four of the more recent include: the Iran-Iraq War (1980 to 1988), which led to the Gulf War in 1991; the Turkey-PKK Conflict (1984-2013); the Iraq War (2003-2011); and the Syrian Civil War (since 2011), which spilled over into Lebanon, international organizations have continuously played a part in attempting to resolve issues.

Additionally, Turkey is located in Western Asia and Southeastern Europe, bordering eight states, including Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Iran, Iraq, the Azerbaijani enclave of Nakhchivan, and Syria; the Aegean Sea on the west, Black Sea on the north, and Mediterranean Sea on the south. Along with the Turkish Straits which divide Europe and Asia, the state has endured a compelling score of extramural activity. Turkey also resides in a pivotal geopolitical region of the world. As it has had an influx of international relations with neighboring states, organizations, and both the U.S. and Russia, Turkey has been immersed in contention over its locus of power. Given the affluence of the more powerful states, Turkey has maintained a two pronged approach to its foreign and domestic policies, under the compulsion of the U.S. and Russia.
Most significantly, the two states have compelled Turkey, along with other smaller states, into conflicts that further escalate problems that have materialized throughout the Middle East. The current article will examine how the U.S. and Russia’s continued protestation to international power has influenced the Middle East. Concentrating on U.S. and Russia relations, Turkey relations with the U.S. and Russia, Turkey’s domestic issues, the Syrian Conflict, and the emergence of Daesh in Syria and Iraq; the following article will explain structural realism and geopolitics in regards to current international conflicts.
“For most scholars, the fundamental cause of war is international anarchy, compounded by the security dilemma. These forces press hardest on the leading powers because while they may be able to guarantee the security of others, no one can provide them with this escape from the state of nature. As we have seen, different schools of thought propose different explanations for the rise of the Security Community and so lead to somewhat different propositions about the conditions under which anarchy can be compatible with peace. But what is most important is that the Community constitutes a proof by existence of the possibility of uncoerced peace without central authority. Because these countries are the most powerful ones and particularly war-prone, the Community poses a fundamental challenge to our understanding of world politics and our expectations of future possibilities. With terrorism, the aftermath of the war in Iraq, and the frictions within the Security Community now so salient, it is easy to lose sight of the significance for both policy and theory of the fact that the leading powers know that they will never fight each other. Nevertheless this is the most important change in world politics since the beginning of international history.”

~ Robert Jervis

STRUCTURAL REALISM

Structure is an overwhelming factor of international politics. “This assumption is quite straightforward. It is based on a specific worldview that claims that human behavior is shaped by structural factors. It is the starting point of any structural analysis.” There would be no need to develop structural theories without “a belief in the capacity of structure to shape and transform agency behavior.” Structural theory has to begin by recognizing the overruling force of structure. “Since structure is composed of both an anarchical ordering principle and a shifting

distribution of capabilities, it both shapes agent behavior and is iteratively modified by that behavior as the distribution of capabilities changes. What vary are the particular strategies units will pursue in relation to the specific distribution of power they find themselves in.\textsuperscript{4} Theories of structure also pose four key assumptions: “structure itself is the overruling element of international politics; it is composed of anarchy and the distribution of power; that it shapes, not only behaviors, but identity and orientation of all the units; and it is a conditional environment, which is continuously active and creates an imperative of responsiveness among its units.”\textsuperscript{5} How its units respond to one another or the “interconnectivity” determines the ability of the structure to function accordingly within an international setting. “Interconnectivity is the relationship between states as conditioned by structure and state motive. Interconnectivity, as a feature of the prevailing international structure, allows that significant internal or even multilateral can forge relations across borders. The inside-out and outside-in perspectives can be seen to combine when individual personalities of key leaders, for example, may be pushed by internal, historical or group dynamics to act outwardly.”\textsuperscript{6} Deciding on agenda, an international organization “may decide on an agenda simply from the internal inertia of its members.”\textsuperscript{7}

Yet, “personalities and organizations are important, in part, because they represent a state’s power, and to be effective they must push with that state and act with one eye on the external environment. Personalities and organizations may initiate foreign policy, but foreign policy action that stems from internal drives but which goes against the grain of structure is

risking failure, and over time, successful leadership will see that.” Arguing against structural realism in the post-Cold War era is often the result of unit-level explanations. Although the Soviet Union collapsed, similar system dynamics still exist. “The disappearance of the Soviet Union from the center stage for some seems to mean that suddenly unit-level explanations have replaced structure. But in reality the unipolarity that was created when the Soviet Union slid away merely gives unit-level actors like personalities the appearance of a greater relative profile because they stand on a narrower stage. They were there before. Systemic dynamics that operated then continue to persist. A change in history does not necessarily require a change in the general theory that explains history. We should not be repulsed by the continuation of the familiar just because it did not explain all actions in the past.” As a result of history, different structures must continue to exist side-by-side, and “the fact that a large historical world co-exists with the post-historical one means that the former will hold attractions for certain individuals precisely because it continues to be a realm of struggle, war, injustice, and poverty.” The predominance of this attraction is especially seen in the Eastern region of the world, and the Middle East.

Furthermore, Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer, two predominant realist-based IR theorists, also explained international relations from a structural level. Their focus is on its anarchic nature and the distribution of capabilities. “From a structural perspective, how capabilities are distributed across an environment lacking centralized authority should reveal why IR flows as it does. Such a focus should provide us an expectation about the key actors

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within the system and their behaviors. As Hans Morgenthau (1993:7) himself suggested, it is what is possible and not what is desirable that drives behavior.” Richard J. Harknett and Hasan B. Yalcin asked the question, “If the distribution of power is structurally conditioning the behavior of states, should not the behavior of states vary based on the relative capabilities they possess?” An example to illustrate structural realist theory is the longstanding U.S.-Saudi relationship. Although Saudi Arabia has an extremely poor human rights record, and does not tolerate political dissent, minority opinion, or gender equality; but the region is one of the largest proven oil reserves. U.S. foreign policy regarding Saudi Arabia is not based upon their behavior; it is based upon the capabilities that Saudi Arabia possesses.

Moreover, concerning an array of states within this particular international conflict, there lays an unequal distribution of power. For this reason, the examination must include the diffuse power structure. “The relative power between several units is marginal but important. For a diffuse power structure to exist, a small gap in power must subsist between a minimum of two units and can encompass many more. What have traditionally been called bipolar and multipolar systems have more in common than offensive and defensive realists have considered and are better explained under the single category of a diffuse power structure. Within such a diffuse power structure, there is a stronger incentive to seek change in relative power position and in overall structure itself.” Illustrated in the Cold War-era, the U.S. and the Soviet Union sustained the greatest proclivity towards autonomy in history. “One characteristic of such diffuse power structures is that this behavioral orientation toward change will tend to lean the

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overall system toward major war—the propensity for major war is higher in diffuse power systems. This outcome tendency holds even if states within the diffuse power system frame their behavior and intentions as being primarily defensive. ¹³ The meticulousness of powerful international actors is not dependent upon their structural capabilities. Capabilities simply enhance units’ abilities to carry out actions in the international community. A particular unit will also comply with the structures most influential power in order to establish autonomy within the system.

Relating to the international system currently in place, “concentrated power structures by definition are the ones in which there is a significant gap between the capabilities of one side and others. So they are populated by one powerful actor and the rest. In such a structure, there is only one actor with the capabilities to challenge that strong party or the system itself. Under these conditions, actors do not intend to change the structure because of two reasons. The first one is related to the strong party’s choices in its search for autonomy as an actor “liberated from the ropes” of conflicting autonomies (Joffe 2003), while the second one is related to weaker parties’ obligations and their lack of enough capabilities to challenge the status quo.” ¹⁴ Weaker states thus perceive the idea of change as either unnecessary or unattainable.

Lastly, there is a place for structural realist theory in the attempt to explain the complexities that encompass international conflict. “IR theory has been evolving for decades and has strengthened as structural variables were given more prominence. To date, however, the field has fallen short in leveraging the strength of structuralist thinking. The evolution of

realism, in particular, has provided a solid conceptual basis for the subfield’s development (whether one has worked within or in contrast to realism), but also complicates realist explanation, when in fact we have not.”

In principle, structuralism “provides the opportunity of understanding human identity, motivations, and behavior by tracing their own roots to the environment which they are all located.” The purpose of utilizing structural realism will be to demonstrate how what we have continues to determine international conflict.

GEOPOLITICS

Accordingly, where we are, or the word geopolitics, “was originally coined by the Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén about the turn of the 20th century, and its use spread throughout Europe in the period between World Wars I and II (1918–39) and came into worldwide use during the latter.” Pertaining to power relationships differing between states, which are based upon the geographical influences, geopolitics examines how topography, climate, arable land, and access to the sea affect politics. The majority of comprehensive geopolitical writings occurred in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. “Geopoliticians sought to understand how the new industrial capabilities of transportation, communication, and destruction—most notably railroads, steamships, airplanes, telegraphy, and explosives—

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interacting with the largest-scale geographic features of the Earth would shape the character, number, and location of viable security units in the emerging global international system.”¹⁸

Believing that a new era would consist of the “closure of the frontier, territorial units of increased size, and intense interstate competition,”¹⁹ and that a drastic change was imminent, many theorized specific changes to come; but their predictions were convoluted. Yet, these early writings on geopolitics consisted of explaining how new technology would impact world politics, but “the popularity of geopolitical theory declined after World War II, both because of its association with Nazi German and imperial Japanese aggression and because the emergence of nuclear explosives and ballistic missiles reduced the significance of geographical factors in the global strategic balance of power.”²⁰ Yet, with the emergence of the Cold War “geopolitics continued to influence international politics, serving as the basis for the United States’ Cold War strategy of containment, which was developed by George Kennan as a geopolitical strategy to limit the expansion of the Soviet Union. Political geographers also began to expand geopolitics to include economic as well as military factors.”²¹

Also, following the collapse of Soviet Union, the Western world’s predominance in the international system changed the overall approach and perception of economics. The structure of the international community testifies to Western ambiance, but “westerners should never have

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expected old-fashioned geopolitics to go away.”

Revisiting Francis Fukuyama’s argument in *The End of History and the Last Man*, the Western world negates the historical presence that resonates within the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. Most importantly, “the second part of Fukuyama’s book has received less attention, perhaps because it is less flattering to the West. As Fukuyama investigated what a post-historical society would look like, he made a disturbing discovery. In a world where the great questions have been solved and geopolitics has been subordinated to economics, humanity will look a lot like the nihilistic “last man” described by the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche: a narcissistic consumer with no greater aspirations beyond the next trip to the mall.”

Even more, “apart from the economic realm and political life, megalothymia [A term coined by Francis Fukuyama, building on Plato’s concept of the spiritual part of the soul, which drives tyrannical ambition; the compulsion to be superior to others] finds outlets increasingly in purely formal activities like sports, mountain climbing, auto racing, and the like. An athletic competition has no “point” or object other than to make certain people winners and others losers— in other words, to gratify the desire to be recognized as superior.”

Walter Russell Mead argued Fukuyama’s point in his article entitled *The Return of Geopolitics* by stating that “these people would closely resemble today’s European bureaucrats and Washington lobbyists. They are competent enough at managing their affairs among post-historical people, but understanding the motives and countering the strategies of old-fashioned power politicians is hard for them. Unlike their less productive and less stable rivals, post-historical people are unwilling to make sacrifices, focused on the short term, easily distracted,

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and lacking in courage.”

Mead examined how the Western world’s perception can result in negative consequences and explained that “societies filled with Nietzsche’s last men (and women) characteristically misunderstand and underestimate their supposedly primitive opponents in supposedly backward societies -- a blind spot that could, at least temporarily, offset their countries’ other advantages. The tide of history may be flowing inexorably in the direction of liberal capitalist democracy, and the sun of history may indeed be sinking behind the hills. But even as the shadows lengthen and the first of the stars appears, such figures as Putin still stride the world stage. They will not go gentle into that good night, and they will rage, rage against the dying of the light.”

By building from Francis Fukuyama’s synopsis and rephrasing Dylan Thomas’ poetic verse from Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night, Mead presages a latent advantage to returning to geopolitics to analyze the structure of international relations; as the current article provides that it is highly conducive to date.

Witheal, the structural conditions, as well as the geographic location of powerful states, are overwhelming important to comprehending international relations today. Not only do the different societies encompass a wide array of personalities and values to the fore, but the institutions within each state work differently, “and their publics are shaped by different ideas.”

The purpose of the following is to utilize structural realism and geopolitics to examine the international relations of U.S. and Russia in the post-Cold War era to explain current conflicts in the Middle East.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF STATES INVOLVED IN
THE CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST:

THE UNITED STATES AND RUSSIA

The United States and Russia have unarguably had a long history of conflict throughout the last two centuries. Most predominantly during the Cold War-era, international relations were primarily focused on the issues related to the relationship between these two states. The bipolarity that existed in the Cold War-era illustrated a particular unstable international community. Mutual deterrence, or more significantly, mutual destruction was the fundamental strategy almost immediately after World War II until the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991.

At the end of the Cold War, adopting the principles of liberal capitalism appeared to be the only method for future states to compete economically and militarily. “Unfortunately, many observers conflated the temporary geopolitical conditions of the post–Cold War world with the presumably more final outcome of the ideological struggle between liberal democracy and Soviet communism. The political scientist Francis Fukuyama’s famous formulation that the end of the Cold War meant “the end of history” was a statement about ideology. But for many people, the collapse of the Soviet Union didn’t just mean that humanity’s ideological struggle was over for good; they thought geopolitics itself had also come to a permanent end.”

The notion of The End of History, which is a statement about ideology, “has rested upon geopolitical

consequences of ideological struggle ever since the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel first expressed it at the beginning of the nineteenth century;”30 with the Battle of Jena, in 1806. The beginning of unlimited war thus marked a troubling time in world history. As the two powerful states conflicted throughout the second half of the 20th century, smaller states mattered very little in international relations. Once, the powerhouse of the Eastern world, the Soviet Union slowly pieced itself back together; establishing the Russian Federation. In decades that followed, the U.S. became a hegemonic power in a unipolar international system. Russia has continued to slowly re-shape itself; economically, politically, and militaristically. Alike other states that have risen yet failed to remain a superpower, such as China and Iran (i.e. Persia), Russia has long desired to pull itself from the rubble and assert the state’s position eminently within the international community. This section will examine the current international relations among the U.S. and Russia.

The U.S. has remained the dominant state since the Cold War. The hegemonic power wields enormous capacity in the international community. As the greatest influence in relations among states, the U.S. undoubtedly vested interest in projecting specific political and economic conditions upward to that of the international level, as well as establishing an international system of states that “subscribe to the United States’ liberal values and institutions and that are open to US economic penetration.”31 From the viewpoint of Russia, U.S. affluence threatens the likelihood of claiming international power with any of its prior political infrastructure playing a

role. John Glenn commented on the United States and the expansion of power, in an article regarding realism v. strategic culture, by stating that:

- The United States’ “pursuit of hegemony in regions outside the Western Hemisphere is primarily driven by Open Door-domestic-considerations and is not structurally determined. “The explanation for the United States’ pursuit of extraregional hegemony can be found not at the international, but domestic level. Furthermore, a policy of extraregional hegemony stands in sharp contrast to the behavior predicted by defensive realism (no hegemony) and by Mearsheimer’s offensive realism (regional hegemony). Both predict that the United States should be engaging in off shore balancing, but Layne argued that the United States has sought to establish extraregional hegemony and actively prevented other states/regions emerging as new autonomous poles of power.”

The Theory of Hegemonic Stability (HST) is imperative for this research. “HST is based on the idea that the international system can only remain stable if there is a single dominant state that regulates the interactions of other states in the system. The hegemonic power must have the power, will and commitment to enforce the rules. It must also be perceived as mutually beneficial to the major states. The capability rests upon three attributes: a large, growing economy; dominance in a leading technological or economic sector; and political power backed up by projective military.” Although these capabilities rely on the mentioned attributes, shifts in aptitudes will occur, causing changes in the behavior of units within the international structure.

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Considering the possibility that the U.S. will remain the hegemonic power for years to come, Russia has the ability to persevere through rational decision-making strategies that comply with current international standards. Nicolas Pedriana explained:

- The more “zoomed in” the lens, the greater is the focus on the specific decision points and pathways at which rational actors construct their possible choices. At this level of analysis, actors’ immediate institutional/social context should have a greater direct impact on action than contexts further removed from the decision point. As the analytic lens zooms out, however, the focus moves away from specific decision points and begins to incorporate more general features of the entire case. These wider, more abstract contexts may not directly influence the choices actors make at any given point. Indeed, the wider the analytic lens, the more experimental temporality begins to eclipse eventful temporality (see Sewell 1996; Stryker 1996). This is not to say that rational choice narratives are incapable of theoretical payoffs beyond single cases. Indeed, they can be a tool for building comparative designs that allow subsequent research to compare and contrast causal sequences identified in specific historical cases.34

The specific decision points of Russia in the post-Cold War era have reshaped the unit’s structure in the international community. “Russia has undergone significant changes since the collapse of the Soviet Union, moving from a globally-isolated, centrally-planned economy towards a more market-based and globally-integrated economy, but stalling as a partially reformed, statist economy with a high concentration of wealth in officials’ hands. Economic reforms in the 1990s privatized most industry, with notable exceptions in the energy and defense-related sectors.”35 The state has also undergone strategic operations to strengthen their militaristic capabilities. “Russia's military includes Ground Forces, Navy, Air Forces, Airborne Troops, Strategic Rocket Troops, and Space Troops which rank at the top in comparison to other

European military strength and size. It is estimated that Russia has between 735 and 1,365 metric tons of weapons grade-equivalent highly enriched uranium (HEU) and between 106 and 156 tons of military-use plutonium. As the world's largest country, a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, regional power in Europe and Asia and the principal successor state of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation wields enormous international clout and consequently hosts a large diplomatic community in its capital city of Moscow.”

Exactly how this might further change the structure of international relations is unknown, but revitalization in international relations among the U.S. and Russia has the potential to drastically cause global benefits. One of the primary issues that the U.S. should objectify is taking measures to increase communication and to gather intelligence in their dealings with Russia. Ariel Cohen precautions the Obama administration regarding Russia’s military modernization by stating:

- The most important step that the Obama Administration can take in light of Russia’s growing military power is to increase intelligence gathering on Russian military modernization and strategic and tactical goals, programs, and plans. The Administration should also pay closer attention to the dynamics of Russian technical–military cooperation with other countries (arms and military-technology sales); maintain the U.S. military budget at 4 percent of gross domestic product (GDP); continue U.S. military modernization, including the nuclear arsenal and missile defense; and expand military cooperation with NATO allies and partners, especially those in the former Soviet Union.

Needless to say, Russia seeks autonomy, and in the self-interest of this goal, the state acts in its own behavior and by its own motivations. “The wherewithal to act (autonomy) or the lack of it derives from the combined lack of a central authority and the variance of capabilities arrayed

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across several units”\textsuperscript{38}, or anarchy and the distribution of power. “Thus, structurally derived, it can be assumed that units seek autonomy, which is defined as possession of the wherewithal for the organized capacity to act in a sustained fashion globally. Seeking autonomy should be understood not as a unit-based and generated motivation, but rather as a structurally generated necessity. Understanding autonomy as the basic motivation shifts our understanding of Waltz’s and Mearsheimer’s focus on security or power maximization. Those pursuits are, in reality, different strategies (among many others) for achieving the base structural necessity of being autonomous.”\textsuperscript{39} Recent international cooperation exemplifies this pursuit. For example, the U.S. and Russia worked successfully together in implementing a U.S.-Russia framework for eliminating Syrian chemical weapons. “Several weeks after an attack in the suburbs of Damascus that killed large numbers of Syrian civilians by exposure to sarin nerve gas in August 2013, the United States and Russia agreed to a “Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons.” Pursuant to the framework, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) would supervise the identification and destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons by mid-2014. The Security Council adopted Resolution 2118 to support the implementation of the framework.”\textsuperscript{40} Beginning in October of 2014, the joint OPCW-UN team met with Syrian officials and started arranging for inspections and destruction. Although there were difficulties throughout the disarmament program, U.S.-Russia cooperation was lucrative.


Also, “Russia is now the EU’s third biggest partner after the United States and China, accounting for 7.9 per cent of the EU-27’s total trade in 2009.”\(^{41}\) The increase is due to Russia’s share in the EU energy imports. “The EU imports approximately 40 per cent of its natural gas from Russia and Russian gas accounts for around 25 per cent of European gas consumption … the EU, in turn, accounts for two thirds of Russia’s energy exports.”\(^{42}\) The EU’s dependence on Russian energy is much weaker than commonly believed, thus both partners are interdependent. “As interdependence goes well beyond the economic sphere, the scope of EU–Russia interactions has expanded over the past five years to encompass a number of issues of mutual interest, for example, visa regime, stability in the common neighbourhood, and education. In other words, each partner has been faced with both opportunities (for example, trade, scientific exchanges) and challenges (traffics or illegal immigration) stemming from the existence, since the early 2000s, of a common border.”\(^{43}\) Ingrained in trade, primarily fuelled by Central and Eastern European states which acceded to the EU in the beginning of the 21st century, Russia’s interdependence with the EU highlights its development in the post-Soviet period. Recent state practice, such as ”the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia’s record in the UN Security Council, the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights prominent cases in investor-state arbitration, and the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union … [and] increasingly popular ‘civilizational’ ideas, the claim that Russia is a unique civilization and therefore not part of the


Regional systems of administration and its’ universality pave the way for the future of Russia’s approaches to international law.

Fitly, it must also be noted that, as Lauri Malksoo emphasized, “if one had to capture the essence of Russian approaches to international law in one historically laden word, it would have to be-Byzantine. In the same way as Muscovy was ultimately unwilling to bow to Rome, today’s Russia tends to eye ideological projects of the West (i.e. the US and primarily Protestant and Catholic Europe), including directions that they want to take international law in the twenty-first century, with suspicion. Geopolitics and the development of international law are interpreted in the light of Russia’s opposition to the West that is bigger than Communism as an ideology ever was.”

The various accomplishments mentioned above, joined together with Russia’s skepticism towards Western ideas, further strengthen Russia’s autonomy.

Correspondingly, U.S.-Russia joint interest in eliminating chemical weapons in Syria illustrated their ability to successfully work together; which is highly valuable to resolving the conflict in the Middle East. Furthermore, the program of action in Syria was concerted among the two states, but their motives differ. “The reasoning and the responsive characteristics of units should not be interpreted as a classical rational choice assumption. Even though reasoning and responsiveness can be considered as a loose rationality assumption, it is not a classical rational choice assumption because of its responsive and inconsequentialist characteristics. Units are assumed as focusing and responding to the conditions not only on the behavioral level, but also on the motivational level. Reason is not an instrument of already-given and unchanging

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44 Russian Approaches to International Law. (n.d.). Retrieved April 1, 2015, from https://books.google.com/books?id=dkq-BgAAQBAJ&dq=russian%20approaches%20to%20international%20law&source=gbs_navlinks_s
motivations but can rearrange the motivations according to the circumstances.”46 The U.S. and Russia do not follow, “their goals blindly at the expense of anything else. This is not a consequentialist assumption, which focuses on the determinism of agency; on the contrary, it is an assumption based on the sources of motivation and behavior.”47 As previously explained, the future is unwritten, but theory can be established based upon the history of international relations. As Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds suggested, “how the United States' international role evolves during the next 15-20 years-a big uncertainty-and whether the US will be able to work with new partners to reinvent the international system will be among the most important variables in the future shape of global order. Although the United States' (and the West's) relative decline vis-a-vis the rising states is inevitable, its future role in the international system is much harder to project: the degree to which the US continues to dominate the international system could vary widely.”48 It will solely depend on how the powers of units within the international system shift, along with the behavioral changes caused by the shifts of capabilities.

Although the U.S. and Russia are the most significant states regarding the Syrian Conflict, Turkey’s geographical location and economic ties have established the state essential to resolving the conflict. Likewise, structural realism and the geopolitics identify the complex nature of the state’s motivations to increase autonomy, causing further conflict in the international community. Withal, the apparent tension has resulted from an inability for international powers to agree on a common enemy in order to resolve several issues that continue to create an unstable environment in the Middle East. Turkey, Russia and the United States have attempted to negotiate and find solutions to resolve problems that have been increasing over time, but there as yet to be a consensus. The U.S. and Russia have differing motivations to decision-making strategies that they would like to have carried out; and Turkey’s motivations contrast that of the two predominant states’, but their capabilities are meager in comparison. Yet, Turkey is in a vast geographic location, which is undeniably exigent to the conflict. The following will examine current relations among the three states, provide historical and political matters of contention between Turkey and Syria, as well as analyze Turkey’s domestic issues.

After six decades of positive foreign relations between Turkey and the United States of America, the two states have recently been at odds over the escalating conflict. Most recently, there were negotiations in December of 2014, but a definitive plan of operations has yet to be made. The government of Turkey has been reluctant to work together because of, as they argue, the U.S. administrations failure to commit to taking actions against Assad and the Syrian regime.
Turkey and the U.S.’s relations with other states have also resulted in disagreements upon finding an appropriate solution to the crisis. First, Turkey is not friendly with Kurds, considering them a terrorist organization, but the U.S. has continuously backed Kurds within the region. In October of 2014, the U.S. provided a Kurdish group with weapons without Turkish consent.

“The marked deterioration of U.S.-Turkish relations that has occurred since 2003 was triggered by the planning for and implementation of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Seminal events in the downward spiral include intense American pressure on Ankara to allow the Fourth Infantry Division to enter Iraq through Turkey, the Turkish parliament’s failure to pass legislation permitting U.S. troops to transit through Turkey, the unfortunate mutual recriminations that followed, the U.S. arrest of eleven Turkish Special Forces operators in Sulemeniye in July 2003 for allegedly planning to assassinate Kurdish figures, and the Coalition Provisional Authority’s rebuff of Ankara’s offer to send 20,000 troops to Iraq to help with reconstruction.”

Turkey has questioned the intentions of the U.S.’s involvement in the ongoing conflict in Syria. As of the latter half of 2014, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, made statements in regards to U.S.’ support in Kobane, a town on the Syrian border of Turkey. Now, and in 2003, Turkey made it clear that they did not want to be used as a launching pad for attacks against fellow Muslims in the Middle East, a sentiment Erdogan has repeatedly expressed in his many recent comments involving U.S. policy. “He [Erdogan] has accused the United States of being more interested in oil than in helping the people of the region and has made it clear that he does not regard the Islamic State as a greater threat than the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK),

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the organization affiliated with the Kurdish Syrians the United States has been helping in Kobane.”

Moreover, Turkey’s neighbor, Syria is the major competent of conflict in the Middle East. The global position of Turkey has caused complications for the enormous West Asian/South Eastern Europe state. Among these issues, Russia has strongly back Assad, has economic ties with Turkey, and tensions with the U.S., which further stagnates resolution. The Turkish government has also held lengthy talks regarding their concern for the refugees fleeing the conflict within Syrian borders. Furthermore, the Syrian people are under two pressures; ISIS and the regime. Turkey has stated that they desire to create an integrated strategy to assist the refugees that are currently residing in their own state, and are also are concerned about the future of Syria. Turkey’s stance is that Assad must be removed from power in order for Syria to become more stable; as well as eliminating ISIS. These issues bring about important questions concerning how the U.S. and Turkey can negotiate and establish terms, along with implementing a productive plan concerning the conflict that began in Syria; which has quickly poured into its’ neighboring states sovereign borders.

As of March of 2014, Russia has been aiding Assad both externally and internally. “In addition to blocking UN Security Council resolutions against the regime, Moscow has been assisting Assad’s government in its fight against the opposition on the ground. Russia’s military and political assistance has given Assad leverage and the confidence that he can win the conflict. Moscow’s brokering of a deal in which the Syrian regime agreed to the destruction of its

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chemical weapons has also given Assad a sense of legitimacy in relation to the international community.51 Russia and Turkey have a reciprocal relationship primarily based on their economic ties. Before Moscow invaded and annexed Crimea earlier this year, Russian-Turkish relations had been on a dramatic upswing, with two-way trade reaching some $32 billion in 2013 (mostly Turkish imports of Russian natural gas) and Russia becoming Turkey’s No. 2 trading partner, behind Germany. Turkey had also emerged as Russia’s No. 1 trade partner in services, according to Russian Central Bank statistics, and the leading destination for Russian tourists (some 4 million in 2013), although recent advertisements on Russian state television is encouraging them to go to Crimea instead. Two years ago, Russia and Turkey agreed on visa-free travel for their citizens, allowing stays of one and later two to three months. Meanwhile, the EU and Turkey have established a road map for visa-free travel, but have not finalized an agreement.”52 President Vladimir Putin and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan also have other important reasons to ensure that they will continue to have a stable, healthy relationship with one another. One of Russia’s greatest interests in maintaining sound relations with Turkey consists of building power against its Western counterpart. As Fiona Hill and Omer Taspinar state in their article entitled “Turkey and Russia: Axis of the Excluded?”:

- Paradoxically, even Turkey’s European aspirations have brought it closer to Russia. In spite of the start of accession talks with the European Union on 3 October 2005, Turkey is increasingly frustrated with the EU, at turns feeling rejected or treated like a second-tier state. There is diminishing enthusiasm in Turkey itself for the accession process. In any event, Turks increasingly think the EU will find ways to exclude them.8 Russians are also certain that Turkey will not be admitted. Both Turkey and Russia want the EU to recognise and respect

them as European Great Powers, with significant imperial histories and roles in the Near East and Eurasia. Russia and Turkey are undergoing parallel revivals of their imperial state traditions. In both countries, the imperial state religion, Russian Orthodoxy and Sunni Islam respectively, is back in the political picture – as manifest in the personal and publicly acknowledged beliefs of President Putin and Prime Minister Erdogan – after a long period of absence. Russia is becoming more ‘Tsarist’ with all politics increasingly focused on the central figure of the president and strong links between the Kremlin and the Orthodox Church. It has been reinvigorated as a state and a regional power by economic growth boosted by soaring oil revenues, and increasingly sees itself – as it did in the imperial past – as a Eurasian civilisation complementary to Europe. Turkey is coming to terms with its Ottoman history under the leadership of Muslim-Democrats keen on pursuing a multidimensional foreign policy. With its vibrant economy, large population and growing national pride, Turkey still wants to be anchored in Europe. But after half a century in the EU’s waiting room, its patience is wearing thin. In the meantime, growing frustration with the United States does not make the concept of ‘the West’ any more attractive. Turkey is emerging as a regional power frustrated with both the EU and the United States, and ready to follow its own national interest as far as Iraq, the Kurdish question and stability in neighbouring countries such as Syria and Iran are concerned. In all these matters, Ankara sees eye to eye with Moscow, which has its own independent interests in multiple regions.53

In addition, given both Russia’s and Turkey’s geographic locations, both states benefit as counterterrorism partners in the strategically important Caucasus region and the Middle East. They both stand to benefit militaristically. More fundamentally, if NATO were to consider military operations to restore Crimea to Ukraine – a virtual impossibility given Moscow’s nuclear deterrent, although Russia’s military planners must nevertheless consider it among their worst-case scenarios – or if Russia and NATO slid into a military conflict in Ukraine, Turkey’s

well-developed NATO infrastructure would pose the most immediate threat to the peninsula and to Russia’s naval base at Sevastopol.\(^{54}\)

From the perspective of the United States, “the rapprochement is troubling. In the context of the Middle East, Turkey and Russia are increasingly sceptical about the American-led ‘war on terror’. Ankara and Moscow have their own specific terrorist groups to worry about. Al-Qaeda is a lesser concern for Turkey and Russia, in the face of PKK terrorism and Kurdish separatism, and Chechen (now broader North Caucasian) terrorism and separatism. In their view, these groups threaten their territorial integrities and prevailing conceptions of statehood. The threat for Turkey and Russia is very different from the external threat to the United States from stateless jihadi networks.”\(^{55}\) More recent accounts of threats through social media platforms and other technologies have constructed the U.S.’ view upon the conflict to be considered “closer to home” than it had in the past few years.

Overall, the simple fact that there are a variety of states, consisting of a wide range of capabilities, conflict continues to endure in the Middle East. The increased number of actors capable to act in terms of their interests (self-reliant) decreases all actors’ level of autonomy. Under such a system, units become more and more concerned with structural constraints. It becomes an undesirable environment because of the decreased level of autonomy for all. Additionally, since small changes in gaps in power may impact the position of a unit in the diffuse system, units will not favor the status quo in such a system, and if the possibility arises, their default orientation is to transform it somehow—to shift where they sit along a tight or


tightening distribution of power. Hence, because of the lack of enough relative capabilities to transform the system to its advantage, given its diffuse nature each unit has to content with this constraining structure and actively manage their position in the system. Thus, the main strategic orientation here is to seek autonomy by changing the distribution of power in a favorable manner, but the diffuse power structure itself frustrates these efforts. The behavior of states involved in the conflict has continued to change throughout the course of recent years. Manipulating the effectiveness by reducing the power of the state’s ability to pursue self-interests in the conflict has caused many of the negotiations and decision-making strategies to collapse before they were even materialized.

DOMESTIC ISSUES

A brief explanation of the domestic conflict in Turkey among Turks and Kurds will assist in establishing the lack of capabilities, motivation, and behavioral mechanisms of the Turkish government. By utilizing important aspects of tension, the current section will address how the domestic conflict affects the foreign policies of the states. The population of Kurds in the Middle East and former Soviet Republics is roughly 20 to 25 million, and at least half of the population resides in modern-day Turkey. The Kurdish population has never been able to create a sovereign state which has caused them to lack a central authority, or a single loyalty among them. The Kurds’ desire to rule themselves has been one of the dilemmas within the region for Turkey. As other states such as Iran, Iraq, Greece, and Syria have attempted to aid Kurds in their

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dispute, Turkey’s foreign policy has included cutting support. The most predominant Kurdish organization, the PKK, is considered a terrorist organization because of acts throughout the course of the past three decades; resulting in the deaths of 30,000 casualties. Their actions have damaged Turkey economically and militaristic, which is of much concern to the state. On average, Kurdish violence has been estimated at around $100 billion dollars since 1980s (Sezgin 2002).\textsuperscript{57} Syria allowed the PKK to setup camps to train members of the terrorist organization, which increased conflict between Turkey and Syria.

More recently, the Justice and Development (AK) party has made unprecedented overtures to the Kurds, easing bans on the language and talking to the imprisoned PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan. A two-year ceasefire is holding. An agreement giving the Kurds more rights is on the table as part of a package that AK hopes would see the pro-Kurdish People’s Democracy Party (HDP) back a new constitution, including an executive presidency, after Turkey’s June 7th election.\textsuperscript{58} Yet, there are still many differing opinions held by groups of Kurds. Seeking to resolve problems between the Turkish government and Kurds remains difficult due to sources of conflict that overshadows Turk-Kurd tensions.

Tensions among Turks and Kurds also increased issues between Turkey and Syria. Mainly due to the fact that populations of Kurds also reside in Syria, Turkey has been at odds with their neighboring state. Various aspects of Turkish-Syrian problems arose from Kurds, and other groups of people traveling across their sovereign borders. An acceleration in migration has motivated Turkey to take extreme measures against Syrians. An example is Turkey’s uncovering


of Syria allowing terrorists to travel through Turkey to Syria in order to train in camps. Turkey has gone as far as to stop the flow of the Euphrates River into Syria in order to try to hoist cooperation. The Euphrates River is the main source of water for Syrians. Yet another example of Turkey’s geopolitical capabilities, the control of the Euphrates River provides Turkey with an enormous amount of control over Syria. As James, C., & Özdamar, Ö. (2009) explained Turkish-Syrian relations [especially during the 1987-1998 period], are “an ideal example of how domestic ethnic conflicts are internationalized. Domestic sources of conflict, such as ethnic divides or domestic economic inequalities, [became] internationalized in the policies of other countries and other system level variables.”[^59] The intercultural conflict which crosses the border into a neighboring state creates issues that affect each state’s foreign policies. The issues that have arisen concerning the Kurds in Turkey and Syria have impacted their relations with one another and motivations behind decision-making strategies.

SYRIA

*CIVIL WAR*

“The Syrian conflict has been growing in intensity and scope for more than two years, with the United Nations estimating more than 100,000 dead and millions displaced.”[^60] As the BBC News website stated, “once the centre of the Islamic Caliphate, Syria covers an area that has seen

invasions and occupations over the ages, from Romans and Mongols to Crusaders and Turks.”

Latterly, the conflict ensued into civil war, which created an inviting environment for smaller groups to attempt to establish themselves amid the ongoing conflict. Encyclopedia Britannica summarized the conflict, beginning in 2011 up until 2012, by stating:

- In March 2011 Syria’s government, led by Pres. Bashar al-Assad, faced an unprecedented challenge to its authority when pro-democracy protests erupted throughout the country. Protesters demanded an end to the authoritarian practices of the Assad regime, in place since Assad’s father, Ḥafiz al-Assad, became president in 1971. The Syrian government used violence to suppress demonstrations, making extensive use of police, military, and paramilitary forces. Amateur footage and eyewitness accounts, the primary sources of information in a country largely closed to foreign journalists, showed the Syrian security forces beating and killing protesters and firing indiscriminately into crowds. Opposition militias began to form in 2011, and by 2012 the conflict had expanded into a full-fledged civil war.

Not only is Syria’s political instability ripe for smaller groups (i.e. tribes, syndicates, and organizations), but the geography of the state provides for disparate groups to exist side-by-side; although, clearly far from harmoniously. “A country of fertile plains, high mountains and deserts, it is home to diverse ethnic and religious groups, including Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians, Christians, Druze, Alawite Shia and Arab Sunnis, the last of who make up a majority of the Muslim population.” Further dissolving the ability for each group to remain stable long enough to reach capabilities that accommodate their self-interests. Presently, the escalation in conflict in Syria has drawn an exponential amount of blood. “Around 200,000 people have been killed since 2011 in Syria's civil war, which pits Assad against a range of rebels including

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jihadist groups such as Daesh and Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front.” Another controversial issue is the mounting number of refugees that have spilled into neighboring states. “Since the brutal civil war in Syria began in 2011, more than three million people have fled the conflict. The majority of those who have sought refuge in neighboring Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, and Turkey — four in five, according to the U.N. — are Syrian women and children. On March 15, the war entered its fifth year. With no signs of a peaceful resolution in the near future, Syria’s women refugees will continue to face numerous hurdles.”

More so, four major issues concerning these refugees include: insufficient shelter; lack of resources; lack of security and privacy; and child marriage. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights’ website, as of March 28th, 2015, “Syrian women are grappling with poor living conditions in their host countries”; “face grinding poverty and lack of work opportunities; face harassment,” and “the threat of sexual and verbal harassment is rife in both refugee settlements and in urban shelters.” These problems for women and child are escalating in neighboring states without an end to the conflict in sight. In regards to child marriage, Erin Zaleski stated that, “the poverty facing many refugee families and the threat of rape in overcrowded camps has resulted in an uptick in child marriages. Fearing for their daughters’ safety and struggling to survive, families are marrying off girls as young as 12 to ease the

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financial burden and to protect them from unknown predators." 67 Resolving the conflict is an extremely difficult task to undertake. Although current issues have been met with a variety of recommendations, the cause of the conflict created a complex situation. “Intra-ethnic conflicts are frequently nested in broader political struggles vis-à-vis the state. Faced with the pressure to compete for scarce social, political, and economic resources, intragroup divisions can become hardened and polarized. In the resulting context of mistrust and suspicion, there can be strong incentives for political entrepreneurs to engage in “flanking” behaviors, in which they attempt to maximize their base of support by adopting ever more extreme postures regarding the group’s boundaries and their willingness to resort to violence to defend the group’s “true” members (see Horowitz 1985; Lake and Rothchild 1996; Hislope 1997; Caspersen 2008).”68

In regards to international relations, the Assad government have also been among “the most intransigent opponents of peace with Israel, and have supported several anti-Israel armed groups - most notably Hezbollah and the Gaza-based Palestinian group Hamas. Hopes for reconciliation have repeatedly foundered over Syria's support for these groups and the vexed question of the Golan Heights.”69 For this reason, the current Syrian government has positioned itself as an enemy of the U.S. and the Western world. Consequently, Assad’s regime has quickly lost autonomy, becoming what is considered a “rogue” state. Saunders suggested recent realist arguments, such as:

- Waltz’s assertion, [which] emphasizes structure, explained, “a small number of big and important things” such as the superior stability of biopolar in contrast with multipolar systems, and [other recent versions of realism] have built on his model by exploring its implications for foreign policy. Such scholars focus on whether states balance against threats (Walt 1987), bandwagon with the stronger side to gain material profit (Schweller 1994), or “pass the buck,” effectively free-riding on allies’ ability to confront threats (Christensen and Synder 1990). Some of these accounts eschew Waltz’s pure structuralism, taking domestic politics into account to explain imperatives or constrains on state action. These efforts usually focus on great power dynamics in the face of threats from other great powers rather than threats from smaller but potentially dangerous “rogues”.

Yet, these efforts typically focus on powerful states dynamics in the face of threats. Threats imposed by other powerful states, not states which are considered “rogue” states. Stephen Walt’s (1987) theory of threat balancing is (to some extent) an exception because of his argument in the Middle East. Syria has increasingly become a state that can be considered both “rogue” and possibly dangerous; highly dependent on how the current conflict changes the states dynamics.

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TERRORISM

DAESH IN SYRIA & IRAQ

"This is a terrorist group and not a state. I do not recommend using the term Islamic State because it blurs the lines between Islam, Muslims, and Islamists; the Arabs call it ‘Daesh’ and I will be calling them the ‘Daesh cutthroats.’"

~ Laurent Fabius, France Foreign Minister

The name Daesh, according to France24, is a "loose acronym" for "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (al-Dawla al-Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham). The name is commonly used by enemies of ISIS, and it also has many negative undertones, as Daesh sounds similar to the Arabic words Daes ("one who crushes something underfoot") and Dahes ("one who sows discord"). The name Daesh (ISIS, the “Islamic State”, or ISIL), a formidable foe that has been terrorizing the people of Syria and Iraq has been an international cause of concern in recent years. As Erick Stakelbeck described in the first chapter of his book, entitled, ISIS Exposed: Beheadings, Slavery, and the Hellish Reality of Radical Islam:

- When Daesh had announced its reestablishment of the caliphate, “or Islamic State, on June 29, 2014, the news sent shockwaves throughout the Muslim world. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was declared the caliph, or political and spiritual leader of all Muslims worldwide, and demanded their allegiance—a move that was met with disapproval in many Islamic corners (in many cases not out of opposition to a caliphate, but to ISIS’s presuming to declare and claiming to lead it) but embraced in others. Al-Baghdadi had the audacity—and with ISIS’s military prowess and territorial gains, the means—to do what al Qaeda, the Muslim Brotherhood, Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Iranian regime, and virtually every prominent radical Islamic entity has dreamed of doing for the past ninety years. Regardless of their tactical and even theological differences (Shia Iran, for instance, seek more of an “Imamate,”

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with an Iranian ayatollah at the helm), all radical Islamist organizations share the ultimate goal of reestablishing a caliphate, or pan-Islamic super state, that will confront Israel and the West and return Islam to its former glory days. This grand borderless coalition of Islamic nations governed by sharia law would ideally be united politically, economically, and militarily; control a large share of the world’s oil supply, and boast nuclear capability.  

The ability of Daesh to literally “set up camp” within the states of Syria and Iraq should come as no surprise. “With respect to international terrorism, increased human insecurity could generate terrorism as a result of social dislocation as economic refugees cross borders, both to neighboring states and to places further afield … recruitment for transnational terrorist groups may be more successful in countries experiencing human security failures, as there are likely to be large sticks of disaffected and unemployed young men (Gassebner and Luechinger 2011, 238). Therefore, individuals from these failed states to doubt this potential mechanism, however.” Recruiting within Syria and Iraq is also optimal for Daesh, as the political economy drastically decreases opportunities for civilians. “Moreover, at extreme levels of human insecurity, it seems unlikely that individuals would have the opportunity to focus on anything less immediate than their own survival and redressing grievances at home.” All and all, it is the “perfect storm” for terrorist organizations. In Power, the State, and Sovereignty, Stephen D. Krasner argued:

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The availability of weapons of mass destruction, the ease of movement across borders, and the emergence of terrorist networks have attenuated the relationship between the underlying capabilities of actors and the ability to kill large numbers of people. In the past, state and nonstate actors with limited resources could not threaten the security of states with substantial resources. The killing power of a nation’s military depended on the underlying wealth of the country. Nonstate actors such as anarchist groups in the nineteenth century could throw bombs that might kill fifty or even several hundred people, but no more. This is no longer true. States with limited means can procure chemical and biological weapons.76

An increase in problems arose when Daesh crossed into Iraq, eliminating the two sovereign states respected borders. “Sovereignty failures may also present problems in the area of transnational criminality. Drug trafficking is difficult to control under any circumstances, but such activities are more likely to flourish where domestic sovereignty is inadequate.”77 The failure of states creates an inviting place for terrorists to carry out operations. For example: establishment of training camps in Syria, as well as the ability of Daesh to quickly take over Raqqa as a base of transnational terrorism. Failed states are seen as safe havens; their territories are anarchic conduits through which arms, drugs, money, and people can be trafficked without notice, thereby creating problems for even faraway states. “[These] threats to human security including ecological degradation, refugee flows, and contagious disease and famine burden foreign governments because failed states cannot manage humanitarian crises. Internal disorder can become a cancer on entire regions, spreading chaos and violence to neighbors ill-equipped to handle troubles beyond their own. Finally, if allowed to fester, criminality and violence may become institutionalized as conflicting groups gain a stake in perpetuating the disarray (Kaplan

This is currently exemplified in how the conflict with Syria has spread to an array of issues in Turkey, and the ease with which Daesh militaristic actions made their way into Iraq.

Furthermore, “once ethnic groups are mobilized for war, the war cannot end until the populations are separated into defensible, mostly homogeneous regions. Even if an international force or an imperial conqueror were to impose peace, the conflict would resume as soon as it left. Even if a national government were somehow re-created despite mutual suspicions, neither group could safely entrust its security to it. Continuing mutual threat also ensures perpetuation of hypernationalist propaganda, both for mobilization and because the plausibility of the threat posed by the enemy gives radical nationalists an unanswerable advantage over moderates in intra-group debates.”

CONCLUSION

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

“The process of resolution begins with closely examining the roles of the wide range of stakeholders in Syria. The conflict has escalated over the years to include multiple political and military actors, and with this escalation, the window has closed for resolving the conflict through one channel alone—whether diplomatic or military.”

~ Lina Khatib (Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut)

To conclude, the current structure of the international system has contributed to the current conflict in the Middle East. Conflict in the post-Cold War era has been the result of the most autonomous units of the international structures pursuit for their individual self-interests. It is the current structure of international relations, concentrated in U.S. power, which possesses prestige; depicting an anomaly which altered the international community in the aftermath of the Cold War. The international stature of the hegemonic power is most definitively expressed through its ability to pursue its self-interests through both diplomatic and militaristic actions in the world today. “A further nuance in application of structural autonomy theory relates to the complex interface between regional and global structural framing.”

By viewing the conflict globally and following the expectations of concentrated power structures, the U.S. “engaged in a retention-oriented limited war to consolidate the concentrated system.” Similarly, in the current conflict, the lack of an increased military intervention can be understood by the U.S.’s expansive diplomatic procedures.

Yet, since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, difficulties to resolve problems have continuously emerged. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, Pamela Aall, and Simon Palamar explain two phases of the mediation process in Syria:

- The first is from the beginning of the uprisings in Syria (roughly March 2011) through former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan’s appointment in February 2012 as Joint Special Envoy for the United Nations and the Arab League and his subsequent resignation (August 2012). The second period (August 2012 to December 2013) covers the lead-up to January 2014 Geneva negotiations between the Syrian government and the rebel groups. Annan’s mediation effort came at an early phase in the conflict, a fact which should have boded well for his chance of success (Regan and Stam 2000; Bercovitch and DeRouen 2005). However, despite extensive negotiations with the parties and the international community, Annan’s six-point peace plan (SPPP) ultimately failed to gain any traction, and Annan resigned in frustration in August 2012. Lakhdar Brahimi, former Algerian foreign minister and special advisor to the UN Secretary-General since 2004, took over as Joint Special Envoy in the same month. A year and a half later, his efforts resulted in peace talks between the Syrian government and rebel groups.  

These two mediation periods led to the various policies that have been implemented since the initial conflicts occurred, leading up to the Geneva II conference on Syria. Since the efforts of mediators up until the Geneva II conference on Syria, researchers have presented their perspectives on ways in which to administer mediation strategies throughout the region of the Middle East. In March of 2014, Lina Khatib of the Carnegie Middle East Center recommended eight objectives, which outlined a comprehensive strategy to push the conflict toward a settlement. In Khatib’s document, the author suggested that U.S. and European policymakers should look beyond the objectives of the Geneva II conference on Syria and begin to encourage the expansion of the Syrian opposition’s base of representation; strengthen the Syrian opposition’s governance; begin dialogue with elements of the national army; engage Russia in

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dialogue about transition from Assad’s rule; provide weapons to opposition groups that enable them to shift the balance of power in their favor; cooperate with Gulf countries to bring an end to external support for jihadist groups operating in Syria; end outreach to Assad’s regime in the name of antiterrorism cooperation; and use the ongoing nuclear talks with Iran as a platform for a further Syria deal.  

The outcome of the current conflict is highly dependable on Russia’s position. It is of grave importance that the U.S. work with Russia, in order to resolve any of the issues.

In Khatib’s summary of eight suggestions, an important aspect of the strategy involved the West’s need to further establish trust with Syria’s opposition throughout the Middle East, guarantee strategic interests with foreign powers (such as Russia and Iran) that have interests in present day Syria, and enhance the ability of the Syrian Arab Army and Syria’s network of local councils; in order to topple President Bashar al-Assad’s regime.  

More or less, it has been a year since Khatib published her recommendations in regards to conflict within Syria, which has now extended into Iraq; and it has obviously only gotten worse. From 2014 until present day, The United States’ primary focus has been on Daesh. This has created more issues with Turkey, which is a significant state for the U.S. and E.U. to cooperate with in order to construct a plan that will work to eliminate Assad’s regime, as well as to take out the terrorist organization.

In addition, addressing the possibility of extensive military intervention is necessary; most significantly because of the lack of success in mediation. To topple Assad’s regime, Jacqueline H. R. Meritt elucidated:

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• Does military intervention similarly increase actors’ individual expectation of punishment and thereby encourage them to shirk the order to kill? Like norm diffusion, international advocacy, and HROs, military intervention focuses outsiders on and places them at the scene of the crime against humanity. When interveners oppose the state, they introduce a positive probability that individual perpetrators will be identified and punished. The presence of a hostile military intervention should therefore decrease the likelihood that perpetrators would obey the order to kill civilians. Knowing this and wanting to retain a coercive monopoly, governments should be less willing to order killing in the presence of an unfriendly military intervention than in its absence.85

Yet, the attempt of the U.S. to provide weapons to opposition groups within Syria has increased tensions because of Turkish dislike for Kurds. In the strategy that Khatib outlined, she only had briefly mentioned Turkey in recommendation regarding encouraging expansion of the Syrian opposition’s base of representation. Khatib stated that “Western stakeholders must help build trust among Syria’s various opposition groups, both within and outside the country, especially as the divide between northern and southern Syria grew due to political rivalries driven by external backers (Qatar and Turkey in the north, Saudi Arabia in the south).”86 Turkey and the U.S. relations have been deteriorating since U.S. involvement has not proven to establish any promise of Turkish wishes to extract Assad from power, or provide what Turkey deems necessary; especially resolving issues pertaining to the influx of refugees.

Of equal importance, “the best way to break out of the conflict trap is to ensure that countries that have just ended one conflict do not quickly become enmeshed in another. In some nations, the risks of renewed conflicts are so high that an external military peace-keeping force is normally necessary. The operative word is “external” because high military spending by a post-

conflict government actually increases the risk of another war.\textsuperscript{87} This suggests that the probability of states becoming embroiled in the conflict, such as Iraq, which recently had a large scale war, will be most likely low. Other issues that must be considered at the international level include the establishment of a no-fly zone in Turkey’s airspace, addressing Turkey and the EU’s international position and economic ties to Russia, and enforcing all foreign fighters (Hezbollah, Shiite militias, etc.) to leave Syria. It would also be valuable for the U.S. to revisit Khatib’s summary (mentioned above) to allow for more extensive diplomatic procedures before deeming it necessary for extensive military intervention.