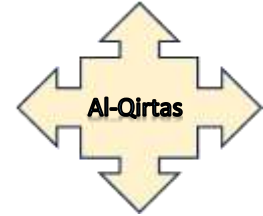


**Power-Security Nexus: Russia's Strategic Involvement in The Syrian  
Crisis**



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**Abstract**

Russian intervention in an important event that needs to be analyzed through the lens of offensive realism. This research is carried out to understand as to why Russia intervened in Syria and what were its regional and global repercussions. The purpose was to assess whether Russia achieved its objectives or not. Qualitative approach was used while conducting this research. The data was secondary data and, upon gathering the data, content analysis was used to analyse that data. The findings that were gotten were that that the Russia intervened in Syria because it wanted to assert itself in the Middle East. Russia had to protect its interests and counteract the US influence in the region. It was strategic decision that Russia took to further its interests in the region. Finally, this research gives us an accurate understanding of the Russian intervention in Syria by applying the IR theory of Offensive realism.

**Keywords:** Russia, Syria, Offensive Realism, Power, Middle East, Intervention

## Introduction

The Syrian Civil War is one of the bloodiest conflicts in the 21st century. People has lost their lives and millions were displaced. It has also caused widespread infrastructural damage (World Bank, 2019). The civil war can be traced back to the Arab Spring that started at the end of 2010. The situation got worsened and eventually led to the civil war. The Syrian populace was dissatisfied with the authoritarian regime of President Bashar Al-Assad as socioeconomic conditions were worse than ever before and people were facing political oppression. Socioeconomic grievances and political oppression led to the eruption of protests where the populace asked for democratic reforms in the country. The government responded with violent crackdowns which further escalated tensions and led to the eventual eruption of civil war. What began as a domestic uprising evolved into a conflict involving different actors pursuing different agendas?

As the conflict intensified, it got attention from regional actors such as Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia which supported different rebel groups to further their geopolitical interests (Phillips, 2016). Concurrently, international actors such as the United States, European Powers and Russia, became involved in the conflict which further complicated the situation. The conflict also added fuel to the sectarian tensions that already existed in the society. The sectarian issue damaged the fabric of the Syrian society and deteriorated the situation.

By 2015, the Assad regime was on the brink of collapse and the rebel groups were gaining ground. ISIS had control over a third of Syrian territory and declared Raqqa as the capital of the Islamic Caliphate (Kilcullen, 2022). Amidst this tense situation, Russian intervention in Syria in September 2015 was a crucial moment in the conflict as it provided support to the Syrian government. The Assad regime was able to gain control over the important territories that were lost and were of strategic importance. The regime was able to retake major cities like Aleppo, thereby, reversing the tide of the war. Russia strengthened the Assad's position in the conflict by conducting airstrikes and providing logistical support and diplomatic backing. This shifted the balance of power on the ground. The intervention is of significant importance because it strengthened the position of Bashar Al Assad and changed the dynamics of the conflict. It added layers of complexity to achieve a solution to the crisis. Russian intervention was the reason this crisis protracted. The decision of Russia to send troops to Syria highlights the offensive nature of Russian foreign policy.

In the current body of knowledge, there is a research gap regarding the analysis of Russian intervention in Syria through the theoretical lens of offensive realism. This gap is of paramount importance because it limits our understanding of that fact that what is the reason behind Russian aggressive behaviour in Syria. Therefore, the problem addressed in this study is the need to apply offensive realism to analyze Russian intervention in Syria. It further provides an understanding of Russia's behaviour. This research is significant for several reasons. It fills a gap in the existing body of knowledge by applying offensive realism so that the Russian intervention in Syria can be analyzed. It gives an idea of the Russian interests and objectives in the Middle East. The paper adds to the broader debate on international relations theory by showcasing that offensive realism is relevant in explain great power behaviour in

the international system. Also, the research is of immense importance for anyone who want to gain understanding of Russian motives in Syria.

The structure of this paper is as follow: It provides an overview of the topic, theoretical framework, research methodology, historical background, and the reasons behind the Russian intervention in Syria. Then, it discusses the role of the Russian military and the regional and global implications of Russia's intervention. It offers a critical assessment of Russian intervention and conclusion summarizes the key findings at the end of this paper.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Offensive realism is a theory put forth by John J. Mearsheimer and it is a well-known theory in the field of international relations. It says that states want to maximize their power and ensure their security in an anarchic system (Mearsheimer, 2001). States want to ensure their survival and security which can only be ensured if a state attains hegemony. States are forced to pursue power maximization to protect themselves from potential adversaries in an anarchic system as there is no Leviathan to enforce rules. Offensive realism is premised upon several assumptions that talks about the nature of the international system and the behaviour of states within this system. It put forth that the international system is anarchic which means that there is no central authority that can enforce rules among states. All major powers possess offensive military capabilities which can be used to threaten or attack other states. Due to this, states can never be sure that other states will not use their military capabilities against them. Survival is the primary national interest of every state. States are rational actors which means that they carefully plan and always consider the consequences of their actions and plan accordingly so that their survival is ensured.

Russian intervention in Syria was a well-planned move by Russia to maximize its power and influence in the Middle East. States are rational actors that want to pursue power and security in an anarchic system. Moscow wanted to maintain its strategic foothold in the region and prevent the collapse of the Assad regime by intervening in Syria. Russia believed that if it had not come to rescue Assad, Russian interests and influence could be undermined. Russia wanted to secure its position as a major player in the Middle East and ensure its access to strategic assets in the region such as the naval base in Tartus. It, therefore, decided to intervene in Syria.”

Furthermore, Russian intervention in Syria can be understood as a response to the power vacuum in the region and the opportunity to increase its influence. Offensive argue that states are willing to use military force to achieve their strategic objectives, and Russian intervention in Syria exemplifies this willingness. Russia was able to exert its influence by using its military. Moscow deployed troops and carried out airstrikes to achieve its objectives. Russia was helped by its allies during the intervention.

### **Research Methodology**

Qualitative research approach is used to analyse the Russian intervention in Syria. In this research, documentary analysis is made use of to collect data. Existing body of knowledge, which includes articles, reports and media coverage, is reviewed in detail to gather data on Russian intervention in Syria. In documentary analysis, textual sources are collected and, then, examined. This gives us a diverse set of data for analysis. The sampling strategy for this

research is purposive sampling of the documents. A wide range of sources is purposively selected so that the inclusion of diverse perspectives on the Russian intervention in Syria is ensured. In such sampling, the sources that are most relevant to the research objectives are selected to ensure the collection of relevant data. The data analysis method for this paper is content analysis. Content analysis is used to properly analyze the qualitative data collected through documentary analysis. The data is first coded to identify main themes related to the intervention in Syria. Then, the data is broken down into units such as phrases and paragraphs. Then, codes are assigned to these units based on their content and meaning. At the end, the coded data is organized and categorized in order to find themes.

### **Historical Background**

Russian intervention in Syria can and should be placed in a historical perspective that explains the enduring ties between Damascus and Moscow. The USSR established diplomatic relations with Syria in 1946 right after its independence. Syria was “more important than other Arab nations,” Andreij Kreutz argues and in fact, was the Soviet Union’s crucial ally in the Arab world (Kreutz, 2006). As a result of the Soviet support, Moscow got an important lever of influence in the Middle East. It got access to a port in the Mediterranean Sea, and the opportunity to influence regional policymaking. The USSR significantly helped Syria, providing it with military and economic support – arms sales, training of military personnel for the Syrian army, and assistance in infrastructure construction (Laqueur, 1969).

After the disintegration of the USSR, Russia’s influence in the Middle East waned as it faced domestic challenges. It wanted to redefine the role it would be playing in the post-Cold War era. It was under the leadership of Putin that Russia began to reassert itself in the Middle East. It realized how important it was to keep friendly relations with century old allies like Syria (Kozhanov, 2016). Putin changed the foreign policy approach after taking office in 1999. He went for a more assertive foreign policy. The objective was to oppose the growing influence of the West in the Eastern Europe and restore Russia’s standing as a major power (Stent, 2015). Moscow intended to improve its relationship with Syria and uphold its strategic interests in the Middle East as part of its larger plan. After the civil war erupted in Syria, Russia faced challenges because the conflict jeopardized the regional stability and threatened Russian interests. Moscow saw opportunities and considered it a blessing in disguise as Russia thought that it can become an important factor in the Middle East if it was able to resolve the crisis. It was the time for Russia to assert itself abroad.

The father of President Bashar Al Assad, Hafiz Al Assad, formed close relations with Moscow in the Cold War era. Syria used to rely heavily on Soviet military assistance and it was necessary for Hafiz Al Assad to maintain his grip on power. The Assad regime was an important ally in the region and was, therefore, vehemently important for Russia to prevent the collapse of Assad regime. It feared that there would be a surge in terrorism and extremism after the collapse of Assad’s regime which, in turn, would pose a threat to its security. Furthermore, Moscow feared that a Libya-like military intervention might take place especially after sanctions were imposed on Syria. "The concern was that the Western Powers might use the pretext of atrocities carried out by the Syrian government on opposition to justify military action or intervention as they had done in Libya. Foreign Minister Sergey

Lavrov warned against that and said “We are extremely concerned that some leaders of the coalition forces, and later the NATO Secretary-General called the Libyan operation a “model” for the future. As for Russia, we will not allow anything like this to happen again in the future” ( Kudors, 2016).

### **Why Russia Intervened in Syria?**

The aim of Russia was clear when it decided to intervene and the reasons are as follows:

1. Russian interests were threatened due to the instability in Syria. These interests were near and dear to Russia. For instance, if we look at the naval base at Tartus, it is the only base Russia has outside of the former USSR. It is also the base that gives Russia an access to the Mediterranean Sea. Now, this was of paramount importance and Russia had to protect it if it wanted to remain relevant in the Middle East
2. Russia was worried as far as security was concerned. The country was becoming more and more unstable. It created a breeding ground for the terrorists outfits. ISIS was also gaining ground there. The possibility that this menace could spread to Russia via Chechnya was a problem for Moscow. The potential of this menace to spill over pushed Russia to take measure in the form of intervention.
3. When Putin got elected he was determined to change the course of his nation. He changed the way to deal with allies and adversaries across the globe. Russia got an opportunity in Syria to stretch its muscle far off its geography. This was the time Russia could adduce itself in the region and exhibit that it is a global power. Russia proclaimed the forethought that it can exert influence anywhere in the world and effectuate bellicose actions where necessary.

### **The Russian Military Involvement in Syria**

Committed to the creation of the kind of conflict that Syria was predestined to live through is the part that has been played by the Russian military intervention. The event which placed the Russian foreign policy under the context of the Syrian conflict was the decision of Military-Technical Cooperation of the Russian Defense Ministry sending its military contingent to Syria in September 2015. This has been particularly apparent in the operation launched by Russia and referred to as bombs, the aviation operation; it has continued being one of the main components of the process. Russia bombed the areas which were under the control of the opposition and had terrorist outfits such as ISIS and others. These operations were the key which made the Syrian government gained ground and capture important cities like Aleppo or Palmyra (Matloob, 2024).

The Syrian forces agreed with the offer of Russian government which would offer ground support when they were planning on attacking the terrorist group. This was done through a military process, this included the use of force, launchers and security forces who were supposed to help in the process (BBC, 2016). Thus, this airborne and amphibian fusion was rather successful and beneficial for the forces on a fortress level. It's also important to point out the fact that Russia had significantly stronger positions as far as bargaining or negotiating the pipeline is concerned over the western countries. The military campaigns specified would demand ground forces to be provided by Russia. Information about Russian presence in Syria point to a number identifying between 3,000 and 4,000 Russians, which encompasses military and employees of PMC (ABC News, 2024). These forces have had a



contribution to the outing that has been conducted by the Syrian government in the way that they offer this force with training, equipment, supplies as well as with logistic support which was then transferred to the Syrian troops. Russia also deployed aircrafts. Russian Aerospace Forces was commanding an operation in Syria, as an operational level activity for Russia's military campaign in the country. It also had assembling of some number of strike capable aircraft which had been planned to carry out several operations.

Now, with the help of the information received from the Russian official sources it is now being said that the RKS has deployed 28 planes in the Latakia base for operations that include the striker squadron of potent Su-24, Su-25 and Su-34 multi role planes and Su-30 and SU-35 potent planes, it said (Thomas, 2021). Yet another group of Russia's navy offered other amenities and facilities for the fighting utilization in Syria. Russia had made sure that it sustained its forces in the naval fleets in the eastern Mediterranean. It is has several naval ships of the Black Sea as well as the Northern Fleet. It is fully involved in a combat mission in support and defense of Russian forces in Syria. Such naval support was beneficial for Russia in a way that it could easily and sufficiently support the military personnel on the ground.

In this regard, one of the key policies of the Russian Intervention in Syria – Interaction of the Russian soldiers with the Syrian troops. Speaking of the so-called world leaders, let's take for instance the United States has been arming and funding the Syrian rebels whilst Russia is backing the regime of Assad. This has enabled the Russian forces to be in a position to support the Syrian forces in the actions and at the same time also engage in concerted operations against the opposition forces. At the same time, Russia provides advisors to train the Syrian forces that greatly increase and enhance the fighters and their organizations. In regard to the air and aviation support, Russian aerospace forces have actively accompanied Syrian ground forces in the sense of attacking aggressive militants and covering/ preparing fights on the ground. Further, support from the Syrian and Russian army has been influential in augmenting the war led by Assad's government.

The questions, being connected with the questions on the strategy which should be adopted to counteract the Russians, are still open. On the one side, Russia has armed the Syrian regime and on the other side there is no prospect of avoiding battle in sight. The headline suggests three major issues that required consideration in terms of the conflict interactivity: the various causes that triggered the conflict, the effects of the conflict and mechanism on how the conflict can be addressed are highlighted (Lund, 2019). The Russian military is likely to be present on Syrian soil in the near future as chances of a political settlement seem bleak. It is the Syrian people that would continue to suffer and the region is on its way to further destabilization.

### [The Regional Repercussions](#)

The Russian intervention in Syria had regional implications. It changed the geopolitical milieu of the Middle East. Assad's regime reversal of fortunes was possible only due to the military assistance provided by Russia. This crucial support impacted the trajectory of the conflict (Gupta, 2016). The Syrian government was now in a strong position. It was able to push opposition forces back and exert its authority in the territories. This balance of power shifted towards the Syrian Army. Russia not only strengthened its relationship with the allies in the

region such as Syria and Iran but also placed itself as an important factor in the geopolitics of the region. Russia demonstrated that it is willing to take offensive measures if its interests are threatened. It would go to lengths to protect its allies and interests.

Moscow established itself as a major power broker and increased its influence. It was able to assert itself and showcase its capabilities. The relationship between Moscow and Washington worsened due to this intervention as Moscow helped Syrian government. Since the US wanted to oust Assad from power, Russia came to save him and, thereby, challenged the US directly (Trenin, 2017). The Russian intervention has intensified the competition and worsened the geopolitical rivalry between these two great powers (Afridi, 2018). As a result, it further complicated the efforts to bring about a resolution to end this conflict. The clash between Russian and American interests in Syria fueled the struggle for power and led to regional instability.

A shift in regional alliances was seen as states such as Iran aligned themselves closely with Russia after Russia intervened in Syria. Turkey has also increased cooperation with Russia in Syria to protect its national interests. A troika of Iran, Turkey and Russia was formed which cooperated closely to tackle the Syrian conflict as it was unfolding (Sökmen, 2018). The intervention has reshaped regional alliances and changed the geopolitical milieu of the Middle East. The intervention had implications for regional stability. Russian intervention prolonged the Syrian. As a result, thousands of people suffered and were displaced. The Russian intervention contributed to the instability as environment was created that was conducive to the spread of terrorism. This environment was made full use of by the terrorist outfits to further their own interests. It increased the risk of conflict domestically as well as regionally. A surge in proxy wars was witnessed throughout the region. States like Iran started backing Shia militias in Syria while Saudi was supporting Sunni militias in Syria (Shoumali, 2015). These states and non-state actors were competing for influence and control in the region. Unfortunately, Syria became a breeding ground for terrorist outfits and a battleground for regional and international powers. This intervention only added fuel to the fire as it intensified the existing proxy wars and worsened the security situation.

#### [The Global Angle](#)

The Russian intervention had repercussions on global security, especially in terms of arms sales and military cooperation and assistance. The demand for Russian arms and military hardware increased around the globe because Russia was able to successfully use its advanced ammunition, such as cruise missiles and precision-guided munitions, in the Russian intervention. Alexander Markov, a member of Russia's Council on Foreign and Defense Politics, said 'This is colossal advertising and Russia expects new purchases worth tens of billions of dollars' (Mirovalev, 2016). India and Turkey have expressed interest in purchasing the Russian system and both of them acquired the S-400. It has improved Russia's position as the leading arms exporter in the world. The divide within the Western world especially among the NATO members was exposed after the Russian intervention. There has been no unified response to Russian intervention although both the US and its European allies were critical of Russian involvement in Syria. The US had categorically condemned Russia's support for the Assad regime. On the contrary, its European allies were reluctant to call a spade a spade due

to their energy dependency on Russia. They feared the deterioration of relations with Russia and were unable to afford a confrontation with Moscow. A lack of unified response to the Russian intervention has exposed divisions within NATO and fractured Western unity. As a result, a consensus was not developed as to how the West should respond to the Russian intervention in Syria.

#### Did Russia achieve Its Objectives?

Now, in order to evaluate the intervention, it is necessary to take its objectives that Russia wanted to achieve into account. The objectives of Russia were as follows:

- Secure the strategic interests Russia had in Syria,
- Stabilize and strengthen the Assad regime,
- Exert its influence in the region,
- Eliminate threat of terrorism,
- Decrease influence of the U.S. and the West.

The first two objectives were achieved as a result of intervention as Moscow not only successfully propped up Assad but protected its interest in the form of naval base located in Tartus. Russia first strengthened the capabilities of the Syrian army. It provided support in logistics and trained the Syrian Army. It helped Syrian forces to regain the control of captured territories. Russia also had a concern of terrorism which was an issue then disturbing the country. The purpose was to counter the menace of terrorism and fight the terrorist outfits like Al-Qaeda and ISIS. Moscow has not desired to perceive Syria as a state governed by terrorists. The intervention did help in diluting their attempt to establish a strong foothold in the region especially Syria which would have been a major drawback to the security of the region.

An additional goal was the change of Russia's role in the Middle East and its desire to become the new actor on the Middle Eastern stage. To a very large extent, Russia showed its military muscle and at the same time, only acknowledged the role of mediation in the conflict. As far as intervention is concerned, it is possible to look at it as Russian political leadership's attempt to show the global community it is ready for it as Moscow now seeks to ensure it can advance its interests globally. Another aspect is the political power aspect, where after the breakup of USSR, Russia emerged as the powerful nation that could bring the change in polarity of power relations in region and thereby, bring the age of American hegemony to an end. However, the problem has escalated after the race of 2016 and Russia started interfering directly in the US backchannel as the key contenders started escalating their rivalry much more aggressively. Russia had to merit this status even though it had its military contingent in the theater which only added to the struggle. Thus, the confrontation of two leading contenders in the geopolitical plane increased further even in the theater.

Russia was able to secure many goals which it had set while in other cases it did not succeed in attaining the same. However, problems of geopolitical nature, and even instabilities and terrorist acts do not allow the peace process to progress. According to evolution and achievements made internationally, a sustainable or long-term solution to the Syrian crisis cannot be seen to have been reached (Charles, 2021). This conflict is not entirely a past war



though it involves Syria; it is an ongoing conflict to some extent. Hence, it is only important to consider new factors into the passage when discussing the Russian interference.

### Conclusion

Hindrance of the Russians of engaging themselves in the conflict in Syria was a major sub-phase of the Syrian War. In addition to modifying the process of the fighting it introduced changes to politics in the respective area. Therefore. Given the history and at the same time the contracts relations of a strategic partnership, Russia was to conduct the problem of Syria. Military intervention – undertaking that was conducted, in many cases, with the direct assistance of Russia to achieve objectives of their country – flipped the logistics of the war upside down. Likewise, every country had some things they were seeking to realize so that they could benefit from the opportunity emerging in the international system. Should the above-mentioned aims and objectives be realized, then Russia was on her way with some of the strategic goals it had set but could not achieve others. On the one hand, it was extremely successful in the goals that was saving the Bashar al-Assad's regime and defending Russian interests while its role in the goals that were preserving the regional stability and fighting terrorism was rather negligible.

The action of giving military support to Syrian regime by sending Russian troops, was regarded as a wrong move by other countries including America and the West hence escalating the whole relations between Russia and its enemies. It would also be very important to emphasize on the fact that the issue of conflict is complex, or the nature of the conflict. This type of an intervention was relatively very crucial in RW since it created unimaginable impacts to stability within the region. It has also played an important role in the shift of the political structure in the region due to swap of sides. It also introduced several complexities in the domain of International law also worsened the conditions of the ongoing peace transition process during that period. Therefore, these implications shall shift the future of Syrian civil war and the geopolitical map of the Middle Eastern region. The idea of intervention and its consequences need to be discussed time and time again with the different events that transpire within the Syrian conflict and efforts must continuously be made to provide long lasting peace in Syria.

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