Lebanese American University

Realism Explains the Rise of ISIS and the Response of the Two Super Powers: The United States and Russia despite Their Rivalry over Syria

By

Ibtissam Klait

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Thesis Approval Form

Student Name: Ibtissam Klait

I.D. #: 200905063

Thesis Title: Realism and Explaining the Rise of ISIS and the responses of the Two Superpowers

Program / Department: International Affairs / Social Sciences

School: Arts & Sciences

Approved by:

Thesis Advisor: Sami Baroudi

Committee Member: Marwan Rowayheb

Committee Member: Jennifer Skulte-Ouaiss

Date: 22/ 08/ 2016

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Dedication Page

To my loving husband and to my best Professor ever Dr. Jennifer Skulte
Ouaiss

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Realism Explains the Rise of ISIS and the Response of the Two Super
Power Rivals: The United States and Russia despite Their Rivalry over
Syria

Ibtissam Klait

ABSTRACT

The rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), a non- state actor, is explained through realism although realism does not have much to say about non- state actors and their terrorist acts. The rise of ISIS and its violent acts in the Middle East and some Western countries triggered the response of the international community via air strikes' campaigns to fight ISIS. This thesis explores the response of two super power rivals: the United States and Russia to the rise of ISIS. Despite the fact that both super powers aim at defeating ISIS, the United States and other Western powers continue to perceive Russia as contributing to international instability whether in its actions in Ukraine or in Syria. This super power rivalry undermines the struggle against ISIS. The thesis concludes that cooperation between the US and Russia over global issues such as over the Ukrainian Crisis is a postulate in order to achieve a transitional government in Syria. Realism as a broad school of thought and its variants is used as a guide to explain the rise of ISIS and the United States and Russia's response to this threat despite their different national interests and adopted foreign policies toward the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

Keywords: ISIS, Non-State Actors, Realism, Middle East, The United States, Russia, Western Countries, Air Strikes' Campaigns, Super Powers, Rivals, Cooperation, National Interests, Foreign Policy Ukrainian Crisis, Syria, Transitional Government

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Chapter One

Introduction

Due to their success in chopping large swaths of land, their occupation and control of such land in Iraq and Syria, their managing of finances, and their steady, persistent recruitment of homegrown jihadists, ISIS has become a unique and dominant terrorist group. ISIS is threatening the security and stability of both the Middle East and the whole world, including the United States, Russia, and the European Union. Notably, ISIS is remapping the Middle East and posing its brutality and threats worldwide.

The Aims of ISIS and Examples of Its Attacks

It seems that ISIS's threats will not stop in the foreseeable future because even if this "terrorist" group is defeated, the Salafi jihadi terrorism as an ideology and strategy will continue. This group, which is spreading unprecedented horror all over the globe as a means to realize its goals, is based on a two-fold objective. The first aim is to establish the Islamic Caliphate, and the second aim is to achieve political goals such as deterring the West from attacking its assets such as oil fields, control and command centers and other bases. ISIS resembles an octopus with many arms releasing its venom everywhere and it applies various terrorist tactics to fit modern circumstances. Undoubtedly, ISIS is effectively utilizing all of the up-to-date communication and transportation technologies that globalization provides.

In fact, the sophistication of ISIS's latest multiple, coordinated terrorist attacks on Paris and its northern district, Saint-Denis on November 13, 2015 resulted in a horrific massacre wherein 130 people were killed and 352 people were wounded (Steafel et al., 2015). These particular attacks were the deadliest for France since

World War II (Hinnant & Keller, 2015), and suggest that ISIS is utilizing an extensive and sophisticated network globally. This network involves recruiting members globally, utilizing social media to disseminate their message, and funding their operations primarily through conquering and controlling large oil fields in Iraq and Syria. Moreover, the attacks on Paris reveal that the fighters of ISIS receive advanced training. These attacks also illustrate that ISIS is not only importing attackers but also exporting them. Thus, ISIS is upgrading the tactics of terrorism to realize its objectives. The recent ISIS attacks on Beirut and Paris in late-2015 and in Jakarta in early 2016 assure the followers and potential recruits of the so-called Islamic State of the approaching the desirable objectives of ISIS's leadership. This ongoing presence of terrorist acts further proves to the followers that the caliphate is undoubtedly advancing and expanding.

Since 2011, ISIS has been gaining power in both Iraq and Syria. Despite all of factions and militias involved in the Syrian Civil War, ISIS has been the strongest group in northern Syria (Zahriyeh, 2015). The year 2014 was significant in ISIS's history because the world witnessed many of ISIS's most dramatic gains of territories. It is important to highlight the influx of foreign jihadists that is estimated, according to Soufan Group, to be 27,000 coming from more than 86 countries, including the United States, Britain, and Russia, who have been fighting alongside ISIS (BBC, 2016). In January 2014, ISIS declared its total control of Raqqa, which has a population of 220,000 (Strategy Page, 2015, parag.6). After several battles with the Free Syrian Army, ISIS declared the city of Raqqa to be the de-facto capital of the Islamic State.

Moreover, people worldwide expressed shock when, in June 2014, ISIS captured Mosul (Cockburn, 2016), Iraq's second largest city after Baghdad, with a

population of over a million (Knights and Pregent, 2015). Advancing further into Syria, ISIS seized Syria's most substantial oil field, the Omar (Bacchi, 2014). Notably, the oil in both Iraq and Syria fuels the jihadi terrorists where the black gold feeds the black flag (Solomon, Chazan & Jones, 2015). In fact, the backbone of the IS economy are the petroleum and hydroelectric power plants that ISIS has captured and controlled. In fact, ISIS managed to control three hydroelectric power plants and one thermal power in both Aleppo and Al- Raqqa (The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2016, p. 24). Additionally, in August 2014, ISIS launched a war against Sinjar, an Iraqi town. As a result, tens of thousands of Yazidi minorities escaped to nearby mountains. Although the US-led coalition has launched airstrikes on ISIS targets in both Syria and Iraq, ISIS has advanced to Kobane. By seizing this Kurdish town, ISIS gains ultimate control of the Syrian-Turkish borders. Importantly, Atwan (2015) has warned that ISIS aims to take over Baghdad. ISIS seeks to declare this prominent city in Iraq as its capital (Atwan, 2015, p. 202). The objective of the US airstrikes is to halt ISIS's march on Baghdad.

According to *The New York Times*, Belware (2015) explained that there were at least 80 major attacks and arrests related to ISIS activity during 2015. ISIS targeted Paris with a series of terrorist attacks on November 13, 2015 as mentioned earlier in this Chapter. It was the second time during 2015 where Islamist terrorists targeted Paris. The first time was on the January 7, 2015 when two extremist brothers, Said and Cherif Kouachi, belonging to Al- Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, attacked the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, a French satirical newspaper in Paris; twelve people were killed because of the mass shooting (Callmachi & Yardely, 2015, parag.5). Throughout 2015, France witnessed other terrorist attacks, though the consequences were less severe.

In fact, it was the recent attacks on Paris that prompted the Elysee's decision to intensify the airstrikes against ISIS targets. As Belware (2015) stated, in the last two months prior to the latest atrocities and devastating "terrorist" attacks that targeted Paris and were conducted by extremists of the Islamic State, ISIS carried out at least six other attacks, including two in the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt. According to news reports, ISIS carried out two suicide bombs in Beirut, Lebanon on November 12, 2015. Many innocent people were killed, and many others were seriously injured. On November 4, 2015, the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt was targeted by a suicide bomber, and at least four police officers were killed next to a police club when a suicide bomber detonated an explosive- filled vehicle. On October 31, 2015, the Sinai-based jihadists, a terrorist group affiliated with ISIS, planted a bomb on a Russian plane. The Russian plane crashed in Sinai Peninsula and killed all the 224 passengers and crew on board. In addition, in Aden, Yemen on October 6, 2015, at least 15 civilians were killed when ISIS attacked the Cosmopolitan Port Town, a luxury hotel which was hosting Yemeni officials. Moreover, ISIS bombed a mosque in Sana'a, Yemen on October 7, 2015. Then, on October 18, 2015, ISIS attacked a Libyan prison in Tripoli. This prison was known for housing high profile Islamic militants. Finally, another mosque in Sana'a, Yemen was attacked on September 24, 2015. Twenty-five Shiite Muslims were killed at the mosque where they had been praying during the religious holiday of Eid Adha (Belware, 2015).

The Rise of ISIS and Realism

In summary, the above paragraphs show that ISIS has managed to conquer and control large swaths of territories in Iraq and Syria by using terrorism as a means to justify the establishment of the Islamic State and thus to attain its political

objectives. This thesis seeks to relate the rise of ISIS to realism. Before partaking in a thorough analysis of realism, however, it is important to consider the anarchic system, the main first pillar, as a means to understand the rise of ISIS. Additionally, following the assumption of anarchy, the United States, Russia, and France have found themselves obliged to follow the “self-help” strategy to fight ISIS in order to preserve their security and interests at home and abroad. In “International Relations: One World, Many Theories,” Walt (1998) concluded that realism remains the most powerful general framework for understanding international relations because of the insight it provides on contemporary international affairs (Walt, 2015, p.43).

Realism remains the dominant tradition in the study of international relations. Proponents of realism (e.g., Ken Waltz and John Mearsheimer) offer plausible justifications for the continued usefulness of the realist perspective despite the end of the Cold War. Mearsheimer has asserted that realism will cease to exist only if there is a revolutionary change in the structure of the international system; however, Mearsheimer believes that this radical change is not likely to happen in the foreseeable future. In addition, he explains that this justifies the dependency of people who care greatly about the real world in regard to the insights that realist theory provides (Mearsheimer, 2002, p.9).

As a state-centered perspective, realism can be applied in this study to explain 1) the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and 2) the formation of a broad coalition to fight it. In general, this thesis focuses on two major super powers in the international system, the United States and Russia, and evaluates their reactions to the rise of ISIS. Importantly, there has not been much theory-informed on either the rise of ISIS or on the swift formation of conservative Arab and

western states to fight it. This thesis seeks to offer such an explanation relying mainly on insights of Realism.

Research Questions of the Thesis:

While Realism does not regard itself with the rise of non-state actors such as ISIS, this thesis attempts to find an explanation through Realism as a broad school of international relations and its variants to such a rise. Thus, using realist insights, this thesis investigates the following primary questions: How can realist theory explain the rise of ISIS, a non-state actor and how can it probes the underlying reasons behind the reaction of the United States and Russia to the rise of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria?

While the first question is particularly significant because Realism does not have much to say about the rise of non-state actors, the second question is not less important because it leads to the formation of additional, related core questions. Despite the common aim of the United States and Russia in defeating ISIS, they are still superpower rivals competing over Syria and in terms of being a hegemon in the entire Middle East. Thus, how does realism explain this teaming up in fighting ISIS, and what explanations does it offer about their rivalry? Moreover, why is the United States so reluctant to have its troops on Syrian grounds while in Iraq it is not the case? Further, in regard to the air campaigns led by the United States against ISIS targets, why did a number of powers led by the United States agree to launch air strikes against such targets, to provide assistance to the Iraqi government, the Kurdish forces fighting ISIS in Syria and Iraq, and to initiate a campaign to train members of the Syrian opposition to fight ISIS? In addition, what does Russia want from Syria, and why it is supporting the Assad regime on the ground and by air? It is also important for the aim of this thesis to investigate

the reasons for ISIS's rise and success in controlling fairly extensive swaths of land in Iraq and Syria as well as their expansion beyond these territories (e.g., establishment of cells in Lebanon, Libya, and Egypt and carry out attacks in Saudi Arabia) before an in-depth focus on the main question.

Significance of the Thesis

Once the Ba'ath Party was removed from power in Iraq in 2003, when the United States led a coalition to oust Saddam Hussein in the war against Iraq, the lack of local figures to immediately take on the then-vacant administrative posts meant that the Iraqi government was too weak to fill the power vacuum. As a result, other forces quickly sought to fill the vacuum. This response resulted in armed militia and insurgents because the Iraqi government had no identifiable central power or authority. Briefly, ISIS has filled the power vacuum in Iraq. The research questions are of high importance because realist theory is genuinely concerned about the balance of power, and states are still apprehensive about their survival. However, realism does not explain the rising of terrorist groups or non-state actors who eventually proclaim to be a de facto quasi state, as in the case of ISIS.

This thesis will provide a comprehensive overview of the rise of the Islamic State. It will begin with the application of a realist framework and then move on to explain the context of the coalitions led by each of the superpowers being evaluated. The thesis will focus on the common grounds concerning the United States and Russia's ISIS-related counter reactions and conflicts. This focus, however, does not overlook the importance of ideology, namely *Salafi jihadi*, during the rise of ISIS. The thesis argues that material conditions in the region and globally, such as the marginalization of the Sunni population in Syria and Iraq, state repression, and the decline of state power in Iraq since the US occupation (2003) and in Syria (2011)

have greatly facilitated the rise of ISIS. Had it not been for these major political changes, ISIS would not have emerged and would not have succeeded in expanding and physically controlling a sizable territory in Iraq and Syria. While realism does not concern itself with non-state actors, it can be argued that non-state actors such as ISIS think in realist terms. This means their use of violence to achieve political objectives evokes a cost-benefit analysis; moreover, their main aim is to establish a state. As such, it is important to focus on the main pillars of establishing a state.

Therefore, it is importantly first to understand the postulate conditions for an entity to become a state. An entity should conform to four basic conditions to be considered as a state. First, it must have a territorial base that has defined geographic boundaries. Second, a permanent populace should reside within its boundaries. Third, the population should show allegiance towards an established government. And fourth, to be a state, it should be recognized diplomatically by other states (Mingst & Arreguin-Toft, 2011, p.116). Thus, when defined, the Islamic State is not a state; rather, it is an alleged caliphate with a self-proclaimed caliph.

ISIS proclaimed itself on June 29, 2014 as the Islamic State (IS) with its ruler, the worldwide caliphate, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi. Currently, ISIS occupies land in Iraq, Syria, and Libya and the de facto Islamic State (IS) has a population larger than Denmark or Finland (Stern & Berger, 2015, p.278). This said, it is highly important to address the origins of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria—of this worldwide terrorist group known in Arabic as “Da esh”—as well as how it succeeded in proclaiming itself as a “state” even though it is unrecognized by the international community. However, it is critical to assert that, by mid-2014 the Islamic State is in control of a total geographic territory equals to the area of Britain (Atwan, 2015, p. 9). Unprecedentedly, ISIS has established new borders that fully

control it. As such, it is the first time since the Sykes-Picot Agreement that an organization or a rebel group has succeeded in carrying out this action and fully altering the map of the Middle East (Stern & Berger, 2015, p.278). In addition, it is highly imperative to highlight its key figures and events that have impacted its establishment and its radical and racist ideology. Moreover, it is also useful to provide an overview of its historical context and environment that empowered and strengthened it. Finally, the thesis will examine the various tactics and strategies that ISIS has employed for achieving its ideology. By explaining this context, the grounds will be furnished to understand the reactions of the United States and Russia and their launching of air strikes against ISIS targets.

Although the two superpowers that are being investigated are fighting ISIS, each one has its own core reasons in addition to the primary reason of the need to launch war on terrorism. Obviously, each one has its own adopted foreign policy towards the Middle East. In addition, each has its own military tactics, strategies, allies, and precautionary plans to preserve its internal and abroad security and interests other than its core values and principles, as in the case of the United States.

The utilization of realist perspectives in this thesis to understand the rise of ISIS and the grand coalitions led by two prominent states, the US and Russia, under study is indeed a valuable approach. First, realism considers states as primary actors in the international system. Hence, realism does not acknowledge non-state actors as the principal actors in the international arena. Only states pursue their own national interests and security; thus, they are the only ones to struggle for either absolute or relative power. However, ISIS thinks in realist terms, and it has succeeded in declaring its state, the Islamic State, although it is unrecognized by the international community. Second, while Russia is playing to its strengths in Syria not only to

defeat ISIS but also to support and strengthen the regime of Bashar Al Assad, the United States wants Al Assad out. Moreover, Russia fears that toppling Assad will increase sectarian conflict and that the consequences of such an overthrow will expand to North Caucasus. Thus, this outcome will lead to the empowerment of Sunni radicalism in the Middle Eastern political system at the expense of Russia's links to the region.

Methodology

The aim of this thesis is to trace the rise of the Islamic State and to explain it within the realist framework. This is an attempt to reveal if the Islamic State has any chances of survival in a volatile region, the Middle East. Moreover, it is an attempt to study realist insights into ISIS's rise and the reactions of the United States and Russia towards the establishment of the so-called Islamic State. Thus, this thesis will closely examine how ISIS has sought control over land, resources, and people as preludes to statehood. This said, core assumptions of realism, such as anarchy, the struggle for power, and the power vacuum, among other realist premises, will be examined in the case of ISIS, which operates in a hostile environment. Thus, its use of extreme violence is a real reflection of its radical beliefs and perceptions that all other actors want to bring down. Thus, the thesis will trace the roots, establishment, and ideology of the Islamic State by depending primarily on scholarly articles, books, journals, speeches, interviews, and *Dabeq* the Islamic State's propaganda magazine. The thesis emphasizes that realist theory underlines its validity and credibility in explaining war on terrorism. Therefore, this thesis provides insights about realism in order to understand the rise of ISIS in the volatile region of the Middle East and to uncover the underlying motives of the United States and Russia

in leading coalitions to fight ISIS despite their different political stances towards Syria and the Middle East.

Chapter Two

Realism and the Rise of ISIS

Despite the airstrikes by the United States-led coalition and Russia on ISIS targets, ISIS has continued its reign. The ISIS evolution is clearly ongoing. Using a realist lens, this chapter aims to explain the rise of ISIS, the new caliphate, the ISIS jihad, and ISIS ideological links to other jihadists.

The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), proclaimed itself on June 29, 2014 as the Islamic State (IS) with its ruler, the worldwide caliph, Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi (BBC NEWS, 2015). This said, it is of high importance to shed light on the origins of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. This global terrorist group is known in Arabic as “Da esh” (Stern & Berger, 2015, p. 8). In an unprecedented fashion, it succeeded to proclaim itself as a state, although this proclamation is unrecognized by the international community, under the strict dictates of Islam *Shariaa* law and by utilizing extreme violence. However, it is crucial to assert that, by now, ISIS is controlling a total geographic territory equals to the area of Britain (Atwan, 2015). Thus, it is the first time since the Sykest-Picot Agreement that an organization has succeeded in carrying out this action and altering the entire map of the Middle East (Stern & Berger, 2015, p.278). In addition, it is highly imperative to focus on ISIS’s top-ranked figures and events that have impacted its establishment, its historical context and the environment that empowered it, and its radical ideology. Finally, the chapter will briefly address the various strategies that ISIS has employed to achieve its political goals. Importantly, this chapter will focus on the circumstances that facilitated the rise of ISIS from the realist perspective.

Mearsheimer, Realism, and Non-State Actors

Realism remains the dominant tradition in the study of international relations. Proponents of realism, such as Ken Waltz and John Mearsheimer, offer plausible justifications for the continued usefulness of the realist perspective despite the end of the Cold War. Mearsheimer has asserted that realism will disappear only if there is a revolutionary change in the structure of the international system; however, he believes that this radical change is not likely to happen in the foreseeable future. He has assessed that this justifies the dependency of people who genuinely care about the real world in regard to the insights that realist theory provides (Mearsheimer, 2002, p.9).

Realism is based on four core assumptions: the international system is anarchic; states are unitary actors; states are rational actors; and survival is the ultimate aim of states. First, taking anarchy into consideration, ISIS has thought in realist terms when it has taken advantage of the anarchic system in order to conquer territories and expand in Iraq and Syria. Mearsheimer has described anarchy as the “911 problem—[an] absence of central authority, to which a threatened state can turn for help” (as cited in Mingst & Arreguin-Toft, 2011, p. 239). Moreover, Waltz (2000) has determined that realism remains the basic theory of international politics until and unless a transformation occurs (Waltz, 2000, p. 41). Since 2011, ISIS has been gaining power in both Iraq and Syria. Despite all of the factions and militias involved in the Syrian Civil War, ISIS has proven to be the strongest group in northern Syria.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter One, 2014 was a significant year in ISIS’s history because ISIS succeeded in gaining substantial territories in both Iraq and Syria. Thus, by gaining power and territory rapidly, ISIS poses as a real threat not

only to neighboring countries of Iraq and Syria such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia, but also to the international community. ISIS focuses on gaining natural resources of power as well as acquiring both tangible and intangible power as a means to achieve the end of survival. Survival is the primary motivation of all states in the international system where the autonomy of the state is a prerequisite for achieving all other ends. In an interview conducted by Hary Kreisler, Mearsheimer (2002) explained that Al-Qaeda is a transnational actor (UCTV, 2002). The term “transnational actor” applies to ISIS. Mearsheimer (2002) commented that realist theory does not necessarily focus on transnational actors. However, according to him, because terrorism is undoubtedly a phenomenon that will present itself in the context of the international system, it will transpire in the state arena. He then thoroughly explained that all of the realist logic concerning states’ behavior will have a noticeable impact on how the war against terrorism is fought. Thus, realism and terrorism are inextricably linked (UCTV, 2002).

Moreover, ISIS is a rational actor because it is fighting for a cause: in this case, to build a state. Stakelbeck (2015) has stated that it is clear that ISIS is building a state when it possesses the geographic expanse of a “state.” He added that ISIS has started to further establish itself by participating in other “trappings of statehood” such as developing a sophisticated bureaucracy and issuing both its own currency and Islamic State passports (Stakelbeck, 2015). Thus, ISIS conforms to the role of a unitary and rational actor as a “state” that acts in a self-help system with the ultimate objective of survival. Thus, the four core assumptions of realist theory are met by ISIS in its displaying of itself in the international community scene. Thus, as long as anarchy exists, war is inevitable. What is interesting about ISIS’s war is that it can be categorized as both an intra-war and an inter-state war.

Two Maps: ISIS's Control of Current and Future Territories

Iraq and Syria are undergoing radical transformation because of radical Islam. Moreover, this radical Islam under the caliph is changing the lives of millions in Iraq and Syria while also remapping the entire Middle East. Thus, here lies the profound danger of the Islamic State under the rule of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi. In a later section, I will address how the Syrian Civil War has opened the doors wide for ISIS to invade Syrian territories and later proclaim Al-Raqqa as its capital. It is first important to display two maps: the first one shows the territories being invaded and controlled by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, and the other is an ambitious map posted by the Islamic State across the Internet.

The first map below offers a clear presentation of the areas under the Islamic State's control. In the span of a few months, ISIS invaded and controlled territories in both Iraq and Syria. The Islamic State's groups set up camps in large areas of North-East Syria while battling the Kurdish militia, the Free Syrian Army, and other anti- Assad rebels, as well as the official Syrian Army (Nasr & Boitiaux, 2014). Supported by international coalition airstrikes, government forces in Iraq have been striving to regain control of their national territory (Nasr & Boitiaux, 2014).

2014).

© FRANCE 24 | Screen capture of a map showing areas controlled by the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq

On June 3, 2014, under the title “The Islamic State's Aspiration Map?” ABC News published a map cited by Breitbart.com. It was a map that was allegedly published by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and has been widely disseminated across the Internet (Lewis, 2014). In fact, the creator of the map is still anonymous as ABC News has not traced the displayed map to ISIS. However, it was discovered via Twitter of the image from the American Third Position (Lewis, 2014).

When looking at the map, one can realize how far-reaching the aims of ISIS are. The map illustrates an unwelcoming future of the entire world if such a plan is

Supposed Future Islamic State?
(Enlarged Version)

implemented. For instance, the map shows Spain and Portugal as parts of the future Islamic State. In its depiction, the map reveals the claim of the radical Islamists to seize lands that were long ago under Islamic control and rule.

The designated date of proclaiming the Islamic State on June 29, 2014 is of high importance because it has holy Islamic connotations. June 29, 2014 was, indeed, the first day of Ramadan, a holy Islamic month during which Muslims fast when they fully abstain of all kinds of food and drink. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi chose this date purposely to present himself as a caliph, the commander of the faithful and the successor of Prophet Mohammad (Hosken, 2015, p. 4). Thus, what are the origins of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and who is Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi?

Reasons Contributed to the Emergence of ISIS

Many reasons have contributed to the growth of ISIS. As explained earlier, the anarchic international system is a main factor that ISIS has benefited from in terms of conquering territories and expanding beyond them. Another important factor is the power vacuum in Iraq and Syria. Two additional, pivotal reasons for the rise of ISIS are the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the demise of its dictator Saddam Hussein. Once the Baath Party was removed from power in Iraq in 2003, a

power vacuum was created. The power vacuum among other factors, facilitated the rise of ISIS.

Explaining ISIS's Conduct Using a Realist Lens

ISIS has not emerged out of vacuum. The ISIS's leadership and members of the so-called Islamic State are predominantly Sunni Muslims. This group consists of persons who were marginalized by the United States prior to the country's invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003. Moreover, they were humiliated by the government of Nuri Al Maliki. Thus, when taking into consideration that ISIS thinks in realist terms and that their foremost aim is to establish a state, it is clear that ISIS is concerned about its survival. Survival is the main motivation of all states in the international system. Given that ISIS has been attempting to establish its own state with defined geographic borders and a permanent population that shows allegiance to its government, then its autonomy is a prerequisite for its achievement of all other goals. *The Guardian* (2015) revealed a 24-page ISIS document, written in 2014, that included a blueprint for building a state. Entitled "Principles in the Administration of the Islamic State," it is a draft for establishing foreign relations, a fully pledged propaganda operation, and centralized control over oil, gas, and other vital parts of the economy. Together with other documents obtained by *The Guardian*, ISIS has established a profile of itself. It focuses on mundane matters such as health, education, commerce, communications, and jobs. According to *The Guardian*, ISIS is unquestionably building a state (Malik, 2015).

It seems it is not an exaggeration to relate the very real origins of the Islamic state to Saddam Hussein's actions. In fact, ISIS began when Saddam Hussein acknowledged that the United States had aimed to topple him and overthrow his Baathist regime. This outcome was assured when the United States established an

aerial ban in both north and south Iraq. Moreover, the United States at the time supported the Iraqi opposition throughout political and organized frames empowered by intense media campaigns. Furthermore, the United States also imposed economic sanctions on Iraq that restricted and humiliated the Iraqis. For all of these reasons, Saddam Hussein altered to God, adopted the Islamic identity, and advocated jihad as a creed to challenge the expected US invasion and occupation of Iraq (Atwan, 2015, p. 13). Saddam Hussein launched what was known as the “Faith Campaign” (Baram, 2014). He abolished all of the aspects of a secular state, closed the bars and night clubs, wrote “Allah w Akbar” in his own blood on the Iraqi flag, and established a militia of youth volunteer members known as Saddam’s redemptions (Atwan, 2015, p. 14). As it is often said, one person’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter (Bergesen & Lizardo, 2004, p. 38). Moreover, an important and documented television interview was conducted between Saddam Hussein and the American News anchor Dan Rather on February 21, 2003. This interview was aired in the United States via CBS News and on all the four Iraqi television networks. In this interview it was clear that the rhetoric and some of the policies of Saddam Hussien between 1991 and 2003 contributed to radicalizing Iraqi Sunnis and turning them against the United States and the West (Dakss, 2003).

Conditions in post 2003 Iraq and the Rise of ISIS

It was too late for the international community to realize that the Iraqi Prime Minister, Nouri Kamal Al-Maliki, had been a significant part of the deeply sectarian problem in Iraq instead of being a source of resolution. Nouri Al-Maliki, who was nominated by the CIA, served two terms in office from 2006 until 2014 (Breslow & Wexler, 2014). Nouri Al-Maliki, a Shi’a Muslim, was a dissident under the regime of Saddam Hussein in the late 1970s. However, in 1980, he gained prominence after

fleeing to exile because he was sentenced to death when he was discovered to be a member of the outlawed Islamic Dawa Party known as the Islamic Call Party (Katzman, 2009, p. 12). The Islamic Dawa Party, a political party in Iraq, is one of the chief parties in the religious Shiite United Iraqi Alliance (Katzman, 2009, p. 5). During Maliki's time in exile, he briefly coordinated, as the leader of Dawa Party, anti-Saddam guerilla activities. In addition, during his exile, he established strong relations with officials in Iran and Syria to overthrow Saddam Hussein (Katzman, 2009, p. 5). Thus, after the US invasion of Iraq, Al-Maliki finally returned to his native country where he became the deputy leader of the Supreme National Debaathification Commission of the Iraqi Transnational Government. It was initially established to purge all former officials of the Baath Party from the government and the Iraqi military. Notably, these purged officials later become the designers and, militarily, the top planner officials and leaders of the Islamic State. In Iraq, Sunni religious groups have often had close ties with Ba'athist military leaders and foreign fighters (Byman & Pollack, 2008, p.57).

Many important events had led to Al Maliki becoming the Prime Minister of Iraq. According to Katzan (2009), two years after the US invasion of Iraq, the United Iraqi Alliance, founded in 2005 and composed mainly of Shi'a Islamist parties, won the plurality of seats in the Iraqi parliamentary elections in December 2005. Thus, Ibrahim Al-Jaafari, the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time in Iraq, was nominated to be the first Prime Minister of the Iraqi Transnational Government. He served from 2005 until 2006, when he finally stepped down from his position after an intervention from Ayato Allah Ali Al-Sistani upon a deadlock associated with his failure to end violence and improve service in Iraq (Katzan, 2009, p. 11). Thereafter, Nouri Al Maliki was elected as a Prime Minister of Iraq upon the

involvement of the United States and Qasem Soleimani, who brokered the deal between the Shia and the Kurds. Notably, Suleimani is the commander of the Quds Force, a unit of Special Forces that are associated with Iran's Revolutionary Guards that is in charge of their extraterritorial operations (Filkins, 2013, p. 2&24).

Atwan (2015) explained that as the prime minister of Iraq, Nouri Al- Maliki purposely marginalized the Sunni Iraqis throughout his divisive sectarian policy. Consequently, this marginalization and discrimination towards the Sunni sect in Iraq paved the way for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant to thrive and expand. In particular, Al-Maliki had been the key figure of Iran in Iraq throughout two terms of total Iranian support. However, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which has long been in political conflict and has encountered enmity with Iran, vetoed Maliki and refused to deal with all aspects of his government. Thereafter, the role of Maliki, as mentioned above, came to an end as soon as the army of ISIS conquered Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq, and strongly defeated 30,000 Iraqi soldiers (Atwan, 2015pp. 82-93).

In conclusion, the war in Iraq has profoundly changed the Middle East, although not in the ways that Washington had anticipated (Nasr, 2006, p. 1). The United States' toppling of Saddam in 2003 was thought to bring democracy to Iraq and the rest of the region when the Bush Administration held the view that politics in Iraq are between individuals and the state. However, the truth is that in general, politics in the Middle East is a balance of power among its communities (Nasr, 2006, p.1). Thus, empowering and reviving the Shiite sect in Iraq by the United States has created a chaotic environment there and in the entire Middle East, presently and for years to come (Nasr, 2006, p. 1).

On the contrary, Rabil (2014) traces the ideological roots of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria to 2004, when the Jordanian Abu Mus'ab Al-Zarqawi, a Salafi jihadist, established Jama'at Al-Tawhid Wal-jihad in Iraq and pledged his allegiance to Osama bin Laden (Rabil, 2014, p. 2). Abu Mus'ab Al-Zarqawi then changed the name of the organization to Tanzim Al-Qaeda fi Bilad al Rafidayn, which became commonly known as Al-Qaeda in Iraq. Thus, Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia is an Iraqi Salafi jihadi militant organization that is affiliated with Al-Qaeda. As a key combatant player in the Iraqi insurgency, Al-Qaeda established the Mujahideen Shura Council in Iraq. It was the chief political force in the province of Al Anbar and consisted of at least six groups involved in the Iraqi insurgency against the United States and its coalition and Iraqi forces (Abedin, 2006, p.1-2). Those involved included Tanzim Qaidat al Jihad fi Bilad al Rafidayn, Jeish Al-Taiifa Al-Mansoura, Katbiyan Ansar Al-Tawhid Wal Sunnah, Saray, the Al-jihad group, Al-Ghuraba brigades, and Al-Ahwal brigades (Abedin, 2006, p. 1). Later, the Shura Council of Mujahideen was disbanded and replaced by the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) on October 15, 2006 (Stanford University, 2016, p. 6)

Planning for the Establishment of the Islamic State

According to Hmade (2015), the creation of the Islamic State is a consequence of the series of wars that have been striking both the Islamic and the Arab world since World War I. He proceeds to explain that the Russia's invasion of Afghanistan was the most important landmark that triggered the creation of Salafi jihadism in its American- Saudi version. More importantly, Hmade has noted that, in 2005, Ayman Al- Zawahiri, the current leader of Al-Qaeda, outlined a four-step plan in a letter to Al-Zarqawi to expand the Iraqi war. These steps were listed as follows: to expel the US forces from Iraq, to establish an Islamic caliphate, to spread the

conflict to Iraqi secular neighboring countries, and to engage in the Arab-Israel conflict (Hmade, 2015, p. 51-61). In a few words, Al Zarqawi was the founding father of the Islamic State. After many escapes, this most wanted terrorist was killed by a US airstrike in June 2006 (Kakutani, 2015). BBC NEWS (12 June, 2006) published that Al –Qaeda in Iraq has named Abu Hamza al-Muhajer as the successor of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi a week after the latter was targeted by US airstrikes near the city of Baquba (BBC NEWS, 2006). Thus, Ayman Al-Zawahiri thinks as a realist on the offense when he believes that conquest pays off. Al-Zawahiri wants to pursue expansionist politics while building up a relative power position and intimidating the United States, Israel, and the neighboring countries of Iraq (Hmade, 2015). This action is what offensive realism prescribes.

The Spillover of the Iraqi War

It is clear that, from the start, the plan was to expand the Iraqi war into Syria. Thus, it is obvious that when the Iraqi war spilled into Syria, it would have also had an effect on Lebanon and other neighboring countries. Eventually, if ISIS's expansion is not stopped by diplomacy or coercive force by the superpowers, its reach and threatening ways will encompass all of the regions and perhaps beyond. Moreover, it has been clear since the plan sent to Zarqawi that Ayman Al-Zawahiri has sought to establish the expanded Islamic State under the rule of a worldwide caliph. Notably, Islamic movements have become a significant political force in many countries in the Middle East and beyond, where they seek to establish political systems and social order based on Islam when resorting to militant violence towards opponents. Stakelbeck (2015) has argued that when Al Baghdadi declared himself as a caliph, or as the political and spiritual leader of all Muslims worldwide, his move was met with disapproval in many Islamic corners not because of opposition to a

caliphate but rather due to ISIS's declaration and claim to lead all Muslims worldwide. In fact, all radical Islamic organizations have had always the dream of establishing their caliphate (Stakelbeck, 2015, p. 13). Thus, what is a caliphate?

The Caliphate

The caliphate is a form of Islamic political and religious leadership which focuses around the successor of Prophet Mohammad. According to the *Free Dictionary* by Farlex, a caliphate is defined as “the office or jurisdiction of caliph who is the civil and religious leader of a Muslim state considered to be Allah's representative on earth”; “many radical Muslims believe a caliph will unite all Islamic lands and people and subjugate the rest of the world” (Farlex, 2014). Thus, the caliph refers historically to the succession of leadership in the world of Islam after the death of Prophet Mohammad. He is the head of the Muslim empire. However, it is important to note that Prophet Mohammad left no instructions for his succession. Briefly, Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq, the closest companion to the Prophet, was the first caliph to succeed in the Prophet's political and administrative functions after the latter's death on June 8, 632 AD.

Concerning caliph and caliphate, Fakhry (1954) in “The Theocratic Idea of the Islamic State in Recent Controversies” explained that the Hulagu conquest in 1258 of Baghdad, in fact, marked the real dissolution of the caliphate. Fakhry took into consideration that the only effective caliphs throughout history were Mu'awiya, Umar, and Harun, who each conveyed authority and statesmanship; however, he asserted that the very position of the caliph, in all instances, enjoyed considerable influence despite the personal impotence of the caliph. It is merely an important position when the caliph is realized as the Commander of the Faithful (Fakhry, 1954, p. 450). Then, he proceeds to inform his readers that the nineteenth century

witnessed the revival of the Islamic State and its consistency with modern civilization (Fakhry, 1954, p.451). Based on this explanation, the major problem concerns how to reconcile democracy which is a European-Christian notion to Islam (Fakhry, 1954, p. 452). Fakhry cited Ibn Khaldoun to provide insight about what is generally recognized as the official teaching of Islam regarding the question of the caliphate. Thus, he explained Ibn Khaldoun's account, which is at the core of many modern controversies. Ibn Khaldoun, in his prominent "Prolegomena," stated that the principle of political authority is power; its natural outcomes are domination and conquest which by consequences breed discontent, dissatisfaction, and, eventually, insurrection that leads to fundamentalism and radicalism within the clan spirit of the group (Fakhry, 1954, p.452). Thus, to alleviate the political and social upheavals and ensure their stability, binding laws should be equally imposed on the ruler and the ruled. Thus, the laws are either put into effect by the legislators of the community or are the result of divine legislation. In the former case, the polity would be a secular one while in the latter case, the polity would be a theocratic one. Ibn Khaldoun also suggested that the theocratic state is better than the secular state because it is directed towards people's happiness on earth and their life after death. Thus, the former is solely directed towards earthly welfare. These specificities explain the caliphs who are successors of the Prophet and are the only ones who ensure the dual welfare of humankind when they exact obedience from the populace that conforms to the precepts of the religious law (Fakhry, 1954, pp. 452 & 453).

In summary, it is clear that scholars like Ibn Khaldoun advocate the establishment of the Islamic State and believe it is the only form of state that provides the dual welfare for humans on earth and their lives after death. Moreover, Fakhry cited Mohammad Abdu's placing the blame of foreign elements for the

present decadence of Muslims. The foreign elements corrupted and distorted Islam for subjective motives and in their pursuit of political ends (Fakhry, 1954, p. 454). In fact, ISIS scholars always blamed the foreign elements, the imperialism manifested by the United States, the capitalist world, and globalization for the distortion of the majority of Muslims worldwide through brainwashing and by influencing them directly or indirectly to follow their steps in order to survive. Moreover, in regard to the notion of the “return to the ancients,” Salafi Islam or the Salafi movement was founded in 1883 by the religious scholars Mohammad Abdu and Jamal El Din Al - Afghani (Fakhry, 1954, p. 454). Thus it is a call to return to the original teaching of Islam as taught in Koran and Hadith. Thus, it is an announcement for jihadism which means, in this context, a war against infidels and apostates.

Stakelbeck (2015) traced the establishment of major caliphates in history. He explains that the global Muslim empire reached its zenith under the Umayyad Caliphate (66-750), which is the second of the four major caliphates after the Prophet’s death in 632 AD. The capital of Umayyad Caliphate was Damascus. It ruled over five million square miles of contiguous land including Spain, Portugal, and the island of Sicily. In addition, the Muslim armies launched frequent raids into Southern Italy and plundered suburban Rome. The struggle between Europe and Islam continued to intensify under the Ottoman Caliphate, which was established in 1571. At its height, it encompassed most of the Middle East, North Africa, the Caucasus, and a sizable portion of Southeastern Europe including Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, former Yugoslavia, and parts of modern day Hungary. The caliphate was briefly abolished in 1924 after it had decreased in size and influence. As a direct response to the dissolution of the Ottoman caliphate, Hassan Al Banna

founded the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 to revive the glory of Islam. Shortly thereafter, the slow and steady incremental strategy of reviving the caliphate was insufficient for Al-Qaeda. Eventually, ISIS followed Al-Qaeda's steps; however, it added tens of thousands of foot soldiers and heavy weaponry. Briefly, ISIS has succeeded where both the Muslim Brotherhood and Al-Qaeda had failed. By using extreme violence, ISIS imposes the Islamic state across regions in both Iraq and Syria, the heartlands of the former caliphates (Stakelbeck, 2015, p. 13-14).

Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi

Born in 1971 near Samarra in Iraq, Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim Al-Badri is the infamous salafi dangerous extremist, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi who is the self-appointed caliph of all Muslims worldwide (Zelin, 2014). Zelin added that in July 2013, Turki al-Binali, a Bahraini ideologue, wrote a biography of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi that highlighted the history of the Baghdadi family. It claimed that the Baghdadi family is a descendant of Prophet Muhammad's Quraysh tribe. Thus, this aspect gives Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi an excellent qualification as the caliph in the eyes of his followers (Zelin, 2014). Formerly, Al-Baghdadi was a shy and quiet, religious scholar who used to lead prayer in a mosque in Tobchi, located on the western fringe of Baghdad (Atwan, 2015, p. 48). He received his BA, MA, and PhD in Islamic studies from the University of Baghdad. He also is one of the founders of the militant group Jamaat Jaysh Ahl Al-Sunnah wal Jammaah, and he served as the head of the *Sharia* committee. He joined the Mujahedeen Shura Council and later became the general supervisor of the Islamic State in Iraq's *Sharia* committee. He was imprisoned by US forces and Iraq forces at the Camp of Bucca from 2005 to 2009. After his release, he was announced as the leader of the Islamic State in Iraq

in 2010; he would serve as the successor of his killed predecessor, Abu Omar-Al Baghdadi (Atwan, 2015, 45-53).

ISIS: The Wealthiest Terrorist Group in History

ISIS is the wealthiest terrorist organization throughout history (Jewis Virtual Library, 2016, p. 1); it even produces its own income. In principle, ISIS's vast revenues are from the fields and refineries of oil it has controlled in Iraq and Syria. The Associated Press (2014) explained that intelligence officials and experts have confirmed that ISIS militants receive more than three million dollars a day through oil smuggling, extortion, human trafficking, and theft (Associated Press, 2014). Underscoring that ISIS is the wealthiest terrorist organization throughout history, *Forbes Israel* assures that the Islamic State is currently the wealthiest terrorist organization, followed by Hamas (Varghese, 2014). The list below shows *Forbes Israel's* list of the ten richest terrorist organizations in the world (Varghese, 2014, p.1-4). It clearly shows that even the second-ranked Hamas cannot compare to the annual income of ISIS.

1	ISIS	\$2 billion
2	Hamas	\$1 billion
3	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia- People's Army	\$600 million
4	Hezbollah	\$500 million
5	Taliban	\$400 million
6	Al-Qaeda and affiliates	\$150 million
7	Lashkare-Taiba	\$100 million
8	Al-Shabaa	\$70 million

9	Real IRA	\$50 million
10	Boko Haram	\$25 million

Note that the US Treasury Department estimates that ISIS gains \$1 million daily by selling in the black market crude oil from the oil fields that ISS seized from Iraq and Syria. However, *Forbes Israel* stated that ISIS's daily earnings amount to approximately \$3 million (Varghese, 2014, p.4). Moreover, according to *Forbes Israel*, the flow of money to this terrorist organization enables it to carry out its operations smoothly in the Middle East and allows it to recruit and train foreign fighters (Varghese, 2014).

The Foreign Fighters and the Strategy of Brutality

Masi (2014) clarified that the Associated Press reported that the new CIA assessment that included the period from May to June reported that the Islamic State could have up to 31,500 fighters in both Iraq and Syria (Masi, 2014). Astonishingly, there are foreign fighters from at least 81 countries, according to a study conducted by the Souffan Group. In addition, Foster (2014) stated that the United Nations has reported “an unprecedented scale” of tens of thousands of jihadists who travel to Iraq and Syria (Foster, 2014). Moreover, BBC News (2015) reported that Nicholas Rasmussen, National Counterterrorism Center Director, informed the Congress that ISIS had attracted more than 28,000 foreign fighters. Rasmussen affirmed that at least 5,000 were Westerners, among which approximately 250 were Americans (BBC NEWS, 2015, p.6). Concerning the brutality of the fighters, it is a spiritual war against all who are not with ISIS. It is a kind of war aimed at subjugating all of those who are not ISIS members and imposing upon them the *Sharia* law either by voluntarily acceptance or by various

kinds of extreme intimidation (BBC NEWS, 2015, p 12). ISIS has followed the strategies of beheading its hostages and raping women and girls. They have also released videos displaying these horrifying acts. However, this brutality is not a novelty of ISIS. Throughout the wars that the earth has encountered, brutality was regarded as an effective strategy used to subjugate and intimidate the enemies, as well as the fighters or armies of the other side. Atwan (2015) has argued that, throughout the past 1,400 years, the Islamic caliphate was actually established throughout 1,300 consecutive years and that it only was abolished during the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1922. Thus, Atwan explained that the ambitions of establishing an Islamic State nowadays by the ISIS should not be an unusual issue at all (Atwan, 2015, pp. 147-148). Thus, the display of extreme horrors through violent acts such as beheadings is merely part of a plan to intimidate the enemies until death in order to force them directly or indirectly to retreat from the battle grounds, surrender, or reconcile with ISIS through subjugation.

It seems that ISIS threats will not stop in the foreseeable future because even if this terrorist group is defeated, the Salafi Jihadi terrorism as an ideology and strategy will not vanish. This terrorist group is partaking in unprecedented atrocities on a global scale to realize its apocalypse. It is a two-fold belief. The first one is to establish the Islamic caliphate, and the second one is to achieve political goals and deter the West from attacking it. ISIS applies different terrorist tactics to fit recent circumstances. Undoubtedly, ISIS is effectively utilizing all of the up-to-date communication and transportation technologies that globalization provides. In fact, the sophistication of the latest multiple coordinated terrorist attacks by ISIS on Paris and its northern district, Saint-Denis on November 13, 2015 resulted in a massacre that resulted in the death of 130 people and the wounding of 368 people. These

attacks are the deadliest France has experienced since World War II and suggests that the Islamic State is utilizing an extensive and sophisticated network globally. This network involves recruiting humans throughout the world, utilizing social media to spread their message, and funding their operations primarily through conquering and controlling large oil fields in Iraq and Syria. Moreover, the attacks on Paris reveal that the fighters of ISIS receive advanced training. These attacks also illustrate that ISIS is both importing and exporting attackers. Thus, ISIS is upgrading the tactics of terrorism to realize its theological and political goals. The recent attacks by ISIS on Beirut and Paris in late 2015 and in Jakarta in early 2016 assure the followers and potential recruits of the so-called Islamic State of the approaching objectives. This further proves to the followers that the caliphate is undoubtedly advancing and expanding.

In a *New York Times* article, Belware (2015) explained that there had been at least 80 major attacks and arrests related to ISIS activity during 2015. ISIS targeted Paris with a series of terrorist attacks on November 13, 2015. This was the second time during 2015 that Islamist terrorists targeted Paris. The first time was on January 7, 2015 when the two extremist brothers Said and Cherif Kouachi, who belonged to Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, attacked the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, a French satirical newspaper in Paris; twelve people were killed in the mass shooting. Overall, throughout 2015, France witnessed other terrorist attacks as well, though their outcomes were less severe. In fact, it was the recent attacks on Paris that prompted Elysee's decision to intensify the airstrikes against IS targets. According to Belware (2015), in the last two months prior to the latest atrocities and devastating terrorist attacks on Paris by extremists of the Islamic State, ISIS carried out at least six other attacks, including two in the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt.

Based on news reports, ISIS carried out two suicide bombs in Beirut, Lebanon on November 12, 2015. Many innocent people were killed, and many others were seriously injured. Additionally, on November 4, 2015, the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt was targeted by a suicide bomber; at least four police officers were killed next to a police club when a suicide bomber detonated a vehicle full of explosives. On October 31, 2015, Sinai- based jihadists, a terrorist group affiliated with ISIS, planted a bomb on a Russian plane. The Russian plane crashed in the Sinai Peninsula and killed all the 224 passengers and crew on board. In Aden, Yemen on October 6, 2015, at least 15 civilians were killed when ISIS attacked the Cosmopolitan Port Town, a luxury hotel that was hosting Yemeni officials. Moreover, ISIS bombed a mosque in Sana'a, Yemen on October 7, 2015. Then, on October 18, 2015, ISIS attacked a Libyan prison in Tripoli. This prison was known for housing high profile Islamic militants. A mosque in Sana'a, Yemen was attacked on September 24, 2015. Twenty-five Shiite Muslims were killed at the mosque where they were praying during the religious holiday of *Eid Adha* (Belware, 2015).

The international community has condemned the brutality of ISIS. Moreover, the documented human rights abuses combined with the increasingly valid fear of further spillovers of the Syrian Civil War to all neighboring countries and beyond triggered the response of the United States to fight ISIS. Therefore, the United States has led a coalition since August 2014 to fight ISIS via airstrikes. The coalition has troops drawn from nearly 60 countries, including regional and Western nations. Whether these airstrikes will succeed their mission against the expansion, and spillover of the ISIS to other neighboring countries, this is still very vague. President Obama himself declared that this is a long term mission. Atwan

(2015) has argued that air strikes are ineffective in the long run because terrorist groups adapt themselves to them. He added that a great danger to the Middle East would be manifested in remapping it if the Islamic State and Taliban decided to collaborate together in all of the wars in the Middle East (Atwan, 2015, p. 219). The next chapter will apply a realist perspective and study the responses of two major powers, the United States and Russia, to ISIS's rise, terrorism, atrocities, and political goals.

Chapter Three

Realism Explains the Opposing Interests of the United States and Russia in Syria: The Partial Cooperation in Fighting ISIS

Using realist insights, this chapter investigates the following question and sub-questions: How can Realist theory explain the reaction of the United States and Russia against the rise of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria? This question is of high importance because it helps us to answer other related core questions. Despite the common aim of the United States and Russia in defeating ISIS, they are still super power rivals competing not only over Syria but over exerting hegemonic actions in the entire Middle East. Thus, how does realism explain this partial teaming up in fighting ISIS and what explanations does it offer about their rivalry? Moreover, the first part of this chapter will attempt to give plausible answers for the US reluctance to have its troops on the Syrian grounds. Next, the first section will also try to justify why a number of powers led by the United States has agreed to launch air strikes against ISIS targets and to provide assistance to the Iraqi government, the Kurdish forces fighting ISIS in Syria and Iraq, and to even start a campaign to train members of the Syrian opposition to fight ISIS.

The second part of this chapter will be concerned in attempting to give some reasonable justifications for Russia's intervention in Syria and its support to Assad's regime on ground and by air strikes. In sum, the anti-government Syrian protests which has escalated to a severe Syrian Civil War has spilled over into neighboring

countries such as Lebanon and drawn world powers such as the United States and Russia into the region. Thus, this chapter aims at studying the US-led Coalition and the Russia-led Coalition against ISIS in two sections. The two- led coalitions although have a common end, defeating ISIS, they differ in their tactics and other ends and interests in the Middle East.

Therefore, what theoretical framework can explain the US-led Coalition versus Russian offensive against ISIS? Indeed, it is not a dilemma anymore to explain this new war with states against non-state actors when taking into consideration that ISIS is acting as a “state”. Thus, taking realism as our guide to answer the above questions, one can appreciate the significance of offense-defense arguments in order to attempt offering plausible explanations of the behavior of the U.S. opposing Russia in their fight against the rise of ISIS. Primarily, the issue of war has taken an exclusive focus of realist theory. This chapter will propose an explanation about the US-led Coalition versus Russia in their fight against ISIS from the points of view of Nuruzzaman (2006), Mearsheimer, Walt, and Waltz among others.

Section One

Neo-Conservative Realism Explaining the US War on Terror

Nuruzzaman (2006) proposes a framework of neo-conservative realism, a development in realist theory, which better explains the U.S. foreign policy and its present national security strategy in light of fighting terrorism. Thus, the war on terror waged by the U.S. is a new kind of war because it is between a state and a non-state actor, Al Qaeda (Nuruzzaman, 2006, p. 240). Given that ISIS is a non-state

actor as Al Qaeda, the same explanation can be endorsed in this context.

Nuruzzaman attempts to provide a summary of the realist theories to see where they are valid in explaining the war against terrorism and the Iraq's invasion by the U.S troops before he moves on emphasizing neo-conservative realism and assures its validity and credibility in explaining the U.S. war on terror. To clarify, the issues of war, peace, and conflict are dominantly the basic issues of realist “theories” of international relations (Nuruzzaman, 2006, p. 241).

Nuruzzaman (2006) proceeds explaining that classical realism is based on the aggressive nature of human beings and the ultimate aim of survival, which motivate a state of war. The inborn aggression of human nature is the primary cause of war according to Morgenthau. Morgenthau depicts the world as imperfect because the world is the result of forces inborn in human nature. These inherent forces and opposing interests of humans are the reasons for conflicts that realize an imperfect world. In addition, Morgenthau states that other factors such as states’ yearning for military and material power, anarchy, and the goals of revisionist states that defy the status quo motivate a state of war among states. This theory has been advanced then by Kenneth Waltz who relates the competition of military power among states to the anarchic international system; however, he advocates the status quo balance of power. Attempting to deter states from waging wars, classical realists opine that the best way is by forming balances of power to promote a situation of a status quo among states. However, intervening variables may interpose changes in the current balance of power (Nuruzzaman, 2006, p. 241).

Nuruzzaman continues to explain that critics of realism remark that the theories of realists de-emphasize legal norms in explaining the interaction and

interdependence among states (Nuruzzaman, 2006, p.241). Thus, the first serious attempt to modify realism and save it from being obsolete was by Kenneth Waltz who put the theory in a scientific-positivist frame. Unlike classical realists, Waltz advocates policies of moderation between states where he explains that while systemic pressures lead states to conflict, states should seek a balance of power as a policy of states' survival. Waltz admits that states are unitary actors play in an anarchic international system and that the primary goal of any state is its survival. Thus, states aim to ensure their security (Nuruzzaman, 2006, p. 242).

In light of the above, the Syrian conflict has been an entanglement because many actors have been involved in this conflict since it has evolved from a popular uprising, to a civil war, to a war of proxy and even to an international conflict. Gilsinan (2015) quotes Andrew Tabler, an expert on Syria at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, arguing that the Syrian Civil War has been the worst humanitarian crisis since WWII because over 250 million people were killed, approximately the same number has been either wounded or missing, and about 11 million Syrians has been displaced (Gilsinan, 2015, p.7-8). The Syrian conflict has been transformed into an international conflict where all the major powers such as the US, Russia, and the EU are directly involved in the Syrian War. Thus, countries involved in the Syrian conflict aim in principle to ensure their security and national interests internally and abroad. Therefore, the objective of all the countries that are involved in the Syrian conflict is to ensure their security and their ultimate goal is their survival in this anarchic international system. However, Realist theory explains that super powers balance rather than bandwagon. Therefore, the two great powers, U.S. and Russia, are great power adversaries that are internally, reallocating

resources to ensure their national security and externally, they are building alliances to preserve their interests in Europe, Far Asia, Persian Gulf and the Middle East.

The above image (Reuters, Khabieh, B., Katan, H., & Bickel, Z., 2015, p. 3) shows the different conflicts within the initial conflict in Syria. This image illustrates clearly how the Syrian Civil War has transformed into a proxy war that involves not only two global powers, the United States and Russia but also regional powers such as the Gulf States and Iran.

Nuruzzaman (2006) continues to explain that Waltzian Structuralism encouraged many other realist theorists to establish on Waltz's theory of structural realism to promote it and give it further explanation. This advancement divides neo-realism into two categories: offensive and defensive realism. To explain the competition concerning security among states, offensive realists introduce the offense-defense balance. They accepted the assumptions of survival in an anarchic system, however, they involve other factors like geography and technology to impact the security among states. Moreover, defensive realists agree on a status quo balance of power and that expansion of states is not only difficult but also unfruitful (Nuruzzaman, 2006, p.243). Thus, the so-called Islamic State is doomed to collapse because of many factors. Most importantly, ISIS leadership aims to establish a Caliphate which is created on conquering and expanding. This aim made all countries rally to bring the so-called Islamic State down also because of many reasons and most importantly according to Walt's defensive realism is that the status quo balance of power of the weak and major power states is not saved. For example, taking into consideration that ISIS fighters think in realist terms, they seek to conquer and expand their alleged Islamic State because they are rational who do not trust others' intentions in a self-help international system. As a result, defensive realists seek absolute power while offensive realists maximize their relative power. Indeed, the latter escalates and boosts the security competition and consequently, the security dilemma. Thus, U.S. and Russia have been escalating the security dilemma between them since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011.

Mearsheimer and Offensive Realism

To understand the rivalry between the US and Russia, it is important to study ‘The Tragedy of Great Power Politics’ by Mearsheimer (2001) who offers plausible justifications through his offensive realism to the actions of major powers in the international system. Mearsheimer (2001) explains that perpetual peace among great powers is, indeed, not at hand, as many western scholars believe. In fact, the threat of erupting wars between major powers remains a probability because competition among them has never stopped. Despite that, the goal of each state is to maximize its relative power; therefore, the ultimate aim for each state is to be the hegemon. Thus, there is no status quo power in the anarchic international system and consequently, major powers intend to shift the balance of power to their advantage. Consequently, there will never be perpetual peace among them. Rather, there will always be perpetual competition in order to reach the impossible end, global hegemony. Then, states are explicitly or implicitly offensive because they aim to sustain their security because they fear each other. This fear springs out of three features: anarchy, doubting others' intentions, and because of offensive military capabilities that a state owns (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp.1&2).

Russia’s Vetoes Impede the Syrian Conflict Resolution

The above discussion of Realism was necessary in order to understand the Russian conduct regarding the Syrian crisis, especially at the United Nation Security Council (UNSC). Since 2011, Russia has vetoed four times United Nations Security Council resolutions on Syria (Whitman, 2015). Later, Chapter Four will discuss thoroughly these four vetoed draft resolutions. These vetoes were on 4 October 2011, 4 February 2012, 19 July 2012, and on May 2014 respectively ("Vetoes - Security Council - Quick Links - Research Guides at United Nations Dag

Hammaraskjöld Library," 2016). The US warned that Russia's continued use of its veto power particularly on issues involving Syria and Ukraine was, indeed, undermining the United Nations Security Council (Whitman, 2015). Later this Chapter will briefly explain the Russian and the US national interests in Syria. In fact, the national interest of states is used to understand and conceptualize their behavior. Thus, different ends are pursued by different states. Nuruzzaman (2006) explains that the common theoretical properties that realist theories revolve around are anarchy- except for classical realism- and the endless competition for power and the unstable international order. The unstable international order is the result of the unequal distribution of power among states. This explained, it is then the possibility of war between or among states that is highly at risk rather than between a state and a non-state actor. Traditionally, wars are waged between a major powerful state and another great one or between two alike weak states. Hence, the invasion of Iraq by the U.S. is a perplexing phenomenon to realists (Nuruzzaman, 2006, pp 243-248).

Nuruzzaman Explaining the Bush Doctrine

Therefore, the war on terror waged by the U.S. is a new kind of war because it is between a state and a non-state actor, Al Qaeda. President Bush, after the attacks of 9/11 outlined his rationale known as the "Bush Doctrine". This "Doctrine" emphasizes the determination of the US to fight terrorists who have the ability to threaten the U.S., its allies and friends. In addition to, he argues that rogue states that harbor terrorists and aim to acquire Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) such as Iraq are also his enemies. Thus, war on terror should debunk the notions of deterrence and containment strategies, which once worked effectively in the Cold War era. Because Bush perceived Saddam Hussein as an imminent threat to the

global peace and security, he invaded Iraq. Actually, this invasion defies all theories of "Realism" because then, the U.S. was the most powerful state. Therefore, invading Iraq in 2003 was justified by the "Bush Doctrine" of that time. To sum up, not all realist theories explain this war because to offensive realism conquest pays off, for defensive realists, the preservation of security is best maintained by the status quo balance of power, while classical realism underlines that human aggressive nature is the major reason for waging wars (Nuruzzaman, 2006, pp. 244-247).

Nuruzzaman's Neo-Conservative Realism

By contrast, Nuruzzaman argues that neo-conservative realism is the best in explaining this issue. He underlines that President Bush even before being a president asserted on many occasions that he is a "clear eyed realist". In addition, his top rank staff in the Administration was all "clear eyed realists". Because all of them formerly were neo-conservatives, however, they acted as realists, one can dub them as neo-conservative realists. They adopted The Project for the New American Century (PNAC), an ideology, to establish the American global Empire. It is an ideology with specific goals to increase U.S. spending on defense in order to boost U.S global leadership, defying any regime that is in enmity to the American values and interests, promoting economic and political freedom globally and lastly, to establish a global order in favor of the U S security, prosperity, and principles. Thus, imposing this ideology requires the U.S to fight in order to promote its liberty, democracy, and free market. In sum, neo-conservative realism which is established on two basic fundamental elements: the exceptionalism of the U.S. and its will to engage antagonistic regimes advocates U.S. promotion of freedom, democracy and

human rights which at times require expansion of the U.S. frontier even though by means of force (Nuruzzaman, 2006, pp.248-249).

Overall, Nuruzzaman concludes that the attacks of 9/11 have shifted U.S foreign policy fundamentally, as the new sources of threats are technology and radicalism. This said, realist theories fall short back in explaining these shifts in foreign policy and new threats and wars. However, it does not mean that all realist theories are irrelevant in explaining the new context. Thus, this new context, which seems in anomaly to realist theories, is explained by neo-conservative realism, which adds ideology to its assumptions, and hence, it explains any kind of threat whether it is posed by states or by non-state actors. In fact, it motivates strengthening military power and its policy accomplishment of expanding and promoting liberty, democracy, and free markets that rest on unilateralism of utilizing military force (Nuruzzaman, 2006, pp .251-252).

In sum, neo-conservative realism explains the U.S. foreign policy in post 9/11 and the projection of the national security strategy on the U.S. scene (Nuruzzaman, 2006, pp. 251-252). I argue that this is merely a neo-conservative approach. Therefore, the invasion of Iraq was in 2003 and after thirteen years of the US invasion, the Iraqi people are still insecure where they are under the control of terrorists' acts. Then, what strategies should the international community undertake to eliminate the real threat of non-state actors such as ISIS? Indeed, the number of ISIS followers is increasing day after day and accumulating more terrorist latent and active cells to launch terrorist attacks wherever ISIS leaders see it is necessary in order to accomplish political gains. In short, I believe that if the U.S. undertook a containment strategy toward Iraq rather than invading this multi-ethnic state, the

situation would have been better. Thus, the U.S. has proven by evidence that it failed in liberating Iraq. Moreover, it has been oblivious that major power states in the system try to balance their powers against the US and its allies.

To conclude, neo-conservative realism is based on assumptions taken from both neo-conservatism and realist theories. However, I see that balancing is endless and it will never stop and in this context, the Bush Doctrine simply encouraged other major powers to balance against the U.S. and as a result, the unipolar system is ushering its demise. Even prior to the announcement of the so-called Islamic State, the international community had divided its hard lines over the Syrian conflict. For example, the US and Russia have had opposite stances at the United Nations Security Council over the Syrian conflict.

Perplexing phenomenon such as the US invasion of Iraq and the US involvement in the Syrian Civil War can be explained using realist theory. As the Syrian Conflict is an unprecedented conflict generating many international and regional dimensions, realism is a valid theory used as a framework in this chapter to offer reasonable answers to the questions addressed at the beginning of the chapter. Realism as a broad school or variants of realism address balance against threats as well as asymmetric wars. These realist notions in addition to the war on terror in which it goes back to the Bush Doctrine help us in establishing a theoretical framework to understand US-Western and Russian responses to ISIS.

Asymmetric War

The 9/11 terrorist attacks, the war in Afghanistan, and the war launched by ISIS on Iraq and Syria are among many examples of irregular warfare or in other

words asymmetric warfare. Arreguin-Toft & Mingst (2011) define asymmetric warfare as the “war between political actors of unequal strength in which the weaker party tries to neutralize its opponent’s strength by exploiting the opponent’s weaknesses (Arreguin-Toft & Mingst, 2011, p.256). Similarly, the Office of Secretary of Defence and the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed on “a violent struggle among states and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population” (Larson, Eaton, Nichiporuk, Szayna, 2008, p. 13) as a definition of asymmetric war. This defined, then, ISIS has been waging an asymmetric warfare against the US and other western countries that are involved in the Syrian Conflict. ISIS utilizes many strategies to achieve its political goals in the region. Illustrating, suicide bombings, beheadings, raping, crucifixion, and abductions are just some examples among many other acts of intimidation that ISIS fighters have applied to subjugate the masses whom ISIS leadership perceive as opponents to ISIS’s political aims.

Therefore the United States took its first military action in response to state-sponsored terrorism despite the fact that “terrorists “offered few profitable targets for conventional military attacks. Say it in other words, the US has engaged states which it perceives as sponsors of terrorism rather than terrorist groups. Examples include Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Libya, and recently Syria (Ayalon, Jenkins & Center for Middle East Public Policy (Rand Corporation), 2015, p. 22). Thus, as the US engaged states in its war on terror because these states have provided safe havens for “terrorists”, the US war on terror and hence, against the states that sponsor terrorism is justified. As a result, the war on terrorism can be explained through the broad school of realism and its different branches.

The Motives of the United States' Intervention in the Syrian Conflict

Blanchard, Humud, and Nikitin (2015) explain that after five years, the expansion of the global confrontation with ISIS has reshaped long-standing controversies over U.S. foreign policy toward the ongoing civil war in Syria. Controlling large swaths of territory in northeastern and central Syria, ISIS continues to launch assaults on forces opposed to and aligned with Assad's government. This devastating war has driven millions of Syrians into neighboring countries as refugees as well as other Syrians who have been displaced internally. The United States has been spending millions of dollars for funding overseas Contingency Operations to counter terrorist attacks in Syria. Overall, the Anti-Assad armed forces in Syria have been divided over tactics, strategy, and their long-term political goals for Syria (Blanchard, Humud, Nikitin, 2015, pp.11-31). Consequently, this division is a significant factor that ushers in the eventual demise of the Islamic State.

This chapter underlines that the US-led coalition against ISIS has proven to be successful, even though partially, in defeating ISIS. Colonel Steve Warren, the spokesman for Operation Inherent Resolve, the US military operation against ISIS tweeted on 5 January 2016 that the US had retaken 40% of territory that ISIS once held. He added that ISIS is weaker and on defensive (Reuters, 2016). In addition, Reuters (2016) states that when ISIS seized Mosul, the largest city in northern Iraq and reached the thresholds of Baghdad, the capital of Iraq, it succeeded to sweep through a 30% of Iraq in 2014. By the end of 2015 ISIS was forced out of several major cities such as Tikrit and Ramadi due to the offensive attacks against them by

Iraqi and Kurdish armed forces who are supported, trained, and equipped by the US (Reuters, 2016). Moreover, Mosul has been retaken from the grip of ISIS (Seldin, 2016). Despite the threat of ISIS, the US and other Western powers continue to see Russia as contributing to international instability whether in its actions in Ukraine or in Syria. This super power rivalry undermines the struggle against ISIS. The West views the Middle East as a source of many challenges while the threat caused by ISIS is currently paramount other threats particularly: 1) - the continued hold on power by Bashar Al Assad, 2) - Iranian intervention in the Middle East such as in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and Bahrain, and 3) - Russia's renewed assertiveness in the Middle East including the use of force in Syria. Therefore, taking these concerns into consideration, the US intervention in Syria is a two-fold objective: to defeat once and for all ISIS leadership and to prevent Iran from filling any power vacuum that might result as a consequence of the Syrian Civil War. Therefore, how can the intervention of the major powers in the international system in the Syrian conflict be explained?

Balance of Power

In fact, the balance of power theory in regional conflicts has a plausible answer to the continuing intervention by the major powers in the international system. Miller (2004) explains that the Middle East is dominated by a variety of regional conflicts, civil wars, and external interventions. Major Powers are, indeed, indulged in the conflicts of the Middle East because of important reasons. These significant reasons as Miller states them are: oil, the strategic location of key actors, formal and present alliances, and key economic interests. Consequently, the involvement of great powers in the Middle East results in a major shift in regional

politics when this involvement is due to competitive intervention by a number of states or hegemonic management by a single major power. The regional balance of power is not autonomous; however, it depends on both the number of great powers in the international system and the type of regional involvement whether it is competitive, hegemonic, or cooperative (Miller, 2004, p. 240).

This study is concerned about the first two types of regional involvement: the competitive and the hegemonic types mentioned in the above paragraph. A regional balance of power and the prevention of a regional hegemony will result when competitive intervention by several great powers takes place or where ever hegemony leads status quo states to bandwagon with the hegemon and therefore balance against revisionist threats. The revisionist is likely to be contained by the hegemon. Therefore, contradictory to what Walt explains about the balance of threat, bandwagoning of states with a hegemon helps in stabilizing a volatile region. Thus, when the Arab conservative states jump onto the wagon of the U.S. it is because they want a great power to balance and contain revisionist Iran, for example. Moreover, the rivalry between the U.S. and Russia prevents the rise of a regional hegemonic state. In fact, the situation in the Middle East seems perplexing. The United States is still a hegemon in the region, however, it is a relatively declining power. Moreover, although Russia is competing the United States regionally, however its attempts are incomplete due to many factors. Therefore, taking the two propositions into consideration, the hegemony of the U.S. and the competition between it and Russia in the region, a prospect regional hegemonic state such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, or Israel is not likely to rise because competition between the two major powers, the U.S. and Russia is indeed taking place regionally and globally. Moreover, whereas the US is a real hegemon, however relatively

declining, it is only the US that can shape the regional agenda decisively (Miller, 2004, p.261). This said, it is important to trace back in time when the United States declared its war on Iraq and the consequences of that war.

The United States Wages War on Non-State Actors

“Our mission is clear, to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, to end Saddam’s support of terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people”, President George W. Bush told the United States on 22 March 2003 (Cramer& Thrall, 2011, p.1). Briefly, the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, ousted Saddam Hussein, toppled its Baathist regime, and disbanded its army. This created power vacuum which paved the way for virulent insurgencies to rush in and fill that vacuum. Briefly, three years after the U.S.-led invasion where Iraq was accustomed to violence, Iraq was an independent nation; however, its government was powerless to restore peace. In May 2007, the Iraqi parliament called on the U.S. to set a timetable for the withdrawal of its troops (ProCon.org, 2011). The full withdrawal of the last US troops was in December 2011; however, thousands of US military personnel stayed in Iraq to take on an advisory role (NBC, msnbc.com, & News Services, 2011).

The Iraqi insurgency escalated after the US troops’ withdrawal in 2011. Thus, the consequences of the withdrawal of the US troops from Iraq was a dual war (Gordon & Trainor, 2012). One was between the Sunni Iraqi insurgency and the central government as well as a sectarian struggle between Sunni and Shiites religious groups who fought for control (Gordon and Trainor, 2012). This vicious circle of violence was the consequence of these parallel conflicts which fueled each other. Escalation of sectarian violence continued. Briefly, June 2014 witnessed major events in Iraq. Northern Iraq was under attack from the ISIS forces and their

Baathist allies. As a result of this offensive war against the Iraqi government, Mosul and Tikrit were taken overnight by ISIS on June 10 and 11 respectively. Similarly, most of Anbar Provinces had been under ISIS control earlier that June. U.S.-led intervention began on 15 June 2014 upon the invitation of the Iraqi Government to assist the Iraqi forces to counter weigh the threat posed by ISIS. By the end of June, Iraq lost its borders with both Jordan and Syria. In addition, ISIS started advancing to Baghdad. The US response was to send more troops to Iraq to secure the US citizens and property in Iraq. On 29 June 2014 ISIS announced the establishment of the world wide Caliphate with its leader Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi. Moreover, on 12 August 2014, ISIS announced a beheading campaign of Western and Japanese civilian hostages. ISIS beheaded two American journalists, James Foley and Steven Sotloff, and uploaded to You Tube a video titled “A Message to America” displaying the beheading of the former and threatening to behead the latter in an act of retaliation against the US airstrikes in northern Iraq (CBS/AP, 2014).

As a response, on 10 September 2014 Obama announced expanded air strikes against ISIS in Iraq and Syria when he delivered a televised speech to the nation on the anniversary of 9/11 (Roberts & Ackerman, 2014) when terrorists smashed two passenger planes into New York’s World Trade Center. As a result, McInnis (2015) states that some 60 nations and partner organizations have joined the campaign when each agreed to contribute either by military forces or/and resources. Among these 60 nations and partner organizations are the member states of the EU except for Malta, other western states, Turkey, the Arab League, 10 Arab countries, some allies’ countries in Far East Asia such as Japan, Republic of Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan.

However, because coalition participation tends to change over time, it is a difficult task to determine precise figures of the participating states when different governments report different figures. These nations agreed to organize themselves along “five lines of efforts”: first, supporting military operations, capacity building, and training; second, stopping the flow of foreign fighters; third, cutting off ISIS access to financing and funding; fourth, aiding in humanitarian relief, and lastly, exposing the true nature of ISIS (McInnis, 2015, p.1).

Realism Explaining the US Plan to Counter-Fight ISIS

Save the effort of humanitarian relief, the above four cited efforts comply exactly with realist planning. Supporting military operations is a postulate to counter balance and eventually defeat ISIS fighters. Whereas, capacity building is important to increase relative power with respect to other forces trying to undermine anti-Assad forces who are contending to defeat ISIS and liberate Syria from its authoritarian regime. Training the opposition and other rebel forces is also important in war in order to upgrade their fighting and tactic skills. A mighty enemy needs mighty forces and fighters to defeat it. Stopping the flow of foreign fighters needs the efforts of all alliances to be harmonized on a specific strategy concerning all the friendly borders. Moreover, cutting the access of funding ISIS is imperatively a core solution from a realist perspective to cripple ISIS terrorist plans. Exposing the real nature of ISIS as a terrorist group to the international community and to the lay people all over the world is very important from a realist lens. It is important to show that ISIS leadership is disguising under the pretext of religion while in fact its aims are merely political.

President Obama's Announcement on TV to Target ISIS Fighters in Syria

On 10 September 2014 President Obama announced that the US would target ISIS fighters in Syria for the first time (Robert & Ackerman, 2014). President Obama started his speech by asserting that he is authorizing two operations in Iraq. The first one is a military action against ISIS targets in Iraq because ISIS is advancing across Iraq and it is near the city of Irbil where the American diplomat and civilians serve in a consulate and where American personnel advise Iraqi forces. Moreover, President Obama assured that the US will provide urgent assistance to the Iraqi government and the Kurdish forces to make them more effectively counter-balance the force of ISIS. Second, he authorized a humanitarian campaign to provide food, water, clothes, and shelter for the starving displaced Iraqi people, namely the religious minorities such as Christians and Yazidis who fled their cities and villages from ISIS's atrocities.

The Guardian (2014) published online the full speech of President Obama on his expanded campaign against ISIS. As the Commander in Chief, he assures that his highest priority is the security of the American people. He states that over the last several years, the US has persistently taken the fight against the terrorists who threatened the US. The result of this war against terrorism was that many members of Al Qaeda leadership were taken out of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Moreover, the US targeted all Al- Qaeda affiliate, most importantly, in Yemen and Somalia. In addition, more than 140,000 US troops were brought home from Iraq. Furthermore, the president promised that the US combat mission would end later that year, 2014. Then, he thanked the US military and counter terrorism professionals for bringing

America safer. However, he warns that the US is still threatened by terrorism. President Obama assures that the greatest threat comes from both the Middle East and North Africa because in these two regions, the radical groups “exploit grievances” for their advantage (Guardian, 2014). Therefore, the content of President Obama’s speech which explains how and by whom the US has been threatened complies with the fundamental assumptions of realist theory as a lens to explain the motives of the US to wage war against non-state actors who threaten the security of the US. Earlier, this chapter explained that neo-conservative realism explains the war of the US against non-state actors.

The (Guardian, 2014) quotes President Obama arguing that ISIS is among these groups that aim to inflict harm on the US. President Obama continues to explain that ISIS group proclaimed itself the “Islamic State” although it is neither Islamic nor it is a state. ISIS fighters kill innocents and the vast majority of its victims are Muslims. Moreover, it was an affiliate of Al- Qaeda in Iraq and thus, it is not a state. It has taken advantage of the sectarian conflict in Iraq and the Syrian Civil War to occupy and control swaths of territories in both countries. Thus, ISIS is not a state but rather, it is a terrorist organization (Guardian, 2014). Therefore, President Obama clarifies that whenever there is a power vacuum in a war-torn country such as the case in Iraq and Syria, non-state actors rally to fill that vacuum.

Furthermore, the President describes the conduct of ISIS as a unique brutal behavior. To illustrate, ISIS terrorists execute captured prisoners, kill children, enslave, rape, and force women into marriage. They threaten religious minorities with genocide and they took the lives of two American journalists, Jim Foley, and Steven Sotloff. ISIS does not only pose a threat to Iraq and Syria but also to the

entire Middle East where there are a significant number of US citizens, personnel, and facilities. If ISIS will be left unchecked, its growing threat will reach the US. The President proceeds to explain that ISIS has always threatened the US and its allies. Moreover, the US intelligence community states that thousands of home grown jihadists from the US and Europe have joined ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Thus, these jihadists pose a real threat upon their return to their home countries when they could attempt to carry out deadly attacks (Guardian, 2014).

President Obama suggests that to stop ISIS advances, the US has conducted since August, 2014 until the time of delivering his speech more than 150 successful airstrikes in Iraq. Listing briefly the points of success: First, the airstrikes protected US personnel facilities, killed ISIS fighters, destroyed weapons and also gave the opportunity to Iraqi and Kurdish forces to retrieve significant territory. Not less important, these airstrikes helped saving thousands of innocent lives. He assures that although the US power can make a decisive difference in its fight against ISIS, the US will not do it alone without the Iraqis because this fight is initially theirs. Thus, he announces that the US will lead a broad coalition to halt ISIS's threat. The President declared a plan of four parts to "degrade and ultimately destroy ISIS through a comprehensive and sustained counter-terrorism strategy."

Yuhas (2014) explains the key points of the president's speech as follows: Firstly, the president did not mention a timetable for the US intervention in both Iraq and Syria. Although the president authorized airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, he will not work with the Assad regime. Moreover, he will send 475 US personnel to join the already 1,211 personnel in Iraq. Furthermore, the US will increase military assistance to both Iraqi and Kurdish forces; in addition, the US will

increase also military assistance to the Syrian opposition. Lastly, the president asserts that humanitarian aid will continue for both the Syrian refugees fleeing Syria and the displaced civilians in Iraq (Yuhas, 2014).

Explaining the US Reluctance to Commit Ground Troops

It is important to explain why the US is reluctant to send more ground troops to Iraq and Syria. Moreover, it is also important to explain why the US has been providing assistance and military training to the Kurdish forces in Iraq and to the Syrian opposition in Syria. The United States also has its motives to interfere in the Syrian conflict. Although it has been reluctant to install its ground troops in Syria which is not the case in Iraq during Bush's era, it has led a coalition mainly composed of Western and Arab conservative countries to fight ISIS not only in Iraq and Syria but also wherever they are.

Thomson (2015) states five reasons why the U.S. ground troops will produce a backlash if they were to be sent to war-torn countries such as Iraq and Syria. Thomson states that after the terrorist attacks against Paris, Reuters/IPsos poll conducted a survey which reveals that 76% of Americans are against sending U.S. ground troops to fight ISIS. Moreover, the survey shows that 65% of Americans even reject conducting limited missions by small special operations units. The Americans whom the survey involved suggest that the U.S. conducts more intensified airstrikes against ISIS and to offer more assistance to local forces in order to better fight extremist groups.

Furthermore, the history of US ground troops such as in Vietnam, Lebanon, and Somalia where the US was trying to help, often ended up worse off than before

troops were sent because the enemy had always interpreted U.S. troops' withdrawal as signs of weakness and impotency. Thomson states that it would be a mistake to send more ground troops to Iraq and Syria because of five reasons. First, targeting US troops that are deployed in war-torn countries such as Iraq or Syria is much easier when the sites of the US troops is within extremists' reach. Second, the US troops then would be targeted to be captives by ISIS fighters who know well how to use US hostages to promote their interests through manipulating for example public opinion when they effectively deliver their messages through the different means of social media. Third, the presence of US troops will take the pressure off local forces to fight efficiently and effectively to defend their countries. Fourth, the presence of US troops will motivate the populations of both Iraq and Syria to take sides in these failed states because they are wreaked havoc by civil wars. Lastly, after the withdrawal of the US troops from an inflicted country by civil war, extremists groups will rush to fill the power vacuum the US left in these failed states (Thompson, 2015).

Mearsheimer Explains Different Strategies at War

According to Mearsheimer (2001), only armies efficiently can defeat a rival enemy. Air and naval forces are auxiliaries, which cannot alone without the former win a major war against a major power. Navies and air forces perform different missions in warfare and blockade together with strategic bombing have their own consequences in past conflicts. Concerning the limits of Independent Naval Power, Mearsheimer argues that projecting a naval power means that the naval power should takeover "command of the sea," or the strategic pathways in the sea in order to use them when needed and turn down the enemy. However, command of the sea

should be an auxiliary for supporting the army. Other less important strategies are the naval bombardment and blockade. According to the author, the history of blockades shows that they fail because they do not have the ability to coerce. As to Air Forces, they must gain command of the air before projecting powers against a rival state. Another strategy is strategic bombing; strategic bombing and blockading aim at coercing the enemy to surrender. Thus, punishing its population or destroying its economy, the outcome is crippling the fighting forces. Overall, wars are won on the ground (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 30-44). Importantly, Russia has not seen any factors threatening to unbalance its military achievements in Syria such as US ground troops. Thus, the US has granted Russia this incentive to motivate it being more cooperative on the issue regarding Assad's departure.

Further Explanation from Offensive Realism on Fighting ISIS

Therefore, where offensive realism is a structural theory belongs to the neorealist school of thought which perceives that the anarchic nature of the international system is responsible among other assumptions for the aggressiveness behavior of states in international politics, offensive realism can be attributed to the conduct of non-state actors such as ISIS group that aims at establishing a large state and realizes an Islamic Empire. Underlining, Fidler (2008) attempts to sketch what he calls a theory of open-source anarchy to explain the rise of non-state actors in global politics that poses challenges to the existing theories of international relations. Fidler's framework argues that the nature of anarchy has shifted from a monopolized condition by states to one in which anarchy has become an open source and in an unprecedented way accessible to non-state actors (Fidler, 2008, p. 259).

The United States Relative Power Is Incomparable

Reassuring, Mingst & M. Arreguin- Toft (2011) explain that Realism is a school of thought that defines international relations in terms of power. Although defining or measuring power is difficult, it is often simplified as the ability to get another actor to do what it would not otherwise have done. From this point of view, power is the potential to influence others. State power is a mix of natural, tangible and intangible sources of power. Examples of natural sources of power include: geography, natural resources, and population; whereas, examples of tangible sources of power comprise industrial development, level of infrastructure, and characteristics of the military. Intangible resources of power involve national image, public support, and leadership (Mingst & M. Arreguin- Toft, 2011, p.127). Importantly, realism focuses on military force as the most significant factor in the short run.

Taking relative power of states into consideration, James and Welsh III (2016) describe the United States Air Force as the greatest air force in the world. Both assert that the US Air Force is powered by Airmen with “more talent and education than ever before”. Although the inventory is aging, they explain, it continues to be more qualified across the enterprise than any state in the world. They announce that U.S. Airmen provide around the clock Global Vigilance, Global Reach, and Global Power in defense of the United States and its Allies (James & Welsh, 2016, p.1). From a realist lens, this part of speech is encouraging the US Airmen and asserting that the US is always ready around the clock to defend US interests internally and externally. Moreover, it is asserting that the US relative power is, indeed, incomparable with respect to other major powers in the international system. Thus, it is a strategy of deterrence; however, it has motivated

other states' fear and uncertainty against US power capabilities and especially among US potential power rivals such as Russia.

Relatively, the US Power Is Declining

James and Welsh III (2016) continue to explain that the US is currently experiencing a “colossal” shift in the “geopolitical landscape” where it is for the first time in thirty years, adversaries are “boldly” defying the United States freedom of maneuver in “air, space, and cyberspace” in US “contested regions” and near the borders of the allies of the United States. Therefore, the era has ended when the United States could project military power without any challenge (James & Welsh III, 2016, p. 1). Thus, the unipolarity that the United States enjoyed after the collapse of the Soviet Union is ushering its demise.

Comparing US Relative Power with Other Powers

Mingst & M. Arreguin-Toft (2011) state that although the United States has an unprecedented military power and its expenditures on defense are more than those of the next fifteen states gathered; however, its military is not updated to suit the warfare of the twenty first century when both wars in Iraq and Afghanistan it has been involved in lasted longer than WWII. Also the US is the first innovator in information technology and the US economy is three times fold greater than those of the next three rivals combined; however, the \$ 14 trillion economy of the European Union is increasingly exerting influence in world politics. The US soft power concerning democracy, activities of human rights, and cultural hegemony is unprecedented and has no competitor; however, its soft power leadership has been suffering from its failure to lead on transnational issues such as global warming, its

rendition of terrorist suspects, allegations of torture, and its economic missteps that led to the global economic crisis of 2008 (Mingst & M. Arreguin-Toft, 2011, p.99).

A New Modern Middle East

Explaining the US decrease of influence in the Middle East and the emergence of a new Middle East with new regional powers, Hass (2006) divides the modern Middle East into four eras. The first was with Napoleon's arrival in Egypt; the second was after 80 years of the demise of the Ottoman Empire; the third was 50 years after the end of colonialism; lastly, it was the era that ended with the US invasion of Iraq.

Hass (2006) envisions a new Middle East that will cause much trouble to itself, the United States, and the world. Hass explains that outside actors will have a relatively moderate impact while local forces enjoy the upper hand in shaping the new Middle East. He offers further explanation about the four eras that dominated the modern Middle East. He emphasizes that the first era ended by the end of WWI. The second era ended by the end of WWII. The third era ended by the end of the Cold War. By the end of the Cold War, the US enjoyed an unprecedented influence in the Middle East until it invaded Iraq in 2003 and among other factors such as the demise of the Middle East peace process and the failure of weak Arab regimes to counter radical Islam and to adapt with globalization. Next, Haas predicts what a new Middle East might look like. First, although the United States influence will decrease, it will continue to have more influence in the region than other outside countries. The United States will be more challenged by other countries' foreign policies where many western countries as well as both Russia and China will distance themselves from US plans to promote political reforms for authoritarian

regimes in the Middle East. Iran and Israel will be the most powerful states in the region. Iraq will remain a tangled issue that is difficult to resolve with its divided society and violent sectarianism for years to come and it might be inflicted by a civil war that spill over into its neighboring countries (Haas, 2006).

Haas analysis of a new Middle East seems to be realized where his envision of sectarian conflicts that might inflict neighboring countries of Iraq is manifested on the stage of the Syrian territories and maybe beyond such as into Lebanon and Turkey.

Aims of the Fiscal Year 2017 President's Budget

Although concurrently the US and Russia Air Forces are launching offensive military operations in Syria's air space, Russia has further pressured the NATO alliance. Russia has attempted to annex Crimea and continues its aggression against Ukraine (James & Welsh III, 2016, p. 1). Moreover, Russia is continuing to oppose the national interests of the US in the Middle East. It sold both Syria and Iran one of the world's most capable air defense system. Thus, the "near-peer" adversaries such as Russia, responded to the US victory and success of Operation Desert Storm twenty-five years ago by modernizing its forces with systems that are specifically designed to neutralize US strengths. Thus, the US Air Force must modernize to deter, deny, and decisively defeat any actor that threatens the United States and its national interests. Consequently, the Fiscal year 2017 President's Budget aims to build, train, and equip the US Air Force to be able to respond to present and future threats (Carter, 2016). Carter (2016) clarifies that the US is entering a new strategic era which is different from the past twenty- five years. He states that this requires the US to create new ways of investing and operating because it faces five evolving

strategic threats. These challenges are namely, Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, and terrorism (Carter, 2016).

Section Two

The Underlying Russian Motives for Its Intervention in the Syrian Conflict

Allison (2013) offers the underlying reasons and determinants behind the alliance between Russia and Syria although the latter has been in crisis since 2011. The 2011 Syrian Civil War has triggered firm political fault-lines among the Middle Eastern governments and in the global community of states. This said, both Iran and- with great leverage - Russia are the most supportive countries for Assad regime. The Russian stance towards Syria stems from its belief that it is illegitimate to overthrow legitimate authorities under the pretext of protecting the civilians. Moreover, Russia fears that toppling Assad will further sectarian conflict and thus, the consequences of such an overthrow will expand to North Caucasus. This if happened will further empowering Sunni radicalism in the Middle Eastern politics at the expense of traditional Russia's links to the region. Allison concludes that Russia would be better off aligning itself with the Arab world against Assad regime; however, he asserts, this is not in Putin's logic. Concluding, Allison quotes Assad himself warning that in the absence of a ceasefire in Syria, the risks of a Syrian partition is high and the consequences would be fatal ramifications "for and beyond the neighboring states of Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon"(Allison, 2013, pp. 795-823).

Thus, Allison's article is significant because it agrees with the fundamental assumptions of realism as a framework of this chapter. Allison focuses on the

balance of power in the Middle East and attributes fear and uncertainty as essential reasons for the conduct of Russia toward Syria and thus, he justifies the underlying reasons behind the alliance between Russia and Syria. Furthermore, Allison's article is valid because the Islamic State, indeed, has further ambitions to expand its geographical territory into Syria's neighboring states and beyond as its caliphate once announced. Moreover, if ISIS foreign fighters arriving from North Caucasus return to their home country, they might, indeed, inflict great harm against Russia.

To illustrate, the above argument about jihadists posing threat to Russia is explained by Shlapentokh (2014). Shlapentokh (2014) explains that increasing numbers of Russian jihadists have joined ISIS to fight in Syria. Evidence asserts that some of these fighters plan to return to Russia afterwards to proceed with the fight after they acquired the skills and expertise to launch terrorist attacks against Russia. Russia claims that these jihadists plan to target factories in Russia by weapons of mass destruction. Underlining this fear, the Russian law enforcement arrested in October 2013 two North Caucasus men who planned to blow up the Maradykovskii factory which engages in the destruction of chemical weapons (Shlapentokh, 2014).

Therefore, according to Chance (2016) Russia has been planning multiple strategies for multiple outcomes when it has decided to intervene in the Syrian conflict. Summarizing these multiple strategies, Chance (2016) explains that Russian intervention in the Syrian conflict is due to several reasons. First, Russia aims to protect its interests in Syria where it has had its only naval base in the Mediterranean based in Tartus. Second, Russia's aim is to preserve its strategic interest in Syria which it perceives as a fundamental pillar of its strategic interests in the Middle East after deposing Saddam Hussien in Iraq (2003) and toppling

Moaamar Gaddafi's regime in Libya (2011). Thus, Russia felt that it has been deprived from its Arab allies and this is a valid reason for it to preserve its friendly regime in Syria. Third, Russia fears jihadist rebels who have been repeatedly carrying out terrorist attacks against Russia. In fact, since the 1990s, Islamist jihadists from southern Russia republic of Chechnya have been fighting to get their independence from Russia. Although to a great extent the region has been under control since the appointment of the pro-Russian leader Ramzan Kadyrov, separatist groups do continue planning to inflict violent attacks against Russia. Chance (2016) claims that some of the key military leaders of ISIS are Chechen and thus, this imposes a threat to Russia's integrity at home. The bombings in Volgograd in 2014 is just an example among others. Fourth, the low oil prices added to the West's sanctions over Ukraine have sent the Russian economy into crisis. Although Putin's popular support has remained powerful domestically, there seems no solution to mitigate the economic crisis in Russia in the foreseeable future. Therefore, Russia's intervention in the Syrian conflict has been used as a policy of distraction away from internal Russian problems. The Russian intervention in the Syrian conflict, then, is a way of boosting national pride for the Russian, as long as the number of the Russian casualties remain low. Lastly, Chance (2016) argues that Russia is one of the biggest arms producers. This said, Russian intervention in the Syrian conflict has been financially and economically beneficial for Russia when it has been displaying its brand new high-tech weaponry such as the Kalibr cruise missile in the Syrian war. This said, as prospect clients for Russian arms sells, two big powerful states with large economies, India and China have been carefully observing the Russian impact on the Syrian war.

Russian Airstrikes on ISIS and Anti-Assad Arm Force

In order to support Assad government forces in their fight against ISIS, the upper house of Russian parliament had supported military action in Syria by 162 votes to zero in response to Assad's request for Russian military assistance (Reuters& VICE News, 2015, p.4). Therefore, Russia has started its airstrikes on 30 September 2015 against ISIS targets as well as against the Syrian rebels who have been backed up by the US upon a formal request from Bashar Al Assad. This action of starting the airstrike campaign in Syria made the Western countries suspicious about Russia's intentions. Moreover, Russia sent combat groups to fulfill its military mission in Syria; In fact, as explained previously, Russia aims to protect its interests in Syria because it has had significant economic and military interests in Syria where it has its only Mediterranean naval base at Tartus; however, since Russia's intervention in Syria's conflict, Hmeymim airbase which is located near Latakia has been the strategic center of Russia's military operation.

Russia's Intervention in Syria: Objectives and Partial Withdrawal

Rather surprisingly, on Monday 14 March 2016, President Vladimir Putin declared that he would withdraw his military troops from Syria starting 15 March 2016 because "the aim is generally accomplished". Although Putin announced the imminent withdrawal to start the next day, he did not give an end date to accomplish this mission. Furthermore, Miller (2016) explains that what Russia has done since its announcement of withdrawing its troops and warplanes from Syria is a reduction of the troops rather than a real withdrawal (Miller, 2016). Moreover, it was clear that Hmeymim airbase where Russia launched its air campaign will stay in use. Thus, it is expectedly that Russia may redeploy its troops whenever it is necessary because the infrastructure is still in place.

This said, analysts believe that Russia has intervened in the Syrian conflict to accomplish several objectives. Walker (2016) believes that the real objective of Russia involving itself in the Syrian Conflict is to force the West to deal with it after it has been isolated as a result of its war against Ukraine. Both the US and the EU have imposed wide-ranging sanctions against Russia after it annexed the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine in March 2014 (Walker, 2016). Therefore, Russia's direct intervention in the Syrian conflict has been elevating its position to place it at par with the United States. Moreover, Russia planned to be an indispensable power arbiter in the peace negotiations that started in Geneva 14 March 2016 between the delegations of both opposing groups, the Syrian government forces and the anti-Assad opposition.

Overall, the Syrian war is far from ceasefire without a decisive political settlement among the Syrians (Dyomkin & Al- Khalidi, 2016). Thus, by displaying itself as a power broker in the Syrian conflict, Russia aims to have an equal say with the US in the Syrian political transition and thus to attempt to leverage its gains against European sanctions. Titov (2016) explains briefly Russia's objectives for intervening in the Syrian conflict. He states that these aims are: to stabilize Assad regime, to be a pivotal player in the Middle East, to be displayed as an equal global power with respect to the U.S., and most importantly, to reform its relations with the West after it has been isolated from the latter because of the Ukraine crisis. Briefly, Russia has restored its position in the region and saved the balance of power when displaying itself as an indispensable regional power.

Russia's Intervention in Syria and Structural Realism

Thus, Russia's intervention in the Syrian conflict can be explained through structural realism. Realism explains national interest in terms of power and "capabilities relative to the evolving international system" (Kay, 2014, p. 12). Similarly, concerning the question of what cause states to compete for power, offensive and defensive realism are alike in attributing this to the anarchic system (Mearsheimer, 2007). There is no higher authority in the international system that states can resort to in case of threat. Moreover, realism asserts that states are uncertain about other states' intentions. Thus, when anarchy coupled with the uncertainty of other states' intentions that states fear in a self-help system, states attempt to ensure maximizing their relative power vis-a-vis other major powers in order to survive. This security competition of acquiring more relative power leads eventually to a security dilemma and hence, to an arm race. Concerning "how much power do states want?" classical and offensive realism hold the belief that states maximize their relative power because they pursue the end of hegemony (Mearsheimer, 2007). Thus, states act aggressively in order to ensure their survival. Therefore, among other reasons, Russia's intervention in Syria is to counter balance US hegemony and also to prevent the emergence of stateless destabilizing zones near its borders and its sphere of influence (Kay, 2014). Therefore, saving the sphere of influence of Russia is explained by realist and geopolitical strategies.

On the contrary, defensive realists' reply is that in order to maintain the balance of power states should preserve the status quo among them. The balance of power is a theory of state behavior. It makes the argument why states act the way they do and how they act when they face certain situations. In fact, the balance of power is a key concept of international relations and global politics. Hence, it is a pivotal part of structural realism. States act to preserve equilibrium in the system

depending on increasing their relative power vis-a-vis other major powers or by forming alliances. Thus, from a realist perspective, Russia's direct intervention in Syria is an effort to extend its influence not only regionally but also globally as a counter balance vis-a-vis the US and its allies. Frydrych (2008) cites Walt (1998) arguing that when taking realism as a lens to explain NATO expansion, NATO enlargement is a genuine effort to extend Western influence (Frydrych, 2008, p. 4). Therefore, Russia cannot tolerate NATO on its thresholds. Thus, the US is generating Russia's fear over NATO expansion and hence, the security dilemma between the two powers is getting worse. This competition has driven Russia to build more military capability (Mearsheimer, 2015).

Conclusion

To conclude, every state must position itself in a way as to be able to take care of itself since no one can be relied on in a self-help system (Waltz, 1979, p. 107). International orders are anarchic which implies that states have minimal functional differentiation. Thus, the international political structures differ only in the states' distributions of power capabilities. The core conclusion of structural realism is that in an anarchic system, states balance rather than bandwagon (Waltz, 1979, p.126). Anarchy can ruin even the best intentions of states (Waltz, 1979). Based on this assumption, the US and Russian's cooperation against fighting ISIS is complicated by their clashing visions over the future shape of Syria. This is the result of their differences on the priorities they adopt of their national interests. Thus, the security dilemma between them is continuing. In fact, the US and Russia are indecisive on the future of Syria. Hence, both powers are trapped in a vicious cycle of security competition because they are suspicious about one other's

intentions. Although there is a minimal cooperation between them on the issue of fighting ISIS when at the United Nations Security Council, member states unanimously adopted a resolution to deny ISIS access to the international financial system (Plagiary, 2015), there is still much more to be done in order to combine their efforts so they can defeat ISIS. For example, they should join their efforts to reach a common view on whom to rule Syria after Assad's departure. Moreover, they should agree on what type of regime should reign Syria. The two power rivals have different approaches and plans for Syria after Assad's departure from rule.

Moreover, as explained earlier, both have different opposing strategies on many other international strategic fronts. Indeed, the threat posed by ISIS should provide some common ground for their cooperation. Thus, diplomatic dialogue between them is needed in order to reach at least a temporary alliance in order to resolve conflict issues at regional and international levels. Briefly, not only coordination between the US and Russia is needed to defeat ISIS in the long run, but also between the US, Russia, the EU, and their regional allies such as the conservative Arab states, Iran, and Turkey. Therefore, it is needed that all these countries put their clashing interests aside to successfully defeat ISIS which is a common threat to all of them.

Chapter Four

Realism and Russian Foreign Policy: The Limits of Cooperation with the West

The national interest of a state is of great importance because it shapes the foreign policy of the state. Therefore, it is a key reason for the state to accomplish its economic, military, or cultural goals. The national interest is of great importance in international relations because it is a theoretical construct within the realist school of thought. Morgenthau defines the national interest of a nation as “a whole held to be an independent entity separate from the interest of subordinate areas or groups and also of other nations or supranational groups (“National Interest | Definition of National Interest by Merriam-Webster” 2016). Thus, the national interest of a state is perceived as a crucial means of power of that state to ensure its ultimate end: survival. As such, the aim of this chapter is to explain the limits to West-Russian cooperation with Syria through the lens of realism.

First, the chapter will focus on the fundamental assumptions of classical realism as it is explained by Hans Morgenthau, whose influences include Thomas Hobbes. Thus, the chapter initially provides a summary of Chapters 13-16 of *Leviathan* and considers the application of classical realism to explain how the foreign policy adopted by the Russian government in order to preserve its national interests has clearly impeded collaboration between the West and Russia in defeating ISIS in Syria. Second, the chapter will test how neorealist theory might offer a plausible explanation of the incompatibility between the West and Russia in

fighting ISIS. Finally, taking neoclassical realism into account, Kropatcheva (2011) explains that neoclassical realism has plausible answers to the cooperative and non-cooperative Russian foreign policy towards the West. However, the chapter shows that neoclassical realism continues to be the most effective theory for explaining the limits of the Western-Russian collaboration in fighting ISIS in Syria while, at the same time, presenting the opportunity for simultaneous cooperation between them.

Realism as an Explanation of Russia's Foreign Policy

Wieclawski (2011) states that Russian foreign policy has been a complex phenomenon in the current era of international relations. Because the Russian Federation has encountered the challenges of both globalization and integration, its foreign policy seems to be a complex phenomenon in contemporary international relations. Admittedly, despite the Cold War having come to an end over two and a half decades ago, Russia has been deeply rooted in the legacy of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) hegemony. Although since the end of the Cold War Russia has struggled with economic and political transformation, Russia's position in the international system as the largest state worldwide, as well as its nuclear power and its raw material potential, have unquestionably factored into its position in the international system. Therefore, despite the challenges of globalization and integration, realism can be used successfully as an explanatory theory to analyze Russian's foreign policy.

Classical Realism, Neorealism, and Neoclassical Realism as a Means to Explain Russian's Foreign Policy

Wieclawski (2011) attempts to analyze Russian's foreign policy using three theoretical approaches of realism: classical realism, neorealism, and neoclassical

realism. He first considers classical realism, which focuses on the national interests and regards the power of a state as key to understanding the complex nature of Russian foreign policy. Second, neorealism explains the structural limitations imposed on Russian's foreign policy in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, although it does not necessarily explain the complexity of Russia's interests abroad. Third, neoclassical realism identifies the varying nature of a state's power and supports a more flexible attitude towards the structure of the international system as well as to the political determinants of Russia's foreign policy. Overall, Wiclawski argues that classical realism remains the best approach to analyze Russia's foreign policy. Therefore, Russian's foreign policy has been an illustration of the fundamental assumptions of classical realism (Wiclawski, 2011). On the other hand, this chapter argues that neoclassical realism is the best theory to explain the limits to the Western-Russian cooperation in Syria.

Hobbes and Morgenthau

Hobbes & Tuck (1996) makes three simple assumptions in his book, *Leviathan*, which are the core premises of classical realism. First, men are equal. When men interact in anarchy, and they are driven by three significant factors, competition, diffidence, and glory, they are perceived as equal. The combination of these three factors leads to a state of war where "all is against all." Men are enemies because the resources available are limited, and men who are driven by appetite and aversions have certain aims that they struggle to attain. Thus, the conjunction of the limited resources (i.e., power capabilities), and the distrust of other men lead to the outcome of a constant state of conflict (Hobbes & Tuck, 1996, pp. 86-115).

The consequence of conflict is due to the competition and the dissatisfaction with the power attained. In fact, Hobbes's argument about perpetual competition among men is a validated argument. Contemporary scholars such as Morgenthau have built on Hobbes's argument about perpetual competition among men and advanced it to explain the perpetual competition among states. Morgenthau perceives the world as imperfect because of the inborn forces in human nature. Therefore, the struggle for power among states at the international level is motivated by *animus dominandi*, the desire to dominate others. In *Politics among Nations*, Morgenthau aims to advance realist theory as a useful tool to explain foreign policy. As such, he provides six principles of power politics.

Morgenthau's Six Principles of Political Realism

Politics is controlled by objective laws that are inborn in human nature. The imperfection of human nature has never changed. Second, international politics is a concept of interests that is defined in terms of power. This definition institutes a separation between political and non-political issues and facts. Third, the concept of interests is the core assumption of politics; it is always intact despite the circumstances of place and time. Fourth, the supreme virtue in politics is prudence. Thus, weighing the consequences in relation to the alternative political actions is political rationality. Fifth, realism does not identify the moral aims of a specific nation with the moral laws that govern the universe. Sixth, realism is unlike other schools of thought in international relations because it recognizes the imperfection of human nature while it maintains the autonomy of the political realm (Morgenthau, 1978, pp. 4-15).

Classical Realism and Suspicious Russia

The fundamental assumptions of classical realism, as stated by Morgenthau (although Morgenthau repetitiously refers to his six principles of political realism) are all reflected in the centralized role of Russia as a state in the international system. Furthermore, the aim of Russian power, its priority of its national interests, and the foreign policy it applies abroad are surely the consequences of anarchy, self-help, fear, and uncertainty where Russia relies on itself to ensure its security and hence, its survival as its ultimate end. Weiclawski (2011) explains that Russia perceives the state as the main actor in the international anarchic system where the international relations preserve the relations among the sovereign states. However, the role of other subjects such as international or transnational organizations is not only secondary but also limited. Notably, Russia has been always cautious and suspicious towards any foreign presence on its territories such as foreign investors or foreign NGOs.

Admittedly, Russia considers foreign investors and foreign NGOs as a potential threat to its national interests. For example, during Vladimir Putin's presidency in 2006, the government passed a restrictive law on NGOs under the pretext of protecting the state from money laundering and from terrorist and spy groups' potential use of NGOs, though this pretext was simply a cover for the actual plans as Russia claims. Importantly, foreign investors in the Russian sectors of energy and raw materials have faced profound problems. The case of the British-Russian BP-TNK joint venture oil company is a typical example where Russia attempted to fully control the company when it created visa problems for the British and accused them of espionage (Wieclawski, 2011).

Similarly, the Russian attitude towards the activeness of an intergovernmental organization has been entirely consistent with classical realism.

For example, Russia differentiates between the works of those regarded as beneficial to Russian interests and neglects those whose activities are seen as acts of intervention in the internal and national interests of Russia. For example, Russia has maintained its leading role in the United Nations after the Cold War because it is in its best interest to do so. In addition, Russia is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. This position has allowed Russia to practice its veto power against some US international operations (Wieclawski, 2011). For instance, it has vetoed four resolutions against Syria on four occasions since 2011. Moreover, all of the decisions of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) were vetoed by Russia because Russia perceived them as a threshold for “future Pan-European political and security order” (Wieclawski, 2011).

Wieclawski (2011) asserts that Russia’s prioritizing of its national interest is, indeed, absolute. In fact, all the wording of its important official state documents as well as the state’s military doctrine gives the impression that Russia is not willing to cooperate internationally when the cooperation does not satisfy its interests. In particular, Russia acts suspiciously towards the United States and the European Union (EU). Where the international order is anarchic, the focus on the national interests of Russia remains the fundamental criteria for the effectiveness of its foreign policy as a sovereign state. Moreover, this fact implies that Russia should rely on itself in a self-help system to ensure its security, interests, and sovereignty. Therefore, Russia has always been seriously committed to protect its foreign aims while cooperating with the US and the EU, for example. The US and the EU attempted to make concrete compensations for Russia during the negotiations on the enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the EU because at that time Russia perceived the NATO enlargement as a threat to its legitimate

national interests. Moreover, Russia operated a campaign to oppose the US plans to deploy elements of missile shields on the territories of Poland and the Czech Republic (Wieclawski, 2011).

Therefore, as a reflection of the anarchic international order where Russia is obliged to rely on itself in a self-help system, Russia prioritizes boosting its military potential because the effectiveness of its foreign policy depends primarily on its military power (Wieclawski, 2011). This confirms what classical realists' affirmation that power is an end in itself. Therefore, in the case of NATO enlargement and the US missile shield plans in Central Europe, Russia reacted according to classical realism when it threatened to deploy its nuclear missiles on Kaliningrad's enclave territory. Furthermore, despite Russia's limited economic and financial abilities, these elements have not prevented it from displaying its symbolic demonstration of its military force. For instance, it has repeated flights of its strategic bombers close to both the Canadian and US territorial waters. Another example is the Russian fleet demonstrative visit to Venezuela (Wieclawski, 2011) in 2008 (BBC, 2008). Thus, these two illustrations of Russian's symbolic demonstration of its military power over zones of US influence match the virtues of deterrence theory.

Even with the establishment of the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council and the NATO-Russia Council at the same time of the NATO enlargement process, Russia has continued its efforts to consolidate its own influence on the Post-Soviet areas of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). However, this imposed influence by Russia over the CIS has created profound conflicts between Russia and Georgia (2008) and between Russia and Ukraine (2014).

More Obstacles for the US-Russian Collaboration in Syria

Although the US and Russia Air Forces are concurrently launching offensive military operations in Syria's air space, Russia has further pressured the NATO alliance. Russia has attempted to annex Crimea and continues its aggression against Ukraine (James & Welsh III, 2016, p. 1). Moreover, Russia is continuing to oppose the national interests of the US in the Middle East. It sold both Syria and Iran one of the world's most capable air defense systems. Thus, the "near-peer" adversaries, such as Russia, responded to the US victory and success of Operation Desert Storm twenty-five years ago by modernizing its forces with systems that are specifically designed to neutralize US strengths. Thus, the US Air Force must modernize to deter, deny, and decisively defeat any actor that threatens the United States and its national interests. Consequently, in the fiscal year 2017, the president's budget aims to build, train, and equip the US Air Force to be able to respond to present and future threats (Carter, 2016). Carter (2016) clarifies that the US is entering a new strategic era which is different from the past twenty-five years. He states that this requires the US to create new ways of investing and operating because it faces five evolving strategic threats. These challenges are, namely, Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, and terrorism (Carter, 2016).

Structural Realism and Russian Foreign Policy

Structural realism emphasizes the significant role of anarchy in the international system because the nature of the structure of the international system is anarchic. Moreover, states adopt foreign policies that are the result of uncertainty and fear in a self-help system which is in turn the natural consequence of anarchy. The anarchic structure of the international system motivates states, out of fear, to

care seriously about the balance of power. Hence, states compete among each other for two reasons: either they aim to attain more power at the expense of other states or they strive to avoid losing power (Mearsheimer, 2006, p. 71). Thus, what matters is the relative power of great powers vis-à-vis other major powers in the international system.

Mearsheimer (2006) explains that great powers are the main actors in the realist's account. In fact, what matters is how much relative power, economic or military, a major power gains with respect to other major powers in the system. The "architecture" of the international system obliges states to pursue power because there is no guarantee that a major power, for example, will abstain itself from attacking another state in the system when there is no upper authority that governs great powers. Then, when the ultimate aim for a state is its survival, then it is obliged to compete with other states to ensure its security (Mearsheimer, 2006, p.72).

Five Fundamental Assumptions

Mearsheimer (2006) explains five core assumptions about the international system. He states that when these five assumptions are "married" together, they create a world of continuous security competition (Mearsheimer, 2006,p. 74) The first assumption is that the main actors in the international anarchic system are the great powers. The second assumption is that all states have some offensive military power. The third assumption is that states are uncertain about other states' intentions. Thus, policy makers can never be assured whether they are dealing with a state that aims to alter the balance of power (revisionist states) or whether they are dealing with states that are satisfied enough with the state of the balance of power

(status quo states). Consequently, this uncertainty leaves the possibility open that there is a revisionist state in the system. The fourth assumption is that the ultimate goal of states is their survival because without this assumption, states cannot pursue other goals. The last assumption is that states are rational actors.

Based on these assumptions, structural realism is a useful tool to analyze power's distribution at the international level. A clear illustration of the new distribution of power is the increasing presence of the US in Europe. Wiclawski (2011) explains that the NATO Enlargement Project is a clear example of US influence in Europe. Furthermore, another impediment to cooperation between the US and Russia is the US presence in Post-Soviet Central Asia and the US operations in Afghanistan. Another example would be the EU hegemonic role on a sub-regional level over the Post-Soviet states. Therefore, offensive realism explains the expansion of the US influence over Europe and also it gives a plausible answer to Putin's aim to expand Russia's influence into Post-Soviet States where Russia considers them as zones of its own influence. The Georgian War of 2008 is a clear example which proves that Russia is decisive in terms of the use of its military force to preserve its influence over Post-Soviet states, regardless of any international consequences. In fact, the Georgian War (2008), among other controversial issues, has exacerbated the limits to Western-Russian cooperation on many international issues, including fighting ISIS in Syria. Thus, it is important to offer a brief account of the reasons for that event that started in the night of August 7, 2008.

Realism and Three Plausible Reasons for the Georgian War (2008)

Petro (2009) explains that in order to restore constitutional order to Georgia's rebellious Northern Province of South Ossetia, the Georgian army

launched a late night attack against them on August 7, 2008. Intense fighting continued for several days until Russian's military force intervened offensively. Controversial arguments followed this event in regard to what happened, why it happened, and what lessons could be learned from this conflict (Petro, 2009). The chapter will briefly address three possible reasons for initiating this war at that time and assess how these reasons correspond with the assumptions of offensive realism.

Aims: Joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Allying with the US, and Offering an Oil Route

The Georgian Parliament set up a committee to investigate what happened during the evening of August 7, 2008. Although President Saakashvili admitted in his testimony in November 2008 that Georgia had started the unavoidable hostilities in August (Petro, 2009), one should also consider the past relations between the two states. From a realist view, Russia considers Georgia as more than a zone of its sphere of influence.

Thus, first of all, it is significant to mention that Georgia was a member state (1993) of the CIS, an organization founded in 1991 by Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Moreover, Georgia was a member state in the Council of Defense Ministers of the CIS; however, it withdrew from the Council of Defense Ministers when it joined NATO because, in principle, it cannot be a member of two military organizations at the same time. Thus, in terms of the pledging to join NATO, the allying with the US, and the providing of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline as an alternative oil transit route that omits Russia (Petro, 2009), Russia perceived these plans as offensive actions that were in conflict with its strategic interests in Europe and a threat to its national security. In fact,

Russian's fear of Georgia's accession to NATO and, therefore, the expansion of NATO's influence into Russian's borders and offering the oil pipeline that is a strategic economic power to Russia, give Russia a validated explanation from the realist point of view to be skeptical about all of Georgia's actions that preceded the Georgian War. Notably, the five assumptions of Mearsheimer's offensive realism adequately explain the case of the Georgian War. Similarly, Georgia is a sovereign state; as such, it has the legal right to decide what organizations to join or not join. In addition, it aims to free itself from any Russian influence. Thus, it has continually been uncertain about Russian's intentions and hostile actions towards its internal politics prior to the 2008 Russo-Georgian Conflict. As a result, Georgia has not joined NATO, and the Western- Russian relations have been negatively exacerbated.

Wiclawski's Use of Structural Realism to Explain Russian Foreign Policy

Similar to other approaches of realism, structural realism places emphasis on the significant role of anarchy in international relations. In fact, Waltz (1979) has primarily focused on the anarchic international system and the distribution of power that exists within the frames of the international system rather than within the state's level and its internal political priorities. Indeed, structural realism serves as an effective theory to explain the patterns of behavior of the United States and the Soviet Union in the bipolar order in the era of the Cold War. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union was unpredictable and contradictory to Waltz's prediction on the catastrophic confrontation that the Cold War had to end with between the two blocs. Wiclawski states that William C. Wohlforth points out that the demise of the Soviet Union was the result of the declining relative power of the Soviet Union

(Wieclawski, 2011) with respect to the US and other Western unions, namely the EU.

Overall, during the Cold War, the US was the first super power in the international system while the Soviet Union was the main challenger of the US power. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US asserted itself as an incomparable superpower in the world, while Russia since then has had difficult time positioning itself as a new competitor of the US on a global level. On a regional level, Russia has been struggling to be a hegemonic regional power, and its actions in Georgia (2008), in Syria since 2011, and in Ukraine (2014) are exclusive examples on how Russia has been struggling to position itself again as an indispensable regional power. Because of many significant reasons, the West and Russia have faced obstacles in regard to cooperating effectively and efficiently in order to fight and ultimately defeat ISIS in Syria. Reasons include the Georgian War (2008), the Ukraine war, the annexation of Crimea, and the conflicting views on Syria's future, Wieclawski (2011) explains that reasons such as Russian's economic transformation and its dependency on the global price of oil and gas are real obstacles for Russia to be a regional hegemon. Moreover, a significant impediment to the cooperation between Russia and the West in Syria is that Russia is not willing to accept any new international conditions such as liberalizing its energy market or accepting the EU standards of management regarding its relations with the EU (Wieclawski, 2011).

Neoclassical Realism and Russian's Foreign Policy

Neoclassical realism is a theory of international relations that combines assumptions of both classical realism and neo realism—especially defensive realism.

It holds that the behavior of a state in the international system can be explained by systemic and cognitive variables. Thus, the distribution of power capabilities among states as well as the perception and misperception of systemic pressures, other states' intentions, or threat posed by them, in addition to domestic variables such as states' institutions and elites, all together contribute to the foreign policy adopted by the decision makers of states. Neoclassical realism, then, helps us understand the varying roles that Russia has been playing at different levels, regionally and internationally. For example, at the regional level, it helps us understand Russian's relations with the EU, and at the international level, it is a useful theoretical approach that helps us better understand its behavior towards the US. Neoclassical realism focuses on the state's perception of its adversaries' power, intentions, ability of the states' elites to mobilize social support for their political goals, and the shifting national interests whenever and wherever preferable under certain situations, such as limiting or increasing cooperation with some states in the system (Wieclawski, 2011).

Russian Foreign Policy: Cooperative and Non-Cooperative

Kropatcheva (2012) attempts to interpret Russia's foreign, policy which has been diagnosed by Western scholars and policy makers as volatile, unpredictable, and non-cooperative towards the West through the lens of the neoclassical theoretical framework. Kropatcheva argues that when Russian domestic and foreign policy factors are studied comprehensively, then its foreign policy seems to be more predictable than it has firstly appeared. Kropatcheva also claims that Russian foreign policy is selective; hence, it incorporates both cooperative and non-cooperative tactics (Kropatcheva, 2012). Moreover, Pipes (2004) argues that Russians' mentality and behavior change slowly because Russia is conservative (Pipes, 2004, p.9), while

Russian scholars such as Shevtsova (2006) and Bordachev (2008) describe Russian behavior towards the West in terms of simultaneous confrontation that is combined with partnership (Kropatcheva, 2012).

Russia is a unitary, sovereign, and rational state that conducts its foreign policy in an anarchic international system that triggers actions of self-help because there is no upper authority that guarantees the security of states in times of conflicts and hostilities. Thus, Russia acts on the basis of realist calculations of cost-benefit analysis and according to the balance of power calculations. Moreover, Russia is cautious to preserve its status, prestige, and national image at the domestic, regional, and international levels. Therefore, Russia contends to preserve its prestige and status while dealing with other major powers. Moreover, Kropatcheva (2012) cites Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro (2009) who argue that a state's behavior should be "adaptive" (Lobell, Ripsman, & Taliaferro, 2009, p. 30). Thus, it is unnecessary to describe the overall foreign policy of a certain state as either cooperative or non-cooperative because the conduct of a state towards the external world shifts accordingly. Further, according to Kropatcheva (2012), neoclassical realism explains that states may perceive each other as security threats and cooperative partners simultaneously.

Russian's Realist Official Documents

The first Post-Soviet documents assert that Russia has declared its preparedness to protect its sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity. "The Law on Security" (1992), "The Basic Provisions of Military Doctrine" (1993), Foreign Policy Concept (1993, 2000, 2008), and the Strategy of the National Security of the Russian Federation (RF) until 2020 (2009) are examples of how Russian's primary

realist interests have been continuous throughout the process of reconceptualization of its foreign policy. However, simultaneously, the policy preferences change when the context of a maneuver changes (Kropatcheva, 2012).

Most of these documents emphasize the need to transform the Western-dominated international system by a multilateral one while Russia has its significant role to play as a major power in the system. Moreover, Russia aims to promote the development of its economy, as it has aspired since the 1990s to be integrated into the world economy. Thus, Russia aims to modernize its economy while in the same time it acknowledges that this can only happen with the help of the West (Kropatcheva, 2012).

On one hand, in 1993, Russian's foreign policy aimed for cooperative relations with the US. On the other hand, since 1997, Russian's official documents on foreign policy referred negatively to the US, NATO, and the EU because it deduced that the three have been determined to continue isolating Russia while enlarging NATO (Kropatcheva, 2012) and, therefore, expanding its influence over Russian's borders.

To conclude, neoclassical realism can offer plausible insights into the cooperative and non-cooperative Russian foreign policy. Kropatcheva (2012) states that methodological pluralism is nowadays the popular trend in the studies of international relations in the form of "constructivist realism." She explains that neoclassical realism is an approach to international politics that emphasizes that a foreign policy of a state is motivated primarily by its position in the international system and, thus, by its relative power capability. However, neoclassical realism acknowledges the significance of intervening variables at the state level such as

perception, “historic memories,” culture, and other subjective factors that are crucial when deciding on and implementing a certain foreign policy. States may simultaneously view each other as security threats and as worthy economic partners. Therefore, competition and cooperation co-occur (Kropatcheva, 2012). Thus, neoclassical realism explains Russian’s competition with the West as the strengthening its relative power capabilities while at the same time seeking its help and recognition. For example, Russia’s intervention in Syria since 2011 has created obstacles specifically for the US and other Western countries to defeat the ISIS group and to eventually bring peace to Syria. On the other hand, its decision to remove its major forces from Syria on March 14, 2016 to help open the door for a political resolution for the Syrian Conflict is a strategic step that posits Russia as an indispensable major power vis-à-vis the US in Geneva as a new round of peace talks occurred under the auspices of the United Nations on March 15, 2016, the day after the partial withdrawal of the Russian forces from Syria.

Chapter Five

More Limits to the Western-Russian Cooperation

The United States has been attempting since 2011 to find a solution with the international community for the Syrian crisis; however; Russia has been blocking all the US serious efforts to reach a reasonable political solution that would avoid the country and the Syrians more atrocities and grievousness as a result of the ongoing Syrian Civil War that has been taking place since five years ago. Russia vetoed four times United Nations Security Council (UNSC) draft resolutions on Syria since 2011. The Security Council failed to adopt four resolutions on Syria due to the negative votes of two permanent Security Council members, China and Russia Federation. Thus, this Chapter aims to explain through the realist lens the limitations to the Western- Russian collaboration in Syria.

First, the Chapter will state the four vetoed UNSC draft resolutions by Russia and China against Syria since the start of the Syrian Civil War. Then, the Chapter will display a brief account on the historical relations between Russia (former Soviet Union) and Syria because it is important to start from that point in order to clarify the significant consequences that have led to serious impediments in Western-Russian cooperation in Syria. Next, the Chapter will examine other reasons such as the different stances of the US and Russia at the Geneva Talks over Syria as another additional important obstacle to effective Western-Russian cooperation in Syria. Overall, this Chapter will attempt to provide a convincing analysis on how the

two super powers view the Syrian crisis differently and why their interests in Syria collide and how this collision is impairing coordinated efforts in fighting ISIS.

First Draft Resolution Vetoed by Russia and China

The first draft resolution (S/2011/612) which was drafted by France, Germany, Portugal, and the United Kingdom and initiated by the President, Mr. Ogwu (Nigeria) on 4 October 2011 (United Nations Security Council, 2011, p. 1-2) strongly condemned the ongoing grave and systemic violations of human rights and the use of force against civilians by the Syrian authorities. Therefore, it demanded an immediate cessation of all violent acts and urged all sides to reject acts of violence and extremism. Moreover, it recalled all that were responsible for human rights violations to be held accountable. Furthermore, it called for a comprehensive Syrian-led political process while encouraging all states and regional organizations to participate in this purpose. It also strongly condemned attacks on diplomatic personnel. Furthermore, it called upon all states to be attentive and exercise control over the direct and indirect supply, sale, or transfer to Syria of arms and related materials of all types as well as technical training, financial resources or services, advice or other services or assistance related to such arms and related materials. Lastly, the draft resolution expressed its intention to review Syria's implementation of this resolution within 30 days including measures under article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations (United Nations Security Council, 2011, p.1-3).

Second Draft Resolution Vetoed by Russia and China

Russian Federation and China doubled veto another UN Security Council draft resolution (S/2012/77) which was initiated by the President, Mr. Menan (Togo) on 4 February 2012 (United Nations Security Council, 2012, p. 2). The draft

resolution which was supported by 19 United Nations General Assembly member states among them were the other thirteen Council members expressed their deep concern at the deteriorating situation in Syria and the violations of human rights and violent acts irrespective of where it comes. Moreover, it demanded that the Syrian government immediately implement the steps of the plan set out on 22 January 2012 by the Arab League. The Arab League's plan outlined that the Syrian army immediately stop all kind of violence, protect its population, release all persons who were detained arbitrarily, withdraw all armed forces from cities and towns, and secure the freedom to hold peaceful demonstrations. Most importantly, the text called upon an inclusive Syrian-led political process to be carried out in a free of violence atmosphere

Third Draft Resolution Vetoed by Russia and China

The third veto expressed also by Russia and China was on 19 July 2012 against the draft resolution S/2012/538 which was tailored by Germany, Portugal, and the other three Permanent Five, France, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America (United Nations Security Council, 2012) and initiated by the President, Mr. Osorio (United Nations Security Council, 2012, p.2). This draft resolution (S/2012/538) condemned the increasing use of heavy weapons including “indiscriminate shelling from tanks and helicopters” in populated areas. Moreover, it condemned the escalation of human rights’ violations by both the Syrian authorities and armed groups and therefore, it recalled all those responsible to be held accountable. Again, it condemned the continued detentions of thousands of Syrians by the Syrian authorities. It underscored the need for Syrians to enjoy freedom of demonstrating peacefully and freedom for journalists to move throughout the country as a postulate for a political transition.

Most importantly, the draft resolution this time determined the situation in Syria as a threat to international peace and security, therefore acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations (United Nations Security Council, 2012).

Fourth Draft Resolution Vetoed by Russia and China

The fourth draft resolution was drafted by 65 states, initiated by Mr. Araud (France) and put to vote on 22 May 2014 (United Nations Security Council, 2014, p.3). Again, both Russia and China blocked that draft resolution (S/2014/348) against Syria (United Nations, 2016). The drafters decided to refer the situation in Syria to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (United Nations Security Council, 2014, p.3).

The United Nations Security Council

When the United Nations was founded in 1945 in the aftermath of WWII it aimed to promote international cooperation among its state members and to prevent the emergence of another international conflict similar to WWII. The Security Council indicates the existence of a threat to peace or an act of aggression. Moreover, it calls upon the parties to a certain dispute to settle it by peaceful means. The Security Council can take measurements of enforcement that range from economic sanctions to international military action according to Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter in order to maintain or restore international peace and security (United Nations, n.d.). This said, the Security Council has proved by evidence since its establishment that it is crippled at certain conflicts. This paralyses is explained by realism.

Explaining the Russia's Vetoes through the Realist Lens

The vetoes casted by Russia and China at the UNSC are mere examples of how anarchy excellently describe the order of the international system. One of the main assumptions of realist theory is anarchy. Anarchy does not refer to chaos rather it means according to Mearsheimer “there is no centralized authority, no night watchman or ultimate arbiter that stands above states and protects them” (Kaplan, 2012). It means there is no central authority or world government to provide protection to the states in the system. Then, there is no force to enforce rules. Thus, states feel insecure and this insecurity obliges them to depend on themselves in order to survive in this self-help system. This said, anarchy determines the behavior of the states. Therefore, Russia’s vetoes at the Security Council can be explained through the realist lens. Russia fears the intentions of the US and other Western States because it cannot trust them. The NATO expansion and the Libyan case are just examples among many others to justify Russian’s fear of the West’s real intentions toward Syria (Armstrong, 2015).

Claims That the West Broke Its Promise to Russia

Armstrong (2015) asserts that during the Gorbachev era specifically in 1990, Moscow was promised that NATO would not expand; however, Armstrong (2015) assures that he was told personally by two Ambassadors, one of the USA and the other of NATO, in the period that the promise that NATO would not expand was made. Moreover, Armstrong provides evidence from both SPIEGEL and the magazine of Foreign Affairs that the West broke its promise to Russia (Armstrong, 2015). Thus, the NATO expansion eastward of Europe left Russia insecure and isolated. Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia,

Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom, and the United States are 28 independent countries that, currently, comprise the NATO Alliance (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2016). Examining these members of NATO, 12 out of the 28 present member states of NATO Alliance were “ former Warsaw Pact, Soviet allies or parts of the USSR” (Armstrong, 2015). This said, Russia’s fears concerning the West intentions are justified from Russia’s point of view. Furthermore, events in Post-Soviet era asserted Russia’s fears towards NATO’s intentions. Indeed, the events that had preceded the Georgian War (2008) and the Ukraine Crisis (2014) are mere examples of how Russia was provoked by the actions of the West and later by the embryonic steps of Georgia and Ukraine to join NATO.

The Libyan Case and Russia’s Abstention

The Security Council authorized a no-fly zone over Libya except for aid planes when it adopted resolution 1973 (2011) by a vote of none against, with 5 abstentions- among them Russian Federation and China- and 10 in favor. The representatives of both China and Russian Federation explained that they prioritize peaceful means to resolve the Libyan’s conflict. Russia asserted that many questions had not been answered concerning the conditions of the resolution, especially, “how and by whom the measures would be enforced and what the limits of engagement would be” (United Nations, 2011). Russia accuses NATO that it went too far when it shifted its position from enforcing a no-fly zone to actively supporting a regime change in Libya (Armstrong, 2015). This said, Russia has refused to repeat the same scenario in Syria, another friendly Russia’s authoritarian regime in the region. Russia argues that it cares about preserving the state structure of Syria because the US failed to do this in both Iraq (2003-present) and Libya (2011-present). Churkin (2012) explains that Russia had very clearly and persistently explained to the

Security Council members that it cannot accept a document under Chapter VII of the UN Charter that would pave the way for the pressure of sanctions and eventually for external military intervention in the Syrian internal affairs. Moreover, he warns that the calculations to use the Security Council to promote the Western plans of imposing their strategies on a sovereign state will not prevail (United Nations Security Council, 2012, p. 8). In fact, the Syrian Crisis is a live evidence on how the Security Council is crippled by the permanent members' disagreements and vetoes.

UNSC Irrelevance and the Veto Power

The Security Council is the most powerful organ of the United Nations. It has the sole authority to issue legally binding resolutions. Nine of the 15 Council members who are elected temporary for two-year terms by the General Assembly must vote for a resolution to be passed; however, permanent members have the veto power. Thus, the veto power and the global inequality it represents is at the core of the struggle over the Security Council and its future (The Guardian, 2015). In this context, Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary General, firmly asserts that the Security Council should be reformed to encompass more permanent members such as Germany, India, Germany, and South Africa that have been lobbying for a permanent seat on the council. Annan affirms that the Security Council cannot continue as it has been 70 years ago because the world has changed and consequently, the United Nations should “change and adapt”; otherwise, it would be obsolete. Annan considers the crises of both Syria and Ukraine are mere examples of the paralyses of the Security Council to resolve international issues like those when permanent members practice their veto power against UNSC resolutions. He adds that the Secretary General and his staff can do nothing to situations like in Syria when the member states are “divided and fighting” (Grant, 2015).

Therefore, Russia and the West have been facing difficulties in realizing a plausible political solution to end the Syrian Crisis because they perceive the future of Syria differently. This is due to several reasons among them, Russia does not want Assad to be ousted, while the West puts Assad's departure as a prerequisite for successful negotiations. In fact, the historic ties between Russia (former Soviet Union) and Syria is a significant underlying reason for Russia saving Assad.

Historic Ties between USSR and Assad's Syria

This explained, Russia and China have cast then four vetoes in the Security Council against UN intervention in Syria since the start of the Syrian War in 2011. For the sake of this thesis, this Chapter will attempt only to tackle some of the Russian's reasons behind its support of the Syrian regime. In fact, Russia's four vetoes against the draft UNSC resolutions aimed at Assad's regime in Syria have been for several reasons that are related to Russian's priorities of foreign policy towards Syria. Since the mid 1950's, the Soviet Union and then- after the end of the Cold War- Russia has had a major strategic interest in Baath ruled Syria. Sharnoff (2009) explains that Syrian tensions with the US have begun almost 60 years ago when Syria decided to join the Soviet Axis during the Cold War (Sharnoff, 2009). Then, historic memories are one reason behind the impairment of the US-Russian collaboration in Syria.

By the end of World War II, the US and the USSR emerged as the only two global super powers. Both were competing over global influence. The Middle East was a significant region for both camps because of its oil, a vital strategic natural resource. Since mid-50s, the USSR supported Syria and other Arab nationalist and socialist governments, Iraq, Libya, and Egypt as part of a greater regional strategic

competition that was then played in the Middle East at that time between the Soviet Union and the US. The Soviet Union had kept in supporting Syria by providing it with military aid and high-tech air crafts to solidify their alliance and counter the US influence in the region. Moreover, former President Hafez Al-Assad signed in 1972 a peace and security pact with the Soviets to maintain and strengthen Syria's defense capabilities. Indeed, the Soviet Union had always aided Syria with substantive Soviet arms that cost millions of dollars until 1975 when all that arm aid dropped substantially because the relation between them was fissured because of the Syrian intervention in Lebanon (Sharnoff, 2009). The Soviet Union and later Russia has always denounced interventionist policies in the internal affairs of sovereign states except at the request of their leaders or with the approval of the UNSC. The Soviet-Syrian relations witnessed a radical change during Gorbachev era from 1985 until 1991. This change was manifested in decreasing the amount of arm aid to the point where the Soviet Union demanded that Syria pay in cash for any requested military arms. Briefly, Syria was the greatest recipient of military, political, and economic support from the Soviet Union for almost four decades (Sharnoff, 2009).

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, the relations between Russia and Syria cooled because Boris Yeltsin, the first president of Russian Federation (1991-1999) held cold relations with Syria; however, both countries revived their relations when Vladimir Putin came first to power in Russia (2000-2008) and later from 2012 until present while Bashar al-Assad succeeded his father as the president of Syria (2000-present) after the latter's death in 2000. Upon the emergence of the Syrian Crisis in March 2011, it has been clear that Russia would support Syria because of many reasons not least important is that Syria has

been the only left Arab state that has had close relations with Russia after the collapse of both Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011).

More Reasons for Russia-China Collaboration at the Security Council

In fact, Russia and China are collaborating together to counterweight US hegemony. Both powers believe that a multipolar system is better than a unipolar one (Ferdinand, 2013, p.10). Moreover, Ferdinand (2013) argues that Russia and China share a common outlook on the priorities and goals of foreign policy more than they do with the other three permanent UN Security Council members. Furthermore, both emphasize the possibility for the UN to provide multilateral solutions to the increasing unrest in international affairs. Importantly, both perceive their permanent membership at the Security Council as a symbol of their global reach and they attribute to the UN the exclusive source of legitimacy for authorization of joint military action (Ferdinand, 2013, p.9); however, the invasion of Iraq by the US without the UNSC authorization has asserted to Russia that in a self-help international system which is dominated by anarchy, states are always fearful, uncertain, and suspicious of other states' intentions. Therefore, a state should rely on itself in order to survive.

As explained in the previous Chapters, Syria is significant for both Russia and the US for many reasons including competing interests, security, geopolitics, and economics. Thus, their competing interests in Syria is impeding any political resolution in this ravaged and fractured country. The United Nations and the Arab League have made great efforts to push the Syrian government and the opposition to negotiate in order to agree on a comprehensive political solution that would stop acts

of hostilities and end the mutual violence that claimed more than a quarter millions, displaced millions of Syrians, and threatened the peace and security of neighboring states and even beyond (Kendall, 2015); however, all the United Nations and the Arab League attempts went in vain. This failure is due to the opposite views of the US and Russia toward the future of Syria. Russia always has had refused to discuss Assad's departure as a prerequisite to realize a plausible political solution to Syria. Meanwhile, the West aims to end the authoritarian regime in the country and pave the way for a democratic political process. Russia cannot trust the West and it believes that chaos rather than democracy would be the alternative if Assad were to step down in this crucial time. Furthermore, the two camps, Russia and the West, are different on whom to target by their airstrikes. Therefore, the terms on which groups they are fighting in Syria is another obstacle to collaborate. While the US is aiding those that the US identifies as democratic opposition and targeting ISIS, Russia is targeting the opposition group to back Assad's regime as well as ISIS group. The US believes that Assad is the primary cause of violence in Syria and that Russia prioritizes the political fate of Assad more than the hundreds of thousands of human lives, let alone peace and prosperity of neighboring countries. On the other hand, Putin has justified blocking any type of international action besides negotiations as defending the norms of non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states unless at the request of their leaders or with the approval of the Security Council (International peace and Security, 2015)

In conclusion, Assad regime is an authoritarian regime that contradicts all the values of democratic Western States. Therefore, this regime poses a fundamental obstacle to a real political process in Syria to end its ongoing crisis. Sharnoff (2009) argues that dating back to 1955, Syria has continuously proved that it is not a friend

to the US. Throughout the Cold War, it was a close ally of the Soviet Union. During the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years, it had a significant role in the Soviet strategy to undermine US interests in the Middle East. Moreover, since Gorbachev years until the demise of the Soviet Union, it failed to seize the unique opportunity to strengthen ties with Washington. During the prime days of Washington- brokered peace deals of the 1990s, it failed again to restore its relations with the US. Currently, the Syrian government's dangerous policies continue to demonstrate that it is a hostile regime to the West (Sharnoff, 2009). This said, there is still a big issue, while the West and Russia have controversial views over the future of Syria, ISIS is continuing to seize control over more territories in both Iraq and Syria.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

This thesis contends that realism as a broad school of thought and its variants have plausible answers to explain the rise of ISIS, a non-state actor, and its acts of terror in contrary to what most scholars argue that realism does not offer reasonable explanation to the rise of such groups. The thesis also probes the assumptions and insights that different branches of realism are built on to offer reasonable explanation to the international community's reaction, mainly the US-led coalition and Russia against the rise of ISIS. The underlying reasons of the US-led Coalition and Russia's intervention in the Syrian Conflict are thoroughly studied. The thesis reveals that the US and Russia have different foreign policies and therefore opposing national interests that are impeding reaching a political solution to the Syrian Conflict. Overall, the thesis concludes that realism maintains itself as a predominant tradition in the study of international relations.

Although realism does not specifically explain the rise of non-state actors, this thesis argues that fundamental assumptions of realist theory do provide an explanation for such rise. Mearsheimer (2002) explains on an episode of "Conversation with History" on UCTV that terrorism cannot be overlooked when it has presented itself in the context of the international system. In consequence, transnational actors inflict atrocities of terrorism and acts of extreme violence to achieve their political goals. Thus, terrorism has arisen in the realm of states. The international system which is characterized by anarchy has a main role in such a rise and the power vacuum created in both Iraq (2003) and Syria (2011) paved the way

for ISIS to take the advantage of both opportunities to fill these power vacuums. The thesis argues that ISIS is acting like a “state”. Therefore, for the aim of this thesis, ISIS is considered as a unitary and rational actor that strives to gain and sustain economic and military power in this anarchic system because its ultimate aim is to survive. Thus, to achieve its ultimate aim, ISIS has been attempting to create its “state” by utilizing coercive force and violent acts against all who oppose its political goals. Through intimidation among other strategies of terrorism mainly against the weak Iraqi and Syrian governments and their civilians, ISIS has managed to conquer and control large swaths of land in both Iraq and Syria.

The year 2014 was a turning point in the world’s history. In 2014, the world witnessed most of ISIS’s substantial territorial gains. Thronkide (2014) reports to *Forbes Israel* (2014) that in order to establish its Islamic State in Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine, ISIS generates its funding resources from oil trade, kidnapping, bank, robberies, looting, and collection of protection and taxes. Statistics reported by Itai Zehorai of *Forbes Israel* reveals that ISIS is the wealthiest “terrorist” organization with an annual turnover of \$2 billion (Forbes Israel, 2014). Key cities and largest oil fields in both Iraq and Syria were conquered and controlled by ISIS. Illustrating, Mosul, second largest Iraqi city was captured and the Omar field, largest oil field in Syria was seized. Major events in 2014 also include Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi’s proclamation of himself being the Caliph of the so called Islamic State and the declaration of Raqqa, one of the fourteen Syrian Governorates to be the de facto capital of the Islamic State (Karouny, 2014).

As a rational response to the violent, illegal, and terrorist acts of ISIS, the international community agreed on fighting ISIS. The broad US-led coalition and Russia have been launching airstrikes against ISIS’s targets although the two camps,

the US-led coalition and Russia have different national interests and foreign policies towards Europe and the Middle East-in particular towards both Ukraine in Europe, and Syria in the Middle East. On 10 September 2014, President Obama delivered a speech to his nation indicating his intention to “degrade and ultimately destroy” ISIS. The President took his decision to expand the US airstrikes against ISIS targets beyond Iraq. ISIS’s targets in Syria were attacked for the first time by the US airstrikes on 22 September 2014. Focusing on the ISIS stronghold of Raqqa, the US and some of its Arab partners such as Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates launched their direct airstrike’s campaign on other ISIS locations too (Sciutto, Castillo, Yan, & CNN, 2014). Russia started its airstrike campaign in Syria on 30 September 2015 upon the official request from the Syrian government to support it militarily against ISIS and other anti- Syrian government groups (Payne, Starr, Cullinane& CNN, 2015).

Prior to the US and Russian intervention in the Syrian Conflict via airstrikes, the US used to back up the moderate Syrian opposition by humanitarian aid and military gear. Moreover, the US has funded the train and equip programme to teach and train rebels on many military and navigation skills. The US has been reluctant to deploy its troops on the Syrian soil for many reasons. Most importantly, the US aims at training the Arab and Kurds locals to fight their own war lest they turn to be dependent on the US troops to fight a war which it is not the US war on foreign grounds. On the contrary, since the start of the Syrian Civil War Russia has been supporting the Syrian government with military aid, and politically through its vetoes at the UNSC to block Western draft resolutions against the Syrian government. The thesis explains that Russian strong bonds with the Syrian governments goes back to the era of the Soviet Union. Although the relations

between the two countries passed through fluctuations during Gorbachev and Yeltsin's eras, it has retrieved its strength since Putin's rule. Therefore, because of the US and Russian different views over the Syrian future, a political solution to resolve the Syrian Crisis has been blocked at the UNSC and at the Geneva Peace Talks over Syria. The US sees the future of Syria without Assad, while Russia opposes ousting Assad.

The contradictory views of the US and Russia on Syria's future are due to the different national interests and foreign policies of both countries towards Syria. The Syrian regime is authoritarian and its broader security strategies are aligned with the security strategies of Iran. Both strategies of Syrian Baathist regime and theocratic Iran are opposed to that of the US and Israel. Importantly, The US advocates democracy while Russia has been under test to be transformed into a democracy. The US motives for intervening in Syria are of two-folds. First aim is defeating ISIS and its second goal is to prevent the Iranians from filling any power vacuum that results from the ongoing Syrian Civil War.

Similarly, Russia considers ISIS as a significant threat. Currently, ISIS is a basic inspiration for individual Muslim radicals. There have been thousands of Muslim jihadists who have joined ISIS in its fight in Syria and elsewhere. Russia reveals that thousands of ISIS jihadists are Russian citizens from Dagestan, a province in north Caucasus. Thus, Russia fears that when radicals return home, they might inflict great harm inside Russia. Evidence proves that this fear has solid grounds. Russia believes that it is illegal to intervene in the internal affairs of sovereign states unless this intervention is called upon an official request of that government or with the authorization of the UNSC. In the Mediterranean, Russia has its only naval base based in Tartus, Syria. Thus, Russia aims at preserving its

strategic interests in the Middle East while it is attempting to save Assad regime from being overthrown because Syria is the only left Arab ally state for Russia in the aftermath of the events in Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011). Moreover, Russia has been displaying its high-tech weaponry since its intervention in the Syrian Civil War. Prospect clients of Russian advanced weaponry such as the two huge economic powers, China and India, have been observing closely the influence of the Russian military intervention in the Syrian Civil war.

The thesis explains that neoconservative realism, asymmetric war, and the balance of power theory are milestones to explain the war on terror, the war against non-state actors, and the partial teaming up between the US and Russia in fighting ISIS and their rivalry whether over Ukraine or Syria respectively. As the new sources of threat are technology and radicalism, Nuruzzama (2006) explains that realism and its variants fall short in explaining the shifts in US foreign policy in post 9/11 and consequently, the new threats of terrorism. Neo-conservative realism as a new approach addressed by Nuruzzaman (2006) adds ideology to the fundamental assumptions of realism. Overall, Nuruzzaman (2006) explains that this new approach explains any kind of threat whether it is posed by states or non-state actors.

The 9/11 attacks, the post 2003 Iraq, and currently the Syrian entanglement are among the best examples illustrating asymmetric warfare. The US army and the insurgents of Al Qaeda or ISIS are two opposing forces that differ greatly in their military power, strategies and tactics. While the US official and professional army uses conventional weapons and observe the criteria of “Just War” theory, belligerents and insurgents of terrorist organizations use unconventional weapons and strategies of intimidation to subjugate the enemy.

The balance of power theory is at the core in explaining both the partial collaboration between the US and Russia and also their rivalry. Miller (2004) explains that a regional balance of power is not autonomous because it depends on the number of the major powers in the international system and on the type of regional involvement whether it is competitive, hegemon, or collaborative. Miller (2004) states four propositions.

First, regional balances of power depends on the way how major powers engage in regional systems. Therefore, if great powers disengage from a particular region, it is an autonomous regional system that is able then to arise. (Miller, 2004, p. 240). The US and Russia are attempting to preserve the regional balance in the Middle East lest Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia , or Turkey arise eventually as the sole regional power in the Middle East. Thus, the US and Russia have been exercising significant influence to save the regional balance of the Middle East. Both have superior capabilities to affect the local power balance via supplying arms, economic aid, investment, and technology transfer and training to their local allies.

Second, major powers in the system compete to balance each other in order to avoid the emergence of a global hegemon (Miller, 2004, p. 241). Thus, this second proposition has its grounds on the general events that have been taking place between the US and its Western allies on one hand and Russia on the other hand on both political and military competitions between the two powers over Ukraine and Syria.

Third, status quo states bandwagon with the hegemon and balance against revisionist states (Miller, 2004, p. 242). In fact, this is exactly what has been happening since the start of the Syrian Civil War. The US Arab partners have

jumped into the wagon of the US to fight revisionist Syria. Although currently the US is not in a military war against Iran as it was formerly against revisionist Iraq, the prospects of war between them has been always open since 1979.

Lastly, in a high conflict region, super powers attempt to balance local rivals, particularly revisionist states that pose a real threat to other neighbor states (Miller, 2004, p. 243). In the Middle East, the US and Russia are attempting to balance local rivals such as Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, because revisionist states such as Syria and Iran , are indeed, posing a great threat to both the security and integrity of neighboring states in the region.

Not only does the thesis attempts to explain the rise of ISIS using the realist lens but also it offers plausible answers to explain the rivalry between the two major powers, the US and Russia, that have been intervening militarily in the Syrian Conflict. Although offensive and defensive realism are two branches of structural realism that offer plausible justifications to the US versus the Russian's behavior on Syria, the thesis explains that neoclassical realism as presented by Kropatcheva (2011) has reasonable justifications to the cooperative and non-cooperative Russian foreign policy towards the West. Taking neoclassical realism as our guide to explain the US-Russian relations especially over the Syrian Conflict, neo-classical realism seems to be the most effective theory for explaining the limits to the Western-Russian collaboration in fighting ISIS in Syria; however, concurrently, there is a real opportunity for simultaneous cooperation between both of them to at least mitigate the Syrian Conflict, especially after the partial withdrawal of Russian troops from Syria on 14 March 2016.

Carter (2016) explains that the fiscal year 2017 budget aims to build, train, and equip the US Air Force in order to be more efficient and effective when responding to current and future threats. Carter clarifies that the US power is declining; however, it still remains an incomparable world power. He adds that the US has entered a new strategic era that is different from the past two decades and a half ago. Therefore, the US should create new strategies of investment and operations because it has been facing five advanced strategic threats. Mainly, these threats are: Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, and terrorism (Carter, 2016). As a result of the US declaration of its quadruple augmentation of its fiscal year 2017 President's Budget, the Russians perceive this President's budget as a source of increased US power. This 2017 President Budget would intensify the security dilemma between the US and Russia because any augmentation in a fiscal budget means more military spending and hence, a more military buildup is a real tangible power. The US perceives Russia as a threat to its national interests abroad- whether in Europe or in the Middle East- and the opposite is true. The Georgian Crisis (2008), the Syrian Crisis (2011), the Ukrainian Crisis (2014), and the expansion of NATO are among other important strategic unresolved issues between the US and its Western allies on one hand and Russia on the other hand that impede the political resolution on Syria.

Although they are not in NATO, Georgia and Ukraine have always influenced the bloc since they aimed to be members of NATO; however, aiming at being NATO members irritated Russia to the extent that the latter created war with both of them. The war against Georgia was in 2008 and the war against Ukraine was in 2014 where it resulted in Russia annexing Crimea. Therefore, Georgia and Ukraine are influential in determining the Russian relation with the West. The US

assured both countries during the NATO Summit of 2008 that eventually they could join NATO. As a result, Russia created war with Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014). Although NATO did not intervene in both wars, both Russia and NATO have been increasing their measures of defense along the Eastern European borders.

Mearsheimer (2014) argues that the Ukraine Crisis is the fault of the West because the roots of the problem are the projects of the EU and the NATO enlargement processes eastward of Europe. Thus, to move Ukraine out of the Russian orbit and integrate it into the West was the origin of the problem with the West. In addition to, the “final straw” that President Putin did not tolerate was the illegal overthrow of Yanukovich, the pro-Russian President who was democratically elected. Consequently, President Putin annexed Crimea out of his fear that NATO could install a naval base on the peninsula. Mearsheimer suggests that the best solution to restore peace eastward of Europe and mitigate the tensions between Russia and the West is to save Ukraine as a neutral buffer zone so that Russia would not feel threatened by the West (Mearsheimer, 2014, pp. 1-12). On the other hand, Mearsheimer’s argument has been criticized by many scholars who counter argue that the West also fears that Russia would attempt to invade all Ukraine and beyond. Exacerbating the profound problem between the West and Russia, currently, NATO intends to deploy battalions to Poland and the Baltic States. Moreover, it is expected that NATO will redouble other “initiatives” such as patrols in the Baltic and Black seas (Stratfor, 2016).

As long as Russia is unsure of the Western actions especially in countries neighboring Russia such as Ukraine and Georgia, it will be very difficult to reach a political solution with the West on Syria because the ongoing conflict in Syria is an entanglement where major countries are backing different parties that are involved

in the Syrian Conflict. In conclusion, it can be argued that if Russia and the West narrow their differences over Syria and agree on a political plan for peaceful transition in Syria, then this would help build confidence between the West and Russia to even solve deeper problems in Europe such as the fight in Ukraine and the NATO eastward enlargement project.

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