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**Russian strategic culture after the Cold War:  
understanding Russia's changing Foreign Policy towards  
Syria from a strategic subculture perspective, 1986-2016**

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## **Abstract**

By developing a rigorous analytical framework, built on strategic subculture assumptions, this thesis contributes to the operationalization of strategic culture as an analytic perspective that can explain strategic behaviour. The thesis offers a taxonomy of Russian strategic culture after the Cold War, thus explaining Russia's foreign policy priorities as a matter of strategic preferences of particular strategic subcultures. With Russian foreign policy towards Syria (1986-2016) as the case study, the thesis demonstrates how the ebb and flow of Russian strategic subcultures informed changes in Russian foreign policy outlook and priorities. This thesis argues that changes in Russia's foreign policy towards Syria occurred as a consequence of shifts in Russian strategic culture, correlating at any given time in post-Cold War history to the predominance of one distinct strategic subculture over the rival ones. This thesis divided Russia's strategic subcultures into two opposing clusters, consisting of three subcultures in each cluster. It found that for most of the Putin period, one particular strategic subculture, namely Russia's Neo-Conservative Strategic Subculture, was the dominant strategic subculture and informed Russian foreign policy priorities in accordance with long-standing ideas and beliefs about national identity and geographical imageries, thus

leading to the militarization of Russian Syria policy during Vladimir Putin's third presidential term.

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## List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

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ABM	Anti-Ballistic Missile
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
CHSS	Counterhegemonic Strategic Subculture
FPC	Foreign Policy Concept
FSA	Free Syrian Army
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMSS	Institutional Modernist Strategic Subculture
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
LISS	Liberal Integrationist Strategic Subculture
LSRSS	Late-Socialist Reformist Strategic Subculture
MD	Military Doctrine
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCSS	Neo-Conservative Strategic Subculture
NSC	National Security Concept
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
OPCW	Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RF	Russian Federation
RMD	Russian Maritime Doctrine
SMD	Soviet Military Doctrine
SNS	Strategy of National Security
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WTO	World Trade Organization





# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Research Setting

More than seven decades after its military campaign in Iran (Stewart 1988), Russia went to war in a Middle Eastern country again in 2015. Russia's military involvement in Syria, outside of the perimeter of its historical empire, was the first such move by Moscow after the collapse of the Soviet Union and it caught observers by surprise. Since early 2012, Moscow has blocked Western and Sunni attempts to overthrow the Bashar al-Assad regime and has stood determined on its uncompromising stance on the resolution of the Syrian crisis.

Russia's Syria commitment has attracted both pundits and policymakers to believe that Syria carries some strategic importance for Moscow, which would explain why Russia earlier, in a nearly similar situation in Libya, had neglected to demonstrate such a determination against regime change while standing firm in relation to Syria (Valenta and Valenta 2016).

In regards to Syria, Moscow not only opposed external intervention but involved Russian Armed Forces in an effort to support the Assad regime in its struggle against the Islamic State (ISIS), the Free Syrian Army (FSA), other insurgent groups and more importantly, against the intervention of the regional or Western powers, particularly the United States.

Whether or not Moscow's recent commitments signify Syria's importance to Russia, Damascus has not always held such prominence in Russia's foreign policy. Especially, in the immediate post-Cold War era, initiated by Gorbachev's rise to power, Syria has signified a general disinterest to Moscow and Syria's principal objectives e.g. strategic parity with Israel and its interests in the Arab-Israeli peace process were not backed by Kremlin (El-Doufani 1994).

However, starting in the late 1990s and accelerating in the mid-2000s, Syria ascended to prominence in Russia's foreign policy. In the post-Iraqi invasion period, Moscow supported Damascus against American accusations of hiding Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and condemned Israeli air strikes against alleged terrorist bases in Syria in 2003 (Kreutz 2007; Nizameddin 2013). Moreover, Moscow stood against the possible repeat of the Iraqi scenario in Syria (Kreutz 2010).

The upmost Russian support for Syria thus came in the post-Arab spring period and seemingly decided the political fate of the Bashar al-Assad regime.

While insignificant in the immediate post-Cold War period, why has Syria ascended to prominence in Russia's MENA policy in the new millennium?

And what were the manifestations and causes of Russia's inconsistent foreign policy towards Syria? The aim of this study is to investigate and explore the driving forces and rationale behind the Russia's foreign policy behaviour towards Syria.

## **1.2 Research Question and Hypothesis**

In seeking to understand Russia's foreign policy towards Syria in the post-Cold War period, this thesis aims to use a novel theoretic framework, drawing on the strategic culture tradition. The research question is thus: How does the Strategic Culture approach to foreign policy analysis help us in understanding Russia's changing foreign policy towards Syria in the period after 1986?

This thesis seeks to argue that changes in Russian foreign policy towards Syria occurred as a function of the shift in Russian strategic culture, specifically, when one (dominant) subculture within Russian strategic culture was eclipsed by a hitherto subordinate one. The new ascendant subculture presented a different understanding of Russia's international social/cultural context, a distinct self and geographical imagery, a distinct interpretation of material variables, and unique cultural understandings of the appropriate ways of

defining and resolving the various strategic challenges and opportunities that Russia faced.

### **1.3 Sources and Method**

A wide range of materials have been used as source material for this study. In order to identify distinct, competing strategic subcultures during the Arab Spring this work engaged initially with a primary data e.g. official documents, political statements, formal and semi-formal speeches, videos by Russian officials, political cartoons, newspaper articles reflecting official positions, official and semi-official reports by Russian think tanks. Many of these sources have been available in the Russian language only.

By means of a discourse analysis, the key concepts and articulations for each competing strategic subculture were identified. Often material was translated from Russian to English in order to support the writing of the research. Original terms were retained in the text, where appropriate, to illustrate the cultural construction of security notions.

An identical approach was employed in the identification of competing strategic subcultures before the Arab Spring, starting as early as the mid-1980s, in order to demonstrate the background of the non-monolithic structure of

Russian strategic culture and its implications on Russian foreign policy behaviour. For this task, the study in addition to primary sources has engaged with the secondary data e.g. books, monographs, newspaper articles and the academic journal articles. I will below offer a general overview of the secondary literature, dividing it into periods and arguments.

## **1.4 Literature Review of Key Sources on Russia's Middle East policy**

The literature on Russian Middle East policy can be divided into following five periods: the Cold War, early post-Cold War, the late 1990s, post-Iraqi invasion, the Arab Spring and the post-Uprisings periods.

### **1.4.1 Moscow's Middle East Policy during the Cold War period**

In the Cold War period studies that analyse Soviet foreign policy in the Middle East from political, economic and military perspectives were conducted by Walter Laqueur (1959), Aaron Klieman (1970), Harry Howard (1974), Oles Smolansky (1974) as well as by Galia Golan (1977; 1990; 1999), Karen Dawisha (1980), Adeed Dawisha (1982), Robert Freedman (1982; 1991), Pedro Ramet (1990) and Efraim Karsh (1991).

Most of these works were based on the balance of power approach, which became dominant in IR theory during the Cold War in relation to analysis of bilateral relations and interstate conflicts. The Soviet policy in the region, therefore, were mainly seen as means for the promotion of Soviet power in the Middle East as a counterweight to American dominance in the region.

#### **1.4.2 Russia's Middle East Policy in the early post-Cold War period**

In most analyses appearing in the early post-Cold War period, the Russian foreign policy interest in the Middle East was shown as dramatically decreased. The discussions of Russian foreign policy, such as the study by Aron and Jensen (1995) and Mandelbaum (1998) entirely neglected to discuss Moscow's Middle East policy and instead dedicated their discussions to Russia's policy towards the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Europe and the United States. A study by Nicolai Petro and Alvin Rubenstein (1997) too dedicated very little space to Russia's Middle East policy, pointing out as Aron and Jensen (1995) and Mandelbaum (1998) did, that while this region remains on Russia's foreign policy agenda, it is not particularly significant for Moscow. Similarly, in the Chapter of the book edited by Peter Shearman (1995), Amin

Saikal discussed Moscow's Middle East policy in the context of Moscow's focus on CIS security policy and its non-confrontational policy towards the West.

### **1.4.3 Russia's Middle East Policy in the late 1990s**

The literature appearing in the late 1990s, in contrast to the early post-Cold War period, have been more attentive to Russia's Middle East policy. Works in this period were mainly dedicated to discuss the re-engagement of Russia with the Middle East. Robert Freedman writing on Soviet Middle East policy during the Cold War, viewed Soviet policy in the Middle East as an offensive one, to dominate the region in order to deny oil, strategic communication routes and other assets to the United States and its allies (Freedman 1982; 1991). However, Freedman viewed Russia's policy in the Middle East in the early 1990s as a defensive one, focusing mainly on Iran and Turkey, as these countries in Freedman's account had been seen by Kremlin as threats, spreading Islamic radicalism or pan-Turkic, neo-Ottoman ideas within in the former Soviet states in Central Asia and Caucasus (1996; 1998). In Russia's Middle East policy since the mid-1990s, according to Freedman's account, there was a tendency to play a more active role in the region, through closer ties with Iraq and Iran (both then subject to the dual containment policy of the Clinton administration) and



through co-sponsoring the Arab-Israeli peace process (1996). According to Freedman, while Moscow had some economic interests with its activity in the region, the main rationale was to demonstrate to the domestic opposition audience that Yeltsin could act independently from the West (Freedman 1998).

Similarly, Roland Dannreuther (1998) commented on the prioritization of the Middle East in Russia's foreign policy making in the mid-1990s. While Dannreuther gave credit in Russia's foreign policy shift to Yevgeny Primakov's appointment as the foreign minister in 1996, who had a 'desire to a more activist Russian foreign policy', he brought to the fore other factors such as the 'escalation of the Russian opposition to NATO expansion' that led to the promotion of a more 'Asia-centric and Middle Eastern policy' in Russia (1998: 349). Like Freedman, Dannreuther viewed Russia's Middle East policy in the context of the Moscow's close relations with Iraq and Iran and its active involvement in the Arab-Israeli peace process.

According to Dannreuther, Russia's relations with Iran and Iraq had an economic dimension. However, the economic factor was a 'supplement' to Russia's 'political and geostrategic' interests with those two Middle Eastern states (1998). There was an increasing concern in Russia that the external

powers e.g. the US and Turkey, were in the process of strengthening their influence in Central Asia and Caucasus, therefore, developing close relations with Iran and Iraq was a 'deliberate attempt by Russia to find regional allies and partners which can mitigate the perceived sense of exclusion from the Caucasus and Central Asia' (Dannreuther 1998: 352). In the Arab-Israeli peace process, as Dannreuther argued, Russia sought to play the role of the 'neutral mediator', in order to not alienate the US and Israel, and projected a 'balanced' posture that would accommodate both Israel and Arab concerns (1998).

Stephen Blank (1996) formulated Russia's Middle East policy in the late 1990s as a return to *realpolitik*. In Blank's account, in order to secure its geopolitical and economic interests, Russia's policy was to create an anti-American bloc by strengthening its ties with less pro-Western regional states to counter US hegemony in the Middle East (1996). Like Dannreuther, Blank associated Russia's re-engagement with the Middle East with the elevation of Yevgeny Primakov to the position of foreign minister. In Blank's account, Russia sought an equal voice with the United States in the Middle East peace process and was not necessarily reluctant to demonstrate its 'colder policy towards Israel' and display its 'solicitude' posture towards former Soviet allies, e.g. Libya, Iraq and Syria (1996: 518).

Talal Nizameddin (1999) also observed the re-engagement of Russia with the Middle East in the late 1990s. According to Nizameddin, a combination of factors, such as the Western failure to offer financial aid to Russia, an increasing demand for a global respect in Russia, and the emergence of new thinking for a more active foreign policy (mainly associated with Yevgeny Primakov), combined to lead to a revision of Russia's foreign policy course (1999; 2008).

Nizameddin (1999; 2008) observed that Primakov had a challenging view of US global dominance, which suggested the possibility of strengthening Russia's international position vis-à-vis the United States by forming strategic alliances with other regional powers. The Middle East, Nizameddin noted, offered a major opportunity for this new strategy to take shape (1999; 2008).

All the works in the late 1990s emphasise the revival of Russian interest in and re-engagement with the Middle East and similarly, all associate this interest with Primakov's appointment as a foreign minister in 1996. While, Freedman (1996: 1998), Blank (1996) and Dannreuther (1998) noted that Russia's re-engagement also carries an economic dimension as well as geo-strategic concerns in the context of threat perception, Nizameddin (1999; 2008) was more emphatic on the distinct Primakovist thinking as the main driving force in the

new re-engagement policy. Freedman (1996; 1998) also mentioned the political instability within Russia as one of the sources of the renewed interest in the Middle East. In Freedman's view, by re-engaging with the region, Yeltsin sought to demonstrate to domestic opposition that he was not necessarily pursuing a foreign policy dictated by the West.

#### **1.4.4 Russia's Middle East Policy in the post-Iraqi invasion period**

The works in the post-2003 period were mostly dedicated to discussion of the reassertion of Russia's Middle East policy under Vladimir Putin. Similar to his earlier view, Stephen Blank (2006) explained Russia's activity in the region in the terms of *realpolitik*. In Blank's account after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, and American efforts to establish its hegemony throughout the Middle East, Russia's activity increased in order to undermine US unilateralism and American ambition for the global dominance (2006). As Blank noted, this strategy was based on Russia's pursuing an independent, 'even somewhat anti-American', line in the region (2006). Russia's attempt to exploit existing tensions between the regional states and the US (e.g. in the form of political support to Iran and Hamas, arms sales to Iran and Syria, despite the fact that it

would be used against Israel via Hezbollah) reflected the desire to counter American dominance in the region (Blank 2006).

Similarly, Ariel Cohen (2007) observed Russia's activity in the region as mirroring the Soviet approach of opposing the Western presence in the Middle East. According to Cohen, by rejecting the American narrative of democracy and human rights in the context of the Iraqi invasion, Russia also demonstrated its embrace of the Middle Eastern regime types e.g. monarchy and authoritarianism, which also signalled its ongoing move away from the Western norms of internal political behaviour (2007). This rhetoric, as Cohen noted, found reception with the regional actors, who to some extent felt vulnerable after the way the West dealt with the Saddam's regime (2007). While Cohen viewed Russia's attempt to contain the West by playing to anti-Western sentiment in the region as the main technique for its assertion in Middle East, he also mentions some supplementary factors such as economic interests and vulnerabilities to Islamic extremism as adding impetus to the assertion of Russia's regional policy (2007).

Andrej Kreutz's (2007) work is another study of Russia's Middle East policy, which appeared in the period after the invasion of Iraq. In his work while the

main focus of analysis was Russia's Middle East policy, Kreutz discussed this in the context of the Moscow's Soviet period engagement with the region. Among the primary factors Kreutz demonstrated the geographical proximity of the Middle East to the Russian Southern borders. Within this context, like in the studies in the 1990s, Kreutz highlighted the importance of Russia's relations with Turkey, Iran and Iraq. Other factors that consisted Russia's foreign policy as Kreutz stated, were the economic interests and the Moscow's concern of Russia's growing Muslim population, particularly in the context of the threat of Islamic extremism (2007). Since the Kreutz work is not an in-depth analysis of Russia's foreign policy, it overlooked the important changes that occurred in Russia's regional approach, which did not fit into his historical overview.

Talal Nizameddin (2008) as in his earlier work (1999), viewed the activity of the Russia's Middle East policy under Putin as the continuation of the Primakovist thinking that was about challenging US dominance in the world by forming the strategic alliances with other regional powers (2008). In this context, Nizameddin exemplifies Russia's political and military support to Iran and Syria during and after the 2006 Lebanese war, and the Russian rejection, despite Western pressures, to recognize Hamas and Hezbollah as terrorist organizations (2008).

A different view was presented by Mark Katz (2010). According to Katz, the situation in the Middle East has a significant impact on Russia, but Russia has little ability to affect the situation in the Middle East. Regional impact on Russia, as Katz argued, related mainly to economic and security considerations. In such unbalanced situation, as Katz noted, Russia had no choice but 'pursue a basically defensive foreign policy that seeks to maintain good relations with everyone in the region willing to have good relations with it' (2010: 25). In this context, Katz discusses Russia's attempt to keep close relation with Israel as well as Israel's adversaries e.g. Iran, Syria, Hamas and Hezbollah and other pro-Western Arab states (2010). As such, Russia's close relations with America's regional allies, as Katz added, should not be viewed as an attempt to lure them away from the US (2010).

But, according to Robert Freedman (2010), weakening the American influence in the region was one of the main objectives of Russia's foreign policy in the post-Iraqi invasion. While, Freedman highlighted the region's significance for Russia in the context of its vulnerabilities to Islamic extremism, he also emphasised an economic dimension and great power status aspiration as playing essential roles in the assertion of Russia's Middle East policy (2010). While Russia's economic interests mitigate for good relations with all actors in

the region, including pro-Western, its great power ambitions suggest to side with anti-American Middle Eastern actors, which in Freedman's account, left Moscow in an increased dilemma (2010).

Roland Dannreuther (2012) proffered that the assertion of Russia's Middle East policy should not be viewed through a 'revived Cold War paradigm', calling such an approach to be both 'problematic and misguided'. In Dannreuther's view such an understanding ignored the discontinuity of some Soviet-period considerations in post-Soviet Russia's Middle East policy (2012). As Dannreuther noted, unlike the Soviet Union, Russia's Middle East policy is driven by strict economic interests and the domestic context, in which Moscow's engagement with the Middle East and broader Muslim World was determined by the need to overcome threats of secessionism, instability in the North Caucasus and radicalising influences on the Muslim population within Russia (2012). Along with Russia's concern about its own Muslim population and its economic interests, great power aspiration, as Dannreuther noted, acted as the third driving factor in Russia's Middle East policy (2012). However, as Dannreuther noted, due to the absence of a 'clearly articulated overarching official anti-Western ideology of the type which suffused and legitimated Soviet policy making', Russian officials can act more flexibly and redirect the balance



of cooperation and competition according to changing circumstances and conditions (2012: 544).

All the studies from the post-Iraqi invasion period observed an assertion of Russia's Middle East policy under Vladimir Putin, which is also noticeable from the quantitative proliferation of academic works in the subject. While Blank (2006), Cohen (2007), Nizameddin (2008) and Freedman (2010) viewed Russia's Middle East policy as an attempt to weaken the American influence in the region, Dannreuther viewed Russia's policy as not necessarily anti-Western, rather as driven by its strict economic and security interests. In Katz's (2010) view, moreover, Russia's policy was based on a status quo tendency.

#### **1.4.5 Russia's Middle East Policy in the Arab Spring and post-Uprisings period**

The academic works appearing in the post Arab-Spring period are mostly dedicated to discuss Russia's stance towards the uprisings and Moscow's determination to keep the Syrian regime in power. Olena Bagno-Moldavsky (2013) viewed the Middle East as carrying a secondary importance to Russia. According Bagno-Moldavsky, since the early 1990s until Putin's third presidential term, Russia's major foreign policy priorities towards the Middle

East have not changed, and are unlikely to change in the future (2013). In Bagno-Moldavsky's account, the major regional foreign policy priorities of Russia are multipolarity and economic opportunism (2013). In order to achieve multipolarity, as Bagno-Moldavsky argued, Russia has to promote cooperation with the East, for 'Russia is no longer prepared to put up with a role of a junior partner, particularly in that some Eastern partners such as China and Iran treat it as an equal, and some states, such as Syria, position it in a senior role' (2013: 124). In the context of seeking multipolarity, Bagno-Moldavsky highlighted Russia's support for Syria. Damascus is attractive for Russia with its 'commercial, military-industrial and diplomatic ties, though Syria under Bashar al-Assad has never been a vital strategic asset for Russia' (2013: 127). A naval base in Syrian Tartus, according to Bagno-Moldavsky, served to restore a "tarnished image" of the Russian navy (2013).

In the context of the Russia's support to the Syrian regime, Borshchevskaya (2013), too, emphasized the importance of the region to counterweight US global dominance, and as a platform to exercise Russia's great power credentials. Roy Allison (2013) in the context of the Russian support of the Assad regime, in contrast to the Borshchevskaya's assertion, argued that neither solidarity nor historical ties to the regime nor the material benefits from

the close relations with the Middle Eastern states fully explain the real motives of Russia's foreign policy in the region after the Arab Spring. In Allison's account it is the Russian understanding of a particular threat, which has been posed by Western-initiated regime changes in the region that acts as the real drive behind the Moscow's support of the authoritarian Syrian regime (2013). According to Allison, Russia's opposition to Western military interference in the Syrian crisis and Moscow's reference to 'traditional legal principles and rules of conduct' in resolution of such crisis, are all to a 'significant degree reflect instrumental concerns about political legitimacy and state cohesion within Russia and its near neighbourhood' (2013: 796). By supporting an authoritarian Syrian regime, Russia is, in a sense, opposing the principle of regime change internationally, which poses a direct threat to Russia itself and some of its post-Soviet allies (Allison 2013). Moreover, as Allison (2013) noted, by standing firm in its support for the Assad regime, Kremlin demonstrates to other authoritarian regimes (in the region and beyond) that Russia is a reliable ally.

Stephan Blank (2014, 2015), like in his previous works, viewed Russia's Middle East policy in the post-Arab Spring period through the realist prism. According to Blank, while, Russia engages with the region via economic, political and

military aid and trade cooperation, the main motivation behind Russia's policy is to gain a leverage over the regional states through such engagements, in order to project its military prowess and access and control of resources and infrastructure, and thus balance the American influence in the region (2014; 2015).

Nikolay Kozhanov (2015; 2016) identified three main objectives of Russia's Middle East policy in the post-Arab Spring period in the context of Russia's stance towards the Syrian crisis. According to Kozhanov, by engaging with the Middle East, Russia seeks to:

'secure its existing sources of income and protecting the interests of Russian energy companies and their share in the international oil and gas market; avoiding complete international isolation by creating leverage which can be used to affect US and EU behaviour; reducing potential security threats for Russia and the CIS posed by the situation in the Middle East' (2016: 97).

These factors, however, as Kozhanov noted, were prioritized in Russia's Middle East policy after the Arab Spring, since 'at the beginning of the Arab Spring, the importance of the Middle East was traditionally neglected by Russian strategists', whereas the political consequences of the Arab uprisings and growing confrontation between Russia and the West 'returned the region to the centre of Moscow's attention' (2016: 3).

Similarly, Dimitri Trenin (2016) explained Russia's Middle East policy after the Arab Spring and particularly its military involvement in the Syrian crisis as driven by Moscow's vulnerabilities to the Islamic State's ambitions, in that the global jihadist organization demonstrated a desire to expand to all Muslim populated territories, including Central Asia and Russian North Caucasus and Tatarstan (2016). Moreover, as Trenin noted, a large proportion of IS's foreign fighters hail from the Central Asian and Russian Muslim populated regions. It was therefore rational for Russia to fight them in the Middle East before their anticipated homecoming and involvement in terror acts on Russian soil (2016). Syrian Tartus according to Trenin, has also motivated Russia's active participation in the region. With the ouster of the Assad regime, Russia might have lost its naval base that would have threatened its naval presence in the Mediterranean Sea (Trenin 2016). Along with fighting IS and shoring up the Assad regime, as Trenin (2016) observed, Russia's Middle East policy was directed to achieve equilibrium with the US in the region and in the world generally.

In his 2015 analysis, Roland Dannreuther observed Russia's changing stance towards the Arab Spring. As Dannreuther noted, although in the beginning of the uprisings Russia's stance was characterised by sympathy towards the

popular demands for reforms in the region, the Western military intervention in Libya and the threat of the spread of Islamist extremism led Russia to take a more antagonistic stance towards the regional developments (2015). In Dannreuther's account, while geopolitical factors played a role in shaping Russia's policy during the uprisings, the domestic political factors based on certain ideational and ideological understandings were far more significant (2015). As Dannreuther argued, being threatened by the 2011-2012 oppositional demonstrations in Russia and associating it with the uprisings in the Middle East, the leadership in Kremlin presented a distinct "Russian idea" that challenged the idea of Western promoted liberal democracy (2015). Manifesting itself in the concept of "sovereign democracy", the "Russian idea" articulated the 'need of the state to defend its sovereign rights of state and to respond to the societal demands for reform' rather than forcefully changing the regime as the western model suggested (Dannreuther 2015: 93). As Dannreuther concluded, in contrast to 'the so-called "shared neighbourhood", where the strategic priority for Russia is to construct a Eurasian Union in the post-Soviet space, which would limit and contain the perceived threat from NATO and the EU', the Middle East is an insignificant site for promoting Russia's distinctive idea (2015: 93).

Christopher Philips (2016) viewed Russia's Middle East policy in the post-Arab Spring period as consisting of three main factors. The first factor is domestic security: Moscow has vulnerabilities relating to long-standing ties between the Middle East and the Islamists in the North Caucasus (Philips 2016). The second factor is Russia's economic ties with most states of the region, and the third factor is the geopolitical one (Philips, 2016). As Philips formulated it, 'Putin and his nationalists mostly saw the Middle East through a zero-sum perspective, seeing each diplomatic and economic gain for Russia there as a defeat for the US, and vice versa' (2016: 29).

Most of the works in the post-Arab Spring period view Russia's Middle East policy as driven by mainly its Islamic extremism vulnerabilities and economic interests (Kozhanov 2016; Trenin 2016; Dannreuther 2015; Philips 2016). While these works considered the role of geopolitical factors, Olena Bagno-Moldavsky (2013) and Stephen Blank (2014; 2015) in particular viewed Russia's regional policy through a geopolitical prism. Anna Borshchevskaya (2013) added the role of solidarity with Syria in her analysis of Russia's regional policy. Roy Allison (2013) and Roland Dannreuther (2015) emphasised the significance of the Russia's idea of sovereignty and regime type in explaining Russia's stance towards the Arab Spring.

#### **1.4.6 Overarching Themes in the literature**

The literature on Russian Middle East policy has observed Russia's disinterest in the region in the early 1990s, and Russia's renewed interest in engaging with the Middle East since the mid-1990s. The literature also observed the reassertion of Russia's Middle East policy after the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, as well as Russia's policy during and after the Arab Spring. All of these changes in Russia's Middle East policy has been viewed in the literature as deriving mainly from Moscow's geopolitical, economic, and security interests (Blank 1996, 2006, 2014, 2015; Freedman 1998, 2010; Dannreuther 1998, 2012; Nizameddin 1999, 2008; Cohen 2007; Katz 2010; Olena Bagno-Moldavsky 2013; Anna Borshchevskaya 2013; Trenin 2016; Kozhanov 2015, 2016 and Philips 2016) and domestic political factors (Allison 2013; Dannreuther 2015). Although domestic political factors included some ideational variables into the analysis, they were merely discussed in the context of Russia's geopolitical interests in the post-Soviet space, which left the literature on explaining Russia's Middle East policy dominated by material and physical factors.

Indeed, the studies in the literature have not operationalized a rigorous theoretical framework that incorporates ideational and cultural aspects of



strategic decision-making. Therefore, the extant literature cannot sufficiently explain the inconsistency in Russia's foreign policy behaviour in the region, particularly towards Syria, and remain uncertain in explaining contradictory stance of Russia in the cases of Libya and Syria. To investigate how a more rigorous framework of analysis can be developed, I therefore turn to the literature on foreign policy analysis.

### **1.5 Russia's Foreign Policy: beyond the traditional approaches**

To understand where this thesis fits into the scholarship on Russian foreign policy, I shall now review the current literature on foreign policy analysis.

#### *Foreign Policy and Its Analysis*

Foreign policy refers to an intentful activity of the state, by which it seeks to fulfil its self-ascribed aims and interests within the international arena (Macridis 1992; Reynolds 1994; Webber and Smith 2002; Petric 2013). Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) on the other hand, by definition, is the study of the "conduct and practice" of foreign policy, with specific concentration on actual state conduct and sources of decisions, which connects the study of international relations with the study of domestic politics (Kaarbo, Lantis and

Beasley 2002; Alden and Aran 2012; Carlsnaes 2012; Hudson 2014; Kaarbo 2015).

Foreign policy begins with a *problem*, a *threat* or *opportunity* that motivates concern, which is recognized by decision-makers and requires implementation of particular policies or decisions as a response (Hermann 1990). The recognition of a problem, threat or opportunity and implementation of particular decisions however, may vary across states, despite the similar international circumstances. This is a direct result of the diversity of states' political systems, cultures, and leaders (Kaarbo, Lantis and Beasley 2002:13).

The foreign policy of a state is not a static and may be subject to change (Alden and Aran 2012). Changes in foreign policy of a state may be brought about by changes in the global context and/or at the level of state institutions, political regimes and individuals (Alden and Aran 2012). In other words, there may be domestic or international routes to change. However, key leaders in the position of power play a paramount role in facilitating foreign policy choices (Hermann 1990; Stein 1994; Welch 2005), and often changes are mediated via the interpretative lens of key decision makers (Macridis 1992; Goldstein and Keohane 1993). The interpretative lens of a key decision-maker, is frequently

the reflection of the particular thinking of a social group or a shared identity or culture.

*Russia's Foreign Policy: Traditional Approaches and Strategic Culture*

Two opposing lenses mostly dominate the study of the Russia's foreign policy, namely realism and imperialism (MacFarlane 1999; Lynch 2001; Blank 2002; Bugajski 2004; Blank 2014; Mearsheimer 2014; Van Herpen 2015; Götz 2017).

In the realist account, Russia's international behaviour is viewed as being affected by the structure of the international system, which is in turn characterised by the absence of the legitimate authority (thus, 'anarchy'). In this perspective, Russia's immediate liberal momentum after the collapse of the Soviet Union, its policy in the former Soviet territories, its accommodative stance towards the West or the Russian non-confrontational engagement with the West was the only strategic option, within the context of weak post-Cold War power capabilities (MacFarlane 1999). While in later studies, the offensive realism demonstrates Russia as a revisionist power harbouring aggressive intention and pursuing the goal of power-maximization (Omelicheva 2016), the defensive realist account, explains Russia's actions as an attempt to preserve a status quo threatened by the West (Mearsheimer 2014).

While some realists employ factors other than power such as perceptions, Russia's domestic politics (unit-level) were generally viewed as a supplement to the system-level (structure) analysis (Lynch 2001). Therefore, as the main emphasis is placed on power and the states quest for it, the realist perspective views foreign policy as stable and offer a very narrow conception of "change", limiting it to the changes in distribution of power capabilities. In other words, in the realist interpretations, there is little room for foreign policy priorities formed by considerations other than material power. Potentially significant intangibles such as ideas or cultural beliefs are not included in the analysis of realist tradition. Therefore, they cannot fully account for Russia's perception of threat, various notions of security and typically, overlook and wrongfully interpret some significant changes in Russia's foreign policy. Furthermore, the realist approach is based on ethnocentrism, mostly founded on the Western perspective, which neglects Russia's indigenous security and power understandings that are frequently linked to its historical and cultural perceptions.

Alternative accounts, however, view Russia's foreign policy as ideologically driven by Russia's old imperial identity revolving around empire building and territorial expansion (Jones 1990; Glenn 2004; Blank 2002; Van Herpen 2015).

According to this argument, under Putin's leadership 'Russian despotism has risen again in the form of re-imperialization of the former Soviet space' (Van Herpen 2015:17), and ultimately, extends Russian ambitions to parts of Europe (Blank 2002). Other imperialist accounts view Russia's modern imperialism as distinct from both the expansionist logic of the Tsarist Empire and Soviet imperialism (Galeotti and Bowen 2014). In these accounts, Russia's imperialism rather is explained with recourse to the notion of "Russian civilization" that is rooted in Russian ethnic identity, history, religion and culture. With reference to Russian civilization, Russia, in this argument, attempts to command foreign territories populated by ethnic Russian's or culturally affiliated people, in order to exercise its imperial ambitions (Galeotti and Bowen 2014).

Neo-Imperialist approaches to Russia's foreign policy do not present adequate explanations as they carry more normative (or discursive) than explanatory purchase, and they are mostly used to demonstrate a single perspective e.g. advanced-civilized West against backward-aggressive Russia.

This leads us to the question of how ideas and identity influence foreign policy. A growing Constructivist literature has emphasised that material pressures do not uniquely determine Russian foreign policy priorities. (Wendt 1992; Checkel

1993; Mendelson 1993; Stein 1994; Koslowski and Kratochwil 1994; Lebow 1994; Katzenstein 1996; Herman 1996; Evangelista 1999; Bennett 1999; Risse 2000; English 2000; Hopf 2002; Larson and Shevchenko 2003). Constructivist studies have given an important causal role to identities (Wendt 1992; Hopf 1999; Hopf 2002; Tsygankov 2013) and to a variety of ideational variables (Katzenstein 1996; Risse 2000) including cognitive learning (Mendelson 1993; Stein 1994), political entrepreneurship, transnational networks (Checkel 1993), and socialization (Koslowski and Kratochwil 1994; Larson and Shevchenko 2003).

Constructivist analyses too have been dedicated to the understanding of post-Soviet Russian identity, the role of culture and historical interpretation in Russian foreign policy, and various concepts related to the non-Russian Other (Hopf 1999; Tsygankov 2013). But, by building its theory largely on the international structures under the argument that 'Russia's behaviour is shaped by the nation's interaction with the West', these constructivist frameworks only tangentially evaluated the role of the pre-existing and well-established collective ideas, beliefs and attitudes, although some 'local conditions' in the analysis were seen as important in shaping national perceptions (Tsygankov 2013). As a consequence, existing studies overlook the ideational interactions in Russia's foreign policy. Resultantly, the possibility was disregarded that foreign

policy changes can occur due to the shift in the mechanism by which those collective ideas operate (Tsygankov 2013).

Moreover, these explanations, limit security to its physical form, while in Russia's foreign policy discourses there is a room for other intangible forms of security. As Ronnie Lipschutz noted 'there are not only struggles over security among nations, but also struggles over security among notions' (2000: 48). Furthermore, they overlook, the distinct spatial assumptions rooted in the various modes of self-imagery, which each represents a distinct geographical imagery, and which enter into the making of world politics and foreign policy (Agnew 2003).

Material power and geography are not irrelevant in the analysis of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, but needs to be analysed in the unique contextual framework, in which tangibles acquire meaning and are understood. Yet, it is important to note that "meanings" and "understandings" are multiple, due to non-monolithic nature of Russia's strategic thinking.

Strategic culture as an approach, although it emerged prior to constructivism, has not been as subscribed to as constructivism, which left it as an 'underexplored paradigm' (Poore 2003). Nor has it been as debated and revised

as constructivism. However, even in its nascent form, the strategic culture paradigm retains much promise in overcoming the insufficiency of the previous approaches. Its core assumption is the validity of the influence of the a pre-existing set of collective ideas, beliefs and attitudes about a state's strategic preferences in addition to, or irrespective of, external constraints and material forces.

## **1.6 The Use of Russian Strategic Culture**

Russian strategic culture had been viewed as one of the most martial and militarized such cultures in history until it began to change in the 1980s (Heikka 2000; Ermarth 2009; Eitelhuber 2009). This turning point in Russia's strategic thinking has been observed by a number of relevant studies and was marked as the "demilitarization" period of Russia's strategic culture, which included most of the 1990s. Moreover, some studies also observed the changes back in Russia's strategic culture, occurring in the early 2000s, referring to it as the "transformation" or "recovery" of the traditional Russian strategic culture that operated prior the 1980s (Ermarth 2006). Since most of these analyses limited Russia's conception of security merely to the physical form, they could not sufficiently explain how and why these changes occurred, rather limiting



them merely to the external constraints and material factors e.g. international behaviour of the West in the context of Russian economic recovery, so systemic input in the context of capacity. Such conclusion would be rather too simplistic and will not go beyond the explanations provided by traditional approaches.

Unlike most previous analysis, the present thesis will view Russian strategic culture as non-monolithic entity, consisting of distinct and contradicting beliefs and attitudes, derived from historical experiences and accepted narratives, which form particular strategic “subcultures” that are associated not only with institutional or organizational characteristics but also with the homophily principle or social networks that shape distinct collective identity or images and interactions with other groups, and which compete in influencing the strategic course of the country by prescribing more appropriate seen "articulations" in dealing with the strategic issues.

With the new analytical framework, which is more fully discussed in Chapter 2, this work seeks to overcome the weaknesses of the previous studies and present a more holistic approach in analysing Russia’s foreign policy. By this, the thesis aims to explain not only the phases of inconsistency in Russia’s foreign policy towards Syria after the Cold War, but also aims to shed light on

why Russia has demonstrated contradicting approaches during the Arab Spring in regards to Libya and Syria. The implications of Russia's strategic cultural shift has been observed during the Arab Spring, when Moscow along with the Western states condemned the Libyan regime, supported arms embargo on Tripoli against its economic interests, and demonstrated its support on the necessity of the UN Security Council Resolution 1973. Over the same period, Moscow harshly criticized the same Resolution, particularly its allowance of the utilization of force for regime change and demonstrated principled and uncompromised stance on the similar situation in Syria. The Libyan case carries a contrasting and validating value for the main argument of this thesis, therefore along with the Russia's foreign policy towards Syria, this work will also discuss the main aspects of Russian-Libyan bilateral relations.

This thesis aims to be a valuable contribution in understanding and updating Russia's strategic culture and in demonstrating the value of strategic culture as a tool of foreign policy analysis. Moreover, as the first study applying strategic culture approach to understanding Russia's foreign policy towards a particular case, this work will offer an alternative angle on viewing Russia's foreign policy in the Middle East in general, and towards Syria in particular.

## **1.7 Summary Chapter Contents**

This study consists of eight chapters. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the thesis, a brief overview of its main engagements, its method, a literature review, the theoretical approach, and the structure of the work.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to a discussion of relevant theory, evaluating main traditional approaches, such as realism and geopolitics, before proceeding to discuss critical perspectives, including constructivism, and finally engaging various stands of the strategic culture paradigm.

Chapter 3 applies Strategic Culture theory to the Russian case. The Chapter begins with a discussion of the Russian foreign policy structure and proceeds to a discussion of distinct strategic subcultures, their tropes, expressions and priorities.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to demonstrate the influence of strategic subcultures in the strategic visions and discourses of officially adopted strategy documents. This task has been sought to be achieved through analysis of key Russian official strategy documents, which are perceived as the guidelines for and expressions of Russia's foreign and security policy.

In Chapter 5, the thesis proceeds to outline a brief historical background in beginning with Soviet MENA policy and proceeding to discuss Moscow's Syria policy between 1986 and 1999. It seeks to demonstrate how shifts in strategic culture impacted on Moscow's Syria policy through a discussion of the influential strategic subcultures and their influence on foreign policy priorities.

Similarly, Chapter 6 discusses the influential strategic subcultures in Russian strategic thinking between 2000 and 2010 and demonstrates how they have affected Russian Syria policy in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Chapter 7 discusses Russia's foreign policy in the Arab Spring period with the specific focus on the Syrian situation. The Chapter identifies the main attributes of one of the two competing strategic subcultures during the crises in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and discusses the effects of their domination of strategic preferences in the Russia's foreign policy behaviour in the Syrian case.

Chapter 8 forms the conclusion of the thesis. In this concluding Chapter, the main findings as well as the overall argument are summarized. This is followed by a discussion of the contribution to knowledge of the thesis.

## **CHAPTER 2: FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS: META-THEORY AND MACRO-THEORY**

The aim of this Chapter is to demonstrate the origin, concept and the development of the main traditional approaches in IR, to show their strength and weaknesses in Foreign Policy Analysis, and to develop a rigorous analytical framework in analysing foreign policy behaviour. To this end, the role of a theory is paramount. Without theory there is no structure to data. Theory helps us to prioritise data. Data without structure, although may be interesting, does not allow us to draw any conclusion or prescription. Theory, therefore is the tool of interpretation, prescription and recommendation.

### **2.1 Geopolitics: Geography and Politics**

The early geopolitical analysis appearing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were predicated on militarist ideas, in which military confrontations between powerful states were inevitable and necessary as they were seen inherent in human nature (Dittmer and Sharp 2014). In these military conflicts, powerful states had to obtain control of territories to maintain power and to earn distinct military advantage in actual or potential regional battlefields. Therefore, political and military leaders, soldiers and advancing

technology of a time were core analytical emphases of early geopolitical works (Dittmer and Sharp 2014).

However, in the late twentieth century the core assumptions and the level of analysis of geopolitical literature faced sustained critique. Critics of early geopolitical works highlighted the importance of other ideas in order to obtain a more accurate picture of international politics.

*Geopolitics: The origin, classical geopolitics*

‘Geopolitics refers to the theory and practice of politics at the global scale, with a specific emphasis on the geography’ (Dittmer and Sharp 2014: 3). Key elements of geopolitics include the belief that a ‘state’s size and resources can determine its strength’ and the belief that states are in continual competition and seek to expand or consolidate their power (Chapman 2011: 7).

While geopolitics has been practiced by territorial states throughout history (Chapman 2011), its emergence as a discipline begins in the early twentieth century.

“Geopolitics” was a term first used by Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellen in 1899 (Chapman 2011). Kjellen defined geopolitics as describing role of

geographical factors in determining national behaviour and was one of the three most important figures of German school of *Geopolitik*.

German *Geopolitik* was an intellectual movement with wide influence on German politics (Koch 1984), which used metaphors of Social Darwinism.

‘Greatly inspired by Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution German geopolitics particularly Friedrich Ratzel was trying to transfer the principles of Darwinism from the biological to the social arena. Social Darwinism considered people as locked in a struggle for survival, in which only the strong one will thrive’ (Dittmer and Sharp 2014: 15).

Friedrich Ratzel (1846-1911), Rudolf Kjellen (1846-1922) and Karl Haushofer (1869-1946) were leading intellectuals of this school of thought and ‘prolific and widely read advocates of German expansion’ (Deudney 1997: 93). This version of geopolitics viewed states as the primary political entities and perceived them as “living organisms” (Tuathail 1996: 29). In their account, as organisms states were heavily dependent upon territory and a thriving state will need “*Lebensraum*” (living space) sufficient for its growing needs, at the expense of other states if necessary (Dittmer and Sharp 2014: 4). This belief made the interactions of states heavily competitive and viewed “war” as a normal condition of world politics (Deudney 1997: 93). Consequently, some scholars

trace the rise of Nazi aggression to this particular branch of geopolitics (Bowman 1942).

While German geopolitical thought represented “statist”, state-centric analyses, the Anglo-American branch of geopolitics in these early days was derived from a different mode of thinking. Instead of starting with the states, scholars such as Alfred Mahan and Halford Mackinder concentrated more on the ‘patterns of the history, trying to link particular climates and landscapes with patterns of political success and at the same time linking those historical patterns to emerging technologies of warfare’ (Dittmer and Sharp 2014: 15). This, as Sloan and Gray explain, is another aim of geopolitics, which emphasises that:

‘political predominance is a question not just of having power in the sense of human and material resources, but also of geographical context within which that power is exercised...states do not find themselves in a geographical strait-jacket; instead geography or geographical configurations present opportunities for policy-makers and politicians’ (1999: 2).

This was recognised both by Mahan (1890) and Mackinder (1904) and in their account the key to success in the realm of international relations was to work with geography rather than against it...for the United States and for Great Britain that meant becoming naval powers and ensuring that no land power



was able to cross the water to get to their territory (Mahan 1890; Mackinder 1904).

Although the German and the Anglo-American branch of geopolitics have derived from slightly different modes of thinking, a cardinal aim of these thinkers was to shape government policy and empower their respective countries by emphasizing the significance of geography and making it a paramount concern to statesmen and political scientists.

The term itself, however, has been stigmatized and went out of use after the World War II, as it had been viewed as an accomplice of Nazi Geopolitik. Even strong proponents of the Anglo-American strand of geopolitics backed away from the term, instead locating their works as part of the broader project of “political geography” (Dittmer and Sharp 2014). Although political geographers tended to back away from explicit discussion of foreign policy, they have not rejected the assumption that states are primary actors in world politics (Dittmer and Sharp 2014).

### *Geopolitics vs Realism*

As Gearoid Tuathail noted, ‘geopolitics is of the same ilk as political realism, distinguishing itself by its proclivity to find geography as a singularly

important element in foreign policy conceptualization and practice' (2008: 107).

Realism as an approach became known by the term coined by Edward Hallett Carr in the quotation in his book:

'the impact of thinking upon wishing, which in the development of a science, follows the breakdown of its first visionary projects, and marks the end of its specifically utopian period, is commonly called *realism*' (1939: 10).

Carr claimed that Realism is a well-established way of thinking about the world, and his work was a major attack on Idealism or "utopian thought", which dominated international relations in the inter-war period. Although the most sustained attack on Idealism was produced by Carr, it was Hans Morgenthau and later Kenneth Waltz who popularized Realism as an approach in IR (Hollis and Smith 1991). In his major work *Politics Among Nations* (1948), Morgenthau suggested studying International Relations by means of Realism, since it deals with human nature as it is (in a positivist sense), not as it ought to be (as proponents of normative theory believe).

Realism assumes that world politics operates in an international anarchy (a system with no higher, overreaching authority), and states are the pre-eminent actors of world politics and tend to defend their national interests and to ensure their survival, security and sovereignty (Waltz 1979). In this light, power is the

currency of international politics and the great powers (the most important states in realist account) pay significant attention to amount of power (military, economic and soft power) they have relative to each other. The State's task however, is not only a possession of substantial amount of power but also to ensure that no other states sharply shift the balance of power to their own advantage. International politics in this respect is portrayed above everything else as "power politics" (Jackson and Sorensen 2010: 59).

It is noticeable from a brief overview of realism that there are some overlaps with geopolitical assumptions. To begin with, geopolitics and realism have similar ontological positions. They share a belief that a world and its politics as something that exists objectively "out there" and can be known (Tuathail and Dalby 2006; Dittmer and Sharp 2014: 17). Since both relied on a notion of underlying forces producing behaviour, it made intellectuals of both traditions to follow (implicitly or explicitly) an empiricist way of analysing events.

Both geopolitics and realism, moreover, view interactions of states as highly competitive and even war prone, while accepting states as the most relevant actors in the international system. German *Geopolitik's* emphasis, for instance, is on states as mutually exclusive "species" in competition for space, while

Mahan's and Mackinder's antagonistic divide between land power and sea power are underlying aspects of realist strategic thinking. Particularly, Halford Mackinder in his major work *The Geographical Pivot of History* (1904) explicitly uses language of realism (although realism became a school of thought later). He warns that new land-based powers with the ability to mobilize their population and resources through technologies such as railways were serious threats for traditional sea powers like Britain (Mackinder 1904).

'The oversetting of the balance of power in favour of the pivot state...would permit of the use of vast continental resources for fleet-building, and the empire of the world would then be in sight' (Mackinder 1904: 436).

Mackinder's suggestion, therefore, was that the political leaders of the British Empire must in any case prevent potential alliance between Germany and "heartland" (pivot area) of world power, namely the Russian Empire then ruled by the Romanov dynasty' (Tuathail and Dalby 2006: 6). Mackinder's work and other early geopolitical writings undoubtedly inspired many scholars and political elites in the post-war period and their geopolitical analyses were likewise based on underlying dynamics of realism.

Indeed, some of these intellectuals used geopolitics as a synonym for realism generally, and specifically for realism with an emphasis upon geographical

factors. In his analysis, Daniel Deudney noted that 'in the contemporary American discussions, the term geopolitics in its broad usage is employed to mean "power politics between states" (1997: 96). In a narrower sense, it indicates "power competition between major states' (Deudney 1997: 96). Henry Kissinger is one of those who employed the term geopolitics in its broader sense (Kissinger 1979). In his writings he claimed geopolitics as synonymous with global equilibrium and permanent national interests in the world of balance of power. As Michael Joseph argued, his 'ideas on power, prestige, and the importance of the great powers all belong to the realist tradition, even if Kissinger himself prefers the term "geopolitics"' (1986: 19).

Overall, while forms of geopolitical writings from late nineteenth to the early 1970s have varied, these writings all had in common the production of knowledge to aid statecraft in order to empower the state. Since, the main emphasis is on power, geopolitics therefore could be defined as a branch of realism, which distinguishes itself by its inclination to find geography to be an important element in foreign policy conceptualization and practice.

These assumptions, however, soon became increasingly untenable with the formulation of various social movements. These social movements associated

with civil rights, feminism, and anti-nuclear lobby, have demonstrated that rich diversity of politics also unfold well beyond the state system. This triggered a new understanding of geopolitics, which had little in common with classic formulations.

## **2.2 Geopolitics: The Critical Turn**

A new “critical” form of geopolitics is a perspective within political geography and international relations that has been developed since the early 1980s (Dalby 1991; Tauthail and Agnew 1992; Tuathail 2006). With the emphasis on the role of language in emergence of reality, critical geopolitics has challenged the classical form, which sees the geography as the “reality” that needs to be studied to assist statecraft in national and international policy making. Geopolitics in this light can be understood as “discourse” through which the world is made intelligible and therefore made amenable to foreign policy intervention’ (Dittmer and Sharp 2014: 5). Put differently, the collective understandings of geographical knowledge are produced via series of representations of the world (or particular part of the world), which are exchanged among agents and sensitized as the common understandings. Therefore, the world division of classical geopolitics into sea and land powers,

and where the sea powers are threatened by land powers or vice versa, are all (geographical) representations without which the world and the geographical features of the world are meaningless. In this context the term “critical” rather than to criticise, is used to refer to an approach that refuses to take categories “at face value” (Dittmer and Sharp 2014).

*Geopolitical Representations: Geopolitics as a Discourse*

Gearoid Tuathail and John Agnew suggested that ‘the study of geopolitics is the study of spatialization of international politics by core powers and hegemonic states’ (1992: 190) To illustrate this understanding, they proposed to reconceptualise the traditional meaning of geopolitics using the concept of discourse. While geopolitics is commonly seen as practice of actions taken against other powers, about invasions, battles and deployment of military force, Tuathail and Agnew argue, such a practice is only meaningful and justified through discourses (1992). ‘It is through discourse that leaders act, through the mobilization of certain simple geographical understandings that foreign policy actions are explained and through ready-made geographically infused reasoning that wars are rendered meaningful’ (Tuathail and Agnew 1992: 191). Moreover, ‘geography is not a natural, non-discursive phenomenon, which is

separate from ideology and outside politics...rather, geography as a discourse is a form of power/knowledge itself' (Tuathail and Agnew 1992: 192; Tuathail 2008). Therefore, re-conceptualization that Tuathail and Agnew suggested to view geopolitics 'as discursive practice by which intellectuals of statecraft spatialize the international politics and represent it as a world characterized by particular types of places, peoples and dramas' (1992: 192). Although in this definition geopolitics is seen as discursive practice of statesmen, scholars recognize that the emergence of discourses is well beyond the statecraft, which makes geopolitics itself more than the elite activity.

While emphasising the core role of representations in creations of geographical knowledge, another task of critical geopolitics is to demonstrate how discourses emerge in the first place. They do it by investigating the cultural embeddedness of geopolitics.

*Geopolitics: Discursive emergence, cultural embeddedness*

Although geopolitical discourses are commonly articulated by the administrative body of the state, they emerge from already existing narratives about state formation and identity (Tuathail 2006). More precisely, discourses are drawn upon already existing 'images, metaphors and storylines from state's



historical and geographical experience' (Tuathail 2006: 7). In order to illustrate this understanding, critical scholars introduce the concept of *geopolitical culture*. Geopolitical culture according to Tuathail is cultural conceptualization of the state, its unique identity, position and role in the world (2006). The concept is conditioned by series of other factors such as 'a state's geographical situation, historical formation and bureaucratic organization, discourses of identity and traditions theorising its relationship to the wider world, and the networks of power that operate within the state' (Tuathail 2006: 7). As Tuathail continues:

'the geopolitical culture of the state is also shaped by the primary forms of identification and boundary formation that characterize its social, cultural and political life. How do the various groups within a state draw boundaries between themselves and others...? What worldwide communities do they imagine themselves part of and what communities do they define themselves in opposition to? What states are seen as friendly and what ones are considered potential or actual enemies? What collective national identity predominates within the state and how does this shape the state's relationship to the international community' (2006: 8).

Moreover, there could be more than one geopolitical culture within the territorially bounded state (Tuathail 2006) that each will have often unique geopolitical orientations. As Tuathail explains, these

'geopolitical cultures are characterized by particular schools of thought on foreign policy and the state...Coming together as distinctive approaches in the process of debate with each other, these foreign policy philosophies and geopolitics orientations are the building blocks from which intellectuals of statecraft produce particular geopolitical discourses' (2006: 8).

Another illustration of critical geopolitics that geopolitics is more than elite activity is demonstrated by the three main divisions of geopolitical discourses, namely *formal*, *practical* and *popular* via which particular discourses and narratives about the world politics are produced. In this division *formal* geopolitics refers to the 'advanced geopolitical theories and visions produced by intellectual of statecraft' (academics and researchers in think tanks etc.) (Tuathail 2006: 9). The writings of the most of the proponents of classical geopolitics, such as Mackinder (1904) and Mahan (1890) could be considered as formal geopolitics. *Practical* geopolitics refers to the narratives used by politicians, military commanders, and others who are in the community of actual practice of foreign policy (Dittmer and Sharp 2014). However, there could be a direct link between formal and practical geopolitics as the 'intellectuals of statecraft are often drafted in to help craft government foreign policy' (Dittmer and Sharp 2014). *Popular* geopolitics refers to the narratives of world politics, which are expressed in the popular culture of the state such as

newspapers, magazines, novels, movies or cartoons (Dodds 1996; Tuathail 2006; Sharp 2000; Doods et al. 2013; Dittmer and Sharp 2014). Therefore, popular geopolitics helps to circulate particular geopolitical understandings among the ordinary people.

While demonstrating that the geopolitics should be studied via discourses and showing that those geopolitical discourses are produced throughout state-centred society at multiple sites, another task of critical geopolitics is to demonstrate that not all discourses are created and treated equally or to show how acceptance of one particular representation happens over others and who benefits from it.

*A Critical account of geopolitics: power networks*

Critical geopolitics invites to acknowledge that while discourses are produced from existing narratives, which are embedded within cultural practice of the state, not all discourses are created and treated equally. While there are discourses produced by civil society, there are some produced by state institutions such as 'foreign policy bureaucracies, military academies or state universities and are central to the political life of the state' (Tauthail 2006: 9). Particular geopolitical discourses often emerge from think tanks, which are

dedicated to produce and distribute particular types of ideas (Tuathail and Agnew 1992; Tuathail 2006; Dittmer and Sharp 2014). Certain geopolitical discourses in critical perspective, take a shape of the prevailing ones only through the power networks which to be find acting in the states (Tuathail and Agnew 1992; Agnew and Corbridge 1995; Tuathail 2006). To illustrate this understanding and demonstrate operation of this power network, Gearoid Tuathail emphasises importance of social power (2006). Using Michael Mann's (1993) framework of four bases of social power, namely *political*, *ideological*, *economic* and *military* powers, Tuathail shows how these sources of social power interact with each other and form entwined structural networks of power via which certain discourses take shape of prevailing ones (2006). To exemplify, some defence corporations and lobbying organizations, which have close ties (through their campaign donations) with powerful politicians (president, PM, parties, congress etc.), may hire and finance think tanks to do research in order to certain ideas to be generally adopted (Tuathail 2006). In return think tanks may promote a certain geopolitical discourse that imply large defence expenditures, military exports and the aiding favoured states (Tauthail and Agnew 1992; Weldes 1999; Tauthail 2006). Similarly, certain journals and

newspapers may distribute particular geopolitical discourses to serve political agendas (Dodds 1996; Doods et al. 2013; Tauthail 2006).

Geopolitics, in sum, is not a competition of ideas produced by independent intellectuals in which truthful and intellectually greater opinions prosper over untruthful and weaker ones. Rather, geopolitics should be understood as a discourse that operates within networks of power (Tuathail 2006).

### **2.3 Constructivism: Emergence and Foundations**

The emergence of *constructivism* in the late 1980s in the literature on IR theory (Onuf 1989), have commonly been viewed as a direct opposition to the dominant theories of the time (Copeland 2000; Barkin 2003). Since IR is a discipline of social scientific inquiry, constructivism's rise should be viewed as IR's response to the "earth-shaking" changes at the end of the twentieth century, such as the end of the Cold War, the emergence of interdependence and then globalization, the growing social and economic importance of knowledge, the emergence of new technologies of communication, including the internet and then social media (Adler 2002). In other words, with its rise, constructivism has offered alternative understandings to a number of the central issues in world politics, and added value to existing approaches by

bringing different explanations to the field, in order to sort the complex puzzles of international relations.

Indeed, with its emergence IR theory has been advanced with more rigorous research tools in the face of international changes, and sometimes unquestioned and often taken-for-granted *materially* based dominant assumptions were modified with equally, if not more significant, *ideational* factors (Adler 2002). This in return brought novel hypothesis in the discipline, like “a world of our making” or “anarchy is what states make of it” (Onuf 1989; Wendt 1992).

Constructivism is the three-layered understanding of social reality with relate to *metaphysics*, *social theory* and *IR theory* (Adler 2002). Its metaphysical stance refers to the reality that is sought to be known and to the knowledge via which it is sought (Adler 2002). Building on its metaphysical position, constructivism is a social theory that stresses ‘the role of knowledge and knowledgeable agents in the constitution of social reality’ (Adler 2002: 96; Finnemore and Sikkink 2001). It emphasises the importance of understanding ‘the role of intersubjectivity and social context, the co-constitution of agent and structure and the rule-governed nature of society’ (Adler 2002: 96). Finally, building on other two layers, constructivism is an IR theory, which maintains the need for

theory, method and research, based on sound social ontological and epistemological foundations. Therefore, constructivists claimed to be the first group of scholars 'to have grounded IR theory on an explicit metaphysics and social theory' (Adler 2002: 96).

Ultimately, when reaching the shores of IR, constructivism with its core assumptions has led to new and important questions such as the role of *identities, norms, ideas* and culture-based understandings in the constitution of *national interest* (Weldes 1999; Adler 2002). This in return offered alternative understandings of a number of central themes in International Relations theory, including the meaning of anarchy, the balance of power, the very concept of power and prospects for change in world politics (Wendt 1992; Hopf 1998). Moreover, although some agree with the premise that 'knowledge is only partly internal' (Adler 2002: 101), core assumptions of constructivism not only have shaped its successful empirical research program, but have also shaped the methods via which constructivists attempt to validate their assumptions (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001).

*Constructivism: Core assumptions*

The core *ontological* assumption in which all constructivists converge is a representation that the 'social world is constituted by 'intersubjectively and collectively meaningful structures and processes' (Adler 2002: 100), while 'material resources only acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded' (Wendt 1995: 73). In this light, the social world is consisted of 'intersubjective understandings, subjective knowledge and material objects' (Searle 1996; Adler 2002: 100). The very existence of *social facts* therefore, such as money, sovereignty and rights, which are facts only by human agreement, depend on the attachment of collective knowledge to physical reality (Searle 1996; Finnemore and Sikkink 2001; Adler 2002). Moreover, the attachments of collective knowledge or the way individuals think, know and feel occur in the context of and with reference to intersubjective understandings. In other words, as Emanuel Adler formulates, 'it is from...context...that people borrow the epistemic, normative and ideological understandings, rules and discourses that make individuals into agents by enabling them to act upon the world they find themselves' (2002: 100). This leads to the oft-cited constructivist ontology of the *mutual constitution* of agents and structures (Wendt 1992; 1995; Hopf 1998; Adler 2002).



Deriving from this core assumption constructivism generally asserts that human interaction is shaped by *ideational* factors, rather than merely material ones, and that the most important ideational factors are *intersubjective* beliefs, and that interests and identities of actors are constructed via these shared/collective or intersubjective understandings (Wendt 1992; 1995; Adler 1997; Ruggie 1998; Hopf 1998; Finnemore and Sikkink 2001). Therefore, unlike materialist and utilitarian theories, constructivism does not take interests and identities of actors for granted, rather by its ontological assumptions they are shaped by the social milieu in which they are embedded.

In this light, constructivism 'is not interested in how things *are* but in how they *became* what they are' (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001; Adler 2002: 101). Constructivism, thereby, opened up for inquiry by problematizing *social construction* processes and accordingly understanding the origins and manifestations of ideas, ideas, identity, norms or culture has generally become main part of constructivist research program.

#### *Constructivism: Anarchy and power politics*

Alexander Wendt (1992; 1995; 1999) is among the most prominent constructivist scholars, who problematized the realist conceptual bases of anarchy and self-

help international system (Waltz 1979). Wendt did not oppose the *neorealist* description of the *self-help* world and the *competitive* state system but contested neorealist explanations. He argued that neither anarchic structure nor self-help interests/identities of actors are *exogenous* or pre-given but rather as he notes 'the intersubjective knowledge that constitutes competitive identities and interests are constructed every day by processes of social will formation' (Wendt 1992: 410). According to him, 'identities are inherently relational, and interests are bases of identities' (Wendt 1992: 397-98). In other words, the identity of an actor is acquired via interaction with others and interests are defined in the process of defining situations. Therefore, as Wendt formulates:

'self-help and power politics do not follow either logically or causally from anarchy and that if today we find ourselves in a self-help world, this is due to [socialization] process, not structure...or...there is no "logic" of anarchy apart from the practices that create and instantiate one structure of identities and interests rather than another; structure has no existence or causal powers apart from process. Self-help and power politics are institutions, not essential features of anarchy. Anarchy is what states make of it' (1992: 394-95).

Indeed, Wendt's constructivist analysis provided solutions to some issues facing international relations theory that other approaches have failed to engage. However, Wendt's work has been sharply criticized even within the

interpretativist camp. Specifically, criticisms were voiced on his level of analysis and on his state-centrism. According to critics, while 'constructivism is supposed to open structures to different constructions and to different understandings of world politics, Wendt's theory is like Waltz's, is conservative and consecrates the existing inter-state system' (Inayatullah and Blaney 1996; Adler 2002: 108). Moreover, the internal or domestic factors are irrelevant in Wendt's argument of construction of the state identities and interests, as they are subject to interaction with others (Weldes 1999; Reus-Smit 1999). However, it is quite plausible to argue that states approach international politics having already a historically contingent appreciation of the world, which is rooted in the collective meaning production within domestic, cultural contexts (Weldes 1999). Similarly, by neglecting domestic sources of state identity, Wendt's theory does not explain the rise and decline of norms in international societies (Reus-Smit 1999), and is therefore unhelpful for studying transnational communities as well as security communities (Adler 2002).

Generally, in a discipline that has often denied the significance of domestic social structures, critics noted that socially constructed structures such as norms, rules, cultures had effects on world politics, which went further than Wendt's application of constructivist explanations for the inter-state level alone.

*Constructivism: Global norms, culture and domestic factors*

The collection of essays in the book *The Culture of National Security*, edited by Peter Katzenstein (1996), concentrate on *norms of national security, weapons taboos, humanitarianism, military culture* and on *identity politics* to illustrate how social factors of different kinds shape different aspects of national security policy, 'at times in ways that contradict the expectations derived from other theoretical orientations' (Katzenstein 1996: 5). Similarly, according to Richard Price (1995) the role of the norms on decision making in regards to chemical weapons taboo is significant. As he notes, 'among the countless technological innovations in weaponry that have been used by humankind, chemical weapons almost alone have come to be stigmatized as morally illegitimate' (1995: 73). Moreover, in numerous instances, even though when their use would have been distinct military advantage, nonuse of chemical weapons has been more preferable. This preference is not from nowhere, it is a social structure that has been politicized and institutionalized by discursive norms of chemical weapons, which has carried meanings of *immorality, weapons of the weak* and *not civilizational* (Price 1995).

While these works demonstrated that norm and other social structures have causal effects and that these structures are not simple a reflection of state interests, some constructivist scholars were quick to notice that different agents perceive norms and social understandings differently (Checkel 1997: Risse et al 1999). Not only did the same global norms affect different states differently, but the mechanisms via which norms are internalized within states are equally diverse (Checkel 1997). Understanding, therefore, how domestic cultures and institutions mediate norms, as Checkel argues, is a key to understand the political effect of these global social structures (1997). Similarly, Risse et al. (1999) emphasize the importance of understanding the domestic factors, such as regime type, civil war and the presence of human rights organizations within states, in states' reaction to and internalisation of international norms.

*Ideas and Power: Critical constructivism*

Constructivists generally sought to establish that norms and ideas have independent causal force and have 'emphasized the ways in which ideas and norms run counter to or undermine conventional conceptions of strong state interests' (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001: 398). Critical constructivists, however, have more sceptical view on the independent status of ideas from power.

Taking intellectual cues from critical social theory, critical constructivists believe that construction of social reality indeed involves a relation of power (Doty 1996; Weldes 1999). More precisely, they believe that some hegemonic groups may play a privileged role in the process of social construction. Critical constructivists focused more on denaturalizing dominant ideational structures and on demonstrating their connections to existing power relations. Roxanne Doty for instance, notes that 'the constructions of meaning and the constructions of social, political and economic power are inextricably linked' (1996: 170). In her work Doty seeks to reveal how powerful countries have justified their violent military actions and economic exploitations via constructed discursive representations of the southern countries (1996). Similarly, Jutta Weldes in her work on the Cuban missile crisis argues that the crisis was a social construction forged by US officials (1996). In her account US officials used the crisis to reassert that the United States were 'threatened--psychologically, politically, and militarily--by the expansion of and aggression from, among others, a totalitarian Soviet Union and the international communist movement it sponsored' (1996: 15). The crisis also assisted, as Weldes argues, the process of reasserting the US identity as a leader of the 'Free

World' and reinforced its international role of defending both democracy and freedom (1996).

### *Constructivism: Identity and State Action*

Another added value of constructivism to IR theory is the notion that 'state identity fundamentally shapes the state's preferences and actions' (Wendt 1992; Katzenstian 1996; Weldes 1999; Finnemore and Sikkink 2001: 398; Hopf 2002). Unlike Culturalists, however, Constructivists reject the pre-given nature of state identity and all agree on the constructions of state identities, by constant re-articulations, within a given social environment. It is the social environment, however, where the disagreements and changes start. Alexander Wendt (1992; 1995), for instance, with his systemic constructivism highlights the importance of the international environment in the construction of state identity. Specifically, he places emphasis on the interstate interactions where, he believes, the process of identity formation occurs (Wendt 1992; 1995). Thomas Berger (1996), Thomas Risse-Kappen (1996), Michel Barnett (1996), Jutta Weldes (1996) and Ted Hopf (2002), contrarily, highlight the importance of the

domestic environment in the construction of the state identity. State identity is formed by discourses on national ideologies, beliefs and values of collective distinctiveness and purpose that in turn shapes state preferences, interests and of course guides the state's foreign and security policies (Berger 1996; Risse-Kappen 1996; Barnett 1996; Weldes 1999; Hopf 2002).

Moreover, as indicated, constructivism also rejects the assumption of fixed or unchanging nature of identities. Not only do state identities change as discourses change, constructivists argue, but there might be more than one identity discourses in place to constitute the state identity (Hopf 2002). Therefore, when a state identity is changed, it could be expected that the state's foreign and security policy changes will follow since identities fundamentally shape the state's preferences and actions (Banchoff 1999; Hopf 2002).

*Constructivism: The social construction mechanisms and processes*

With its wide empirical work, constructivism not only established that norms, ideas, identities and other social structures matter in world politics, but the paradigm also tackled the research question of how to identify how they came into existence and how they came to matter. In other words, constructivism has



also engaged with identification of the social construction mechanisms and processes.

To this end it is focused on the role of *international organizations* in disseminating new international norms and models of political organization (Finnemore 1993; Adler 1998). Finnemore shows how new norms of behaviour are taught states by some international organizations such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) which she identifies as “teaching agents” (1993; 1996). Similarly, Adler shows how via its legitimacy and perceived impartiality to organize “seminar diplomacy”, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) taught its members new values and norms of behaviour (1998). Constructivist scholars such as Friedrich Kratochwil (1989) and Thomas Risse (2000), focused on the role of *social communications* (speech, argument, persuasion) as mechanisms of social construction. Through speech acts and arguments actors are not only able to diffuse collective understandings but also able to fix meanings, including by patrolling boundaries of discourses (Adler 2002). More precisely, speech can persuade or change people’s minds about values and their role in the social life. As Kratochwil argues, speech acts have an “illocutionary” dimension (doing something by saying something), therefore, they do not only describe but also

construct reality (1989: 8). Similarly, building on Habermas's "communicative action" theory, Risse's work demonstrates how social actors engage in discourses to validate their arguments and change minds and worldviews (2000). Social communications, therefore, do important social construction work, creating new norms, understandings or social facts that in return may reconfigure world politics.

### *Epistemic communities*

Peter Haas (1989) and Emanuel Adler (1992) focused on the role of experts with specialized knowledge in political organization, which they formulated as *epistemic communities*. Starting with the main assumptions of constructivism, Peter Haas, in his analysis of policy coordination (1989; 1991) goes further in arguing that pre-existing patterns of reasoning of policymakers are subject to change under conditions of uncertainty, which might trigger a diffusion of new ideas, and which consequently will lead to pursuing new state's interests and new patterns of behaviour. In this process, Haas argues 'control over knowledge and information is an important dimension of power' (1989: 2).

Haas' work recognizes that at the interstices between systemic conditions, knowledge, and national actions lies a human agency, and offer an approach that 'examines the role that networks of knowledge-based experts--"epistemic communities--play in articulating the cause-and-effect relationships of complex problems, helping states identify their interests, framing the issues for collective debate, proposing specific policies, and identifying salient points for negotiation' (1989: 2).

An epistemic community could be defined as a network of individuals with 'recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area' (Haas 1989: 3). However, the definition of epistemic community differs and are used in a variety ways. The simplest way of defining it as a collection of individuals who share the same worldview or episteme. Although members of an epistemic community may consist of individuals from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds, generally 'they have a shared set of normative and principled beliefs, which provide a value-based rationale for the social action of community members...shared causal beliefs, which are derived from their analysis of practices leading or contributing to a central set of problems in their domain...shared

notions of validity that is, intersubjective, internally defined criteria for weighing and validating knowledge in the domain of their expertise' (Haas 1989: 3).

## **2.4 Strategic Culture: The Concept**

The concept of strategic culture is not a new one. It has been around for quite long and generated useful insights by being the subject of analysis within a number of previous "waves" of scholarships (Johnston 1995; Duffield 1999; Poore 2003; Glenn et al. 2004; Johnson et al. 2009). Each of these waves has adopted different standpoints and methodological approaches however, which made a very loose association between them (Lantis 2002; Poore 2003; Howlett and Glenn 2005). Nevertheless, the common ground exists, and it exists on the level of the recognition of cultural differences between states in strategic thinking and the inclusion of cultural variables into analysis of strategic studies (and FPA), which had been obscured by the rationalist-materials theoretical models. All waves tended to argue that different states have different strategic preferences, on which basis they may behave differently even when they face similar situations. In other words, while all states have a strategic culture, it is assumed that each of them will be somewhat unique, based on historical and cultural perceptions. However, it does not imply that all strategic culture analysis necessarily reject rationality. Rather, they accept that strategic

outcomes are rational, but insist that rationality must be understood within cultural context (Johnston 1995; Johnson 2009; Gray 2009). In simple terms, rationality is not universally applicable as it was suggested, what is rational for one state can be irrational for another. This is in accord with Max Weber's understanding of normative rationality (Kalberg 1980).

However, there is also a division of opinion within strategic culture research. This division is mainly attributed to epistemological differences and an inability of some works to explain policy changes, in particular when strategic culture is defined as "coherent" and "static" over time. Nevertheless, the recent scholarly works on strategic culture have offered solutions to this epistemological problem and began to overcome these weaknesses. I will discuss these in turn below.

### *Strategic Culture: Origin*

The seeds of the strategic culture approach were planted in the 1940s, when the cultural analysis became of interest to scholarship, mostly to anthropologists: studying national characteristics of Axis powers (Benedict (1977) in attempts to draw connection between culture and state behaviour (Desh 1998; Lantis 2009). These analyses defined the roots of a nation's character or culture in language,

religion, customs, socialization, and interpretation of common memory and became 'popular tools for threat assessment during World War II' (Lantis 2009: 34). Yet, culturalist theories of the 1940s declined soon after the end of the war, mostly as result of the nuclear revolution which conversely promoted rationalist empiricism (Desh 1998). Moreover, with the development of nuclear weapons anticipations had developed that this technology would encourage both superpowers to behave in a 'roughly similar' manner, as the strategic utility of these weapons 'made cultural differences irrelevant' (Desh 1998: 145; Trachtenberg 1991). Ultimately, 'the nuclear revolution ushered in general theories of strategic behaviour such as deterrence theory, inspired by the assumptions of the rational actor/rational choice models', which dominated national security studies of the 1950s and 1960s (Desh 1998: 145; Trachtenberg 1991) .

However, the Soviet Union's continuing build-up of nuclear capability beyond its strategic parity undermined the practicality of deterrence theory and caused many scholars in the west to question the assumptions of rational actor model (Desh 1998). Specifically, in the 1970s, these scholars opposed what they saw as "ethnocentric assumptions" in strategic theory (Garnett 1975; Booth 1975; Snyder 1977; Booth 1979). They saw this ethnocentric emphasis in the "rational

actor model" which assumed that the same rationality could be applied to all states, with no credence given to states' national history, politics and culture (Garnett 1975; Booth 1975; Snyder 1977; Booth 1979). Instead, they embraced the notion that each state has a unique worldview and a 'national style in strategy' (Booth 1979; Gray 1981) and suggested to approach strategic studies in contextual rather than universal terms. Jack Snyder was the first to use the precise term 'strategic culture' in his analysis of "Soviet nuclear strategy", which was specifically applied for the nuclear realm (1977).

*Strategic culture: the nuclear realm*

In order to interpret the development of Soviet and American nuclear doctrines, Snyder applied his strategic cultural framework. He concluded that because of Russian history of insecurity and authoritarian control, Soviet military exhibited a bias for pre-emptive and offensive uses of force. Snyder explained that elites articulate a unique strategic culture in regards to state's security-military affairs, socialized within distinctive modes of strategic thinking (1977). Snyder noted that 'as a result of this socialization process, a set of general beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour patterns with regard to nuclear

strategy has achieved a state of semi-permanence that places them on the level of “culture” rather than mere policy’ (1977: 8).

Snyder’s analysis found its significance with the subsequent works that formed what Johnston (1995) terms “the first generation” of literature on strategic culture (Gray 1981; Lord 1985; Jones 1990), which continued to explore ideational pillars of nuclear strategy and superpower relations.

*The first wave: military strategic culture*

Proponents of the first wave broadened the usage of strategic culture by including military strategic culture in general, while application of it remained mainly confined to superpower nuclear strategies. Inspired by Snyder’s work, Gray (1981) suggested that there is a ‘discernible American strategic culture’, which he defined as ‘modes of thought and action with respect to force, which derives from perception of the national historical experience, from aspirations for responsible behaviour in national terms and even from the civic culture and way of life’ (1981: 22). Therefore, strategic culture ‘provides the milieu within which strategy is debated and decided’ (Gray 1981: 22).

Jones (1990) identified the input into Soviet strategic culture by including three sets of variables: a macro-environmental level (geography, history and ethno-



cultural characteristics), a societal level (social, economic and political structure of society) and a micro level (military institutions and characteristics of civil-military relations). Jones argued that all these inputs together produced Soviet strategic culture that was infused into all levels of decision-making and delimited strategic options (1990).

As mentioned, the first wave works on strategic culture mainly described a 'synergistic link between strategic culture and WMD policy' (Lantis 2006: 7). The challenge for these scholars was to demonstrate that 'the technological dictates of the nuclear era were not as universal as had previously been suggested' (Poore 2004). In effect, the main focus was on explaining why the Soviets and Americans seemingly thought differently about nuclear strategy. The argument was that these differences were caused by differences in strategic thought, which in turn was a product of deeply rooted historical experience, political culture and geography (Gray 1981; Jones 1990).

While the literature in this wave concluded that there was one American strategic culture, distinct from one Soviet strategic culture, there were ambiguities about the definition of strategic culture ("too unwieldy") and how to study it (Johnston 1995; Stone 2006). Specifically, strategic culture was

viewed as consisting of a wide-range of variables, including: the nature and geography, the ethnic culture and traditions, history, organizational culture, historical strategic practices, political culture, national character, political psychology, technology, ideology, military history, civil–military relationships and international system structure (Gray 1981; Lord 1985; Jones 1990). As this definition contained both ideas and behaviour (a major bone of contention between Johnston 1995 and Gray 1999) the literature assumed that ‘strategic thought led to consistently to one type of behaviour’ (Johnston 1995:37; Stone 2006:1). Furthermore, the strategic choice was analysed by identifying traits of culture that was viewed as ‘timeless constant’ (Poore 2004: 54). Thereby, the literature in this wave could not adequately account for changes in strategic policy over time. Finally, since the literature expected a single consistent behaviour and leaving little space for discussion on cultural changes, they viewed strategic culture as a single entity that exists in ethno-territorial space and time, which contains no contradictory elements.

Despite the shortcomings of the first wave, it was able to provide valuable insights in to how culture, at minimum could influence state’s strategic preferences.

*The second wave: a critical account of strategic culture*

While the usage of strategic culture remained of military strategic culture in general, the second wave, appearing in the late 1980s, concentrated more on the possible manipulation of strategic culture by a particular group, for the purposes of creating a strategy that justifies actions and promotes group's interests (Luckham 1984; Klein 1988). In other words, strategic culture was viewed as 'a tool of political hegemony in the realm of strategic decision-making' (Johnston 1995: 39; Stone 2006). For Bradley Klein, strategic culture in this tradition establishes 'widely available orientations to violence and to the ways in which the state can legitimately use violence against putative enemies' (1988: 136). In this regard, 'popular representations of violence and of the "enemy" against whom violence is to be legitimately deployed become significant artefacts insofar as they construct as plausible a distinct range of identities and render others unavailable or implausible' (Klein 1988: 136).

In his analysis, Klein defined American strategic culture as "power projection", being able to extend its military power well beyond its national borders (1988). He also identified two strategic modes of this culture: one operational; one declaratory. Thereby, in the case of American nuclear policy, as he argues, on

the one side, was strategy based on 'defence, retaliation and deterrence', on the other, an active 'counter-force, and war fighting strategy' (Klein 1988: 138). Klein argued that operational strategy stressed warfighting in defence of American hegemony's interests, while declaratory strategy was used instrumentally by political elites to fashion a culturally and linguistically acceptable justification for operational strategy (1988; Johnston 1995).

Although strategic culture is viewed as instrumental, the second wave literature implies that strategic culture is a product of historical experience. Thereby, different states produce different strategic cultures, since historical experiences differ across states (Klein 1988). While the literature suggests that states speak different strategic culture languages, it seemingly expects the operation of it to be essentially similar. This operation, as literature argues, reflects interests of the hegemonic political order. This may make for a disjuncture between strategic culture and behaviour. As behaviour is the reflection of the interests of the decision-making group, strategic choice therefore appeared influenced by interests rather than by strategic culture, this appeared to be a challenge to the viability of the strategic culture approach.

This brings us to the much-discussed issue of instrumentality. The second wave literature implies that decision-making groups face strategic culture constraints which they however can manipulate. Yet, it was also argued that 'elites, too, are socialized in the strategic culture they produce, and thus can be constrained by the symbolic myths, which their predecessors created' (Johnston 1995: 40; Poore 2004). In other words, there is a possibility that decision-making groups were trapped in a symbolic discourse they nevertheless manipulated, though as semiconscious or culturally dependent acts rather than as instrumentalization (Johnston 1995; Poore 2004; Stone 2006; Libel 2016).

*The third wave: a broader usage of culture*

The 1990s witnessed a renewed interest in the relationship between culture and strategy and re-opened some old debates while bringing in some new insights into the research. While theoretical works on strategic culture, domestic structure and organizational culture proliferated, a broader debate also emerged in the context of cultural approaches within IR discipline, which has been energized with the rise of constructivism (Duffield 1999; Howlett and Glen 2005; Lantis 2006). For this reason, emergence of the third wave is usually

linked to the rise of constructivism in IR theory. The third wave generally distinguished itself from the previous waves by its

‘willingness to consider other aspects of state policy, not just those relating to military factors, which may be influenced by culture. This can involve an attempt both to widen the notion of security beyond military matters and to investigate how such concerns are influenced by culture’ (Howlett and Glenn 2005: 124).

In other words, unlike the previous waves, which merely focused on the military matters and framed strategic culture as influencing only this limited sphere of policy, the third wave broadened the purview of the concept of strategy. This correlated with the broadening and deepening of the concept of security, which Barry Buzan and the Copenhagen School has seen as both multisectoral and discursive in construction (1998). Furthermore, works of the third wave were inclined to challenge realist assumptions and they do it by employing a more diverse set of variables including, organizational, military and political culture (Johnston 1995; Poore 2004).

In their analysis both Elizabeth Kier (1995) and Jeffrey Legro (1994) stressed on the importance of the organizational culture. By focusing on the formulation of the military doctrines, Kier implied that military organizations do not inherently prefer offensive doctrines. Since the “military organizations differ in

their view of world” and the “proper conduct of their mission, it is rather the ‘military’s organizational culture, which constrains choices’ (1995: 66). In her view ‘domestic politics set constraints; the military’s culture interprets these constraints; the organizational culture is the intervening variable between civilian decisions and military doctrine’ (1995: 68). Similarly, Legro employed organisational culture in exploring the factors of the inadvertent escalations during the wars. He implies that the beliefs and norms held within military culture about the ‘optimal means to fight wars are important because they have a pervasive impact on the preferences and actions of both armies and states’ (1994: 109). As Legro explained, when specific means of warfare are compatible with the dominant war-fighting culture of state’s military branches, then ‘that nation is likely to take actions that contribute to escalation’ (1994: 110). However, when a type of warfare is antithetical to state’s military culture, that state will support restraint even in the face of provocative enemy incidents (1994).

Thomas Berger (1998) provided a broader analysis of culture by examination of the cases of Germany and Japan. Berger argued that the lack of post-Cold War militarization in these cases could be explained by analysing ‘the significance of the creation of national identities, the historical experience and the domestic-

institutional context of the two states' (Berger 1998 in Poore 2004: 60). Unlike the immanent contextualism of realism, Berger took a long historical view, noting that 'the persistent post-war culture of antimilitarism truly defined the security policies of these countries in the 1990s' (Berger 1998 in Lantis 2006: 11). In Berger's account, 'cultural beliefs and values act as the unique national lens to shape perceptions of events and even channel possible societal responses' (Berger 1998 in Lantis 2006: 11). In this sense, he states, that 'cultures enjoy a certain degree of autonomy and are not merely subjective reflections of concrete "objective' reality'" (Berger 1998 in Lantis 2006: 11).

The third wave questioned realist arguments about its predictive capacity and unlike the previous waves sought to not only "engage with" but also "go beyond" realism (Glenn et. al 2004). By highlighting the significance of the domestic cultural environment, including normative and ideational factors in influencing important international outcomes, the third wave has produced alternative scenarios for the future research (Glenn et. al 2004; Johnson et. al 2009).

While most of the works provided "cultural" alternative explanations of the international relations, some of the third wave works focused on the



reconceptualization of the debate in order to provide a comprehensive theory of strategic culture (Johnston 1995). This attempt of reconceptualization led to common referred, incommensurable, epistemological schism within strategic culture studies, known as the “Johnston-Gray debate”.

#### *Strategic culture: the Johnston-Gray debate*

The debate began with the positivist conceptualisation of strategic culture by Alastair Johnston (1995), for whom the earlier conceptualisations were far from acceptable, especially the one provided by the first wave. In Johnston’s view the first wave’s strategic cultural accounts were ‘at the same time over-determined and under-determined’ (1995: 36). By this he meant that they invoked broad and all-encompassing variables to specify the existence of a unique and persistent strategic culture that would affect strategic choice and which also would, in a reductionist way, explain all instances of state’s strategic behaviour (1995). Thereby they presented ‘mechanically deterministic implication that strategic thought led consistently to one type of behaviour’ (1995: 38). Johnston also observed that the models suggested by the first wave

defined strategic culture, both as independent variable (that caused the outcome of distinct patterns of strategic behaviour) and as dependent variable (the observable outcome itself), which made these models tautological (Johnston 1995).

Rather the concept suggested by Johnston treated strategic culture as an ideational explanatory variable that caused strategic behaviour, thereby excluding behaviour from definition of strategic culture (1995). This way he sought to measure causal effect of strategic culture relative to the contribution made by non-cultural variables on strategic outcomes. In instances where strategic behaviour would deviate from their preceding pattern, Johnston's model was able to explain the deviation by observing that state's strategic culture preferences were overridden by the force of other variables.

Johnston's approach provides some valuable insights into issues that were over-stated by the earlier works. Specifically, his approach challenged the first wave's assumptions that state's strategic culture contains no contradictory elements and lead consistently to one type of behaviour. Nevertheless, Johnston's positivist concept presented some methodological flaws. Treating strategic culture as just one independent variable among several that interact to

cause strategic outcome, might complicate the operationalisation of strategic culture. Specifically, such a treatment of strategic culture points researchers to assign definitive and quantitative values to cultural variables (Bloomfield 2012). While, material variables could, but not without significant commensurability problems, be quantitatively measured and their weights and impacts could, with some simplification, be compared to each other, it is not clear whether the same could be applied for cultural variables (Poore 2003; Bloomfield 2012).

In 1999 Colin Gray, a prominent first wave scholar delivered a response, claiming that strategic culture should be conceptualized 'contextually' rather than straightjacketed by positivism, and even suggested that the Johnston approach could lead to an 'intellectual wasteland' (Gray 1999: 51). By calling for contextuality, Gray emphasised a notion of strategic culture that is shaping context for behaviour and is itself as constituent of that behaviour (1999). In this sense, his concept rejected the separation between strategic culture and behaviour, for strategic culture is that which surrounds and gives meaning to strategic behaviour (Gray 1999). Thereby, the behaviour of a security community is a product of 'culturally shaped, or encultured, people, organisations, procedures, and weapons' (Gray 1999: 52).

This definition of strategic culture “out there”, surrounding, which shaping context for behaviour, suggests that that it includes all the factors (both material and ideational variables) that cause strategic decision making and implementation. In other words, there is nothing out of cultural context as Gray concluded that ‘strategic culture . . . [emerges] from the kind of mixed stew of ingredients that Johnston finds, and finds so methodologically frustrating’ (1999:58).

Gray’s conceptualisation again brought the tautological use of strategic culture forefront that Johnston had tried to convince others to avoid. More importantly, Gray openly embraced this position, noting at one point that ‘the unity of cultural influence and policy action denies the existence of the boundaries needed for the study of cause and effect’ (1999: 56), at another that ‘a critic would be correct in observing that if strategic culture is everywhere it is, in practicably researchable terms, nowhere’ (1999: 52), and finally he stated that, ‘let us state the methodologically appalling truth that there can be no such conceptual space because all strategic behaviour is effected by human beings who cannot help but be cultural agents’ (1999: 59).

Gray not only admitted that tautology is unavoidable but also stressed on the strong deterministic effect of culture on decision making that virtually rules out the possibility of human agency. As Gray's bold analysis unfolds, his contextual framework becomes more problematic and demands examination. Although his concept claims that strategic culture is shaping context for behaviour (including both material and ideational variables) and are simultaneously constituent of that behaviour, elsewhere, he suggests that 'strategic culture need not dictate a particular course of action, indeed domestic and external constraints frequently will prohibit such behaviour'(1999: 68). In this sense, he implicitly accepts that these "domestic and external" variables operate independently outside the cultural context, which is quite contrary to his contextual framework. Furthermore, Gray suggests that although strategic culture provides context for behaviour it does not necessarily cause strategic behaviour or in other words, states may behave counter-culturally. In his example, 'an overwhelmingly maritime strategic culture, like the British in World War I, is obliged to play an uncharacteristically major continental military role', however... British continental commitment... did not alter the dominant British strategic culture'. In Gray's account Britain's strategic culture does not explain this inconsistent and "strategically extraordinary" behaviour

to wage war as a continental power but it does explain why after the wars Britain returned to its preferred strategic mode, which is due to strategic culture providing a context for it (1999: 59).

Gray's position unfortunately is inconsistent with his own conceptualisation of strategic culture. If there is nothing out of context or strategic culture is a product of "all the variables", then how some "domestic and external" factors could lead states to act counter-culturally? Or more importantly, how do these "domestic and external" variables operate out of context independently? If he implies that these variables possess an independent causality then unfortunately it does not fit with his declared interpretative framework.

Overall, Gray's conceptualisation of strategic culture is explicit in suggesting that sometimes states follow their strategic-cultural preferences and in other occasions they do not, but it does not theorise when, how and why these inconsistencies will occur.

#### *The Strategic culture debate: Alternative conceptualizations*

Some other proponents of the paradigm offered different ways of conceptualising strategic culture, and most of them refer their analysis to the Johnston-Gray debate.

Stuart Poore generally supports Gray's concept that strategic culture provides an 'interpretive prism through which decision-makers view the strategic landscape' (2003: 281). However, Poore finds some claims provided by Gray as confusing and problematic. He invites Gray to consider adopting 'a context all the way down approach, whereby strategic culture continually constitutes and gives meaning to material factors' (2003: 282). He also notes that 'if strategy cannot fail but be cultural, then non-cultural or material variables can have no meaning outside of the cultures that condition them. Hence a tautology is inevitable: everything cultural does matter and cannot be disconnected from anything else' (2003: 282).

Strong interpretative strategic cultural concept offered by Poore seemingly puts too much causal explanation on ideas and beliefs alone. This, virtually rules out the independent effect of some significant material variables such as geography, relative power and technology. Furthermore, it leaves no space for human agency, since in Poore's account decision makers are encultured all the way down.

Iver Neumann and Henrikki Heikka (2005) have also generally endorsed Gray's concept. By rejecting Johnston's approach, they noted that his concept

'presumes that behaviour' (as something "out there") would not in itself be a constitutive part of culture, and that it can thus be studied separately from culture. This assumption is simply untenable' (2005: 9). Instead they claimed that our understanding of strategic culture should reflect the mutually constitutive relationship between agents and structures and suggested to follow "practice theory" that concentrates 'on the dynamic interplay between practices and discourses' (2005: 10).

John Glen (2009) identifies four main conceptions of strategic culture and provides a thematic analysis of the debate. Glen locates Johnston's school in the "epiphenomenal" and "conventional constructivist" conceptions, where both conceptions seek to establish generalizations by identifying repetitive patterns of state behaviour and identify causal variables/intervening variables responsible for such regularities (2009). They attempt to identify 'the preferred military options that states adopt to achieve particular objectives...[and]...to accomplish this, the cultural aspects dealt with are limited to those concerned with strategy rather than encompassing culture in its wider sense' (Glen 2009: 531).



Gray's school in contrast encompasses the "post-structuralist" and "interpretivist" conceptions (Glen 2009). The "post-structuralist" approach is concerned primarily with dominant discourses and social practices, which are constructed and used by social actors (2009: 536). Whereas, "the interpretivist" conception 'view culture as being akin to ideas: that is, they operate at many different levels and in a complex, intersecting and overlapping fashion' (Glen 2009: 539). Both conceptions emphasise the ungeneralisable, sui-generis nature of culture and the cases (Glen 2009).

#### *The fourth wave: Strategic Sub-cultures*

The works of this recent and emerging wave of strategic culture have sought to overcome the weakness of the previous waves (Bloomfield 2012; Burns and Eltham 2014; Libel 2016). By reformulating strategic culture as consisting of competing strategic sub-cultures, this wave concentrated on solving the long-debated issues of cultural effect on strategic choice, explored states' apparently aberrant behaviour and the mechanisms for changes in states' strategic cultures, and of course the operationalization of strategic culture as an analytical tool.

A central example of the fourth wave research is provided by Alan Bloomfield (2012). In his analysis, Bloomfield generally endorses the “interpretivist approach”, viewing the positivist framework inapplicable to cultural analysis. Furthermore, he identifies the “too-coherent” and the “too-much-continuity” problems emerging from the works of the previous waves. By this, he meant that ‘existing models tend to be stated in a manner which is too coherent, meaning they can’t account for occasional strategic-behavioural inconsistencies, and/or they suggest too much continuity and cannot thereby adequately account for changes in strategic policy over time’ (2012: 437). In order to solve these problems, Bloomfield offers to reformulate a state’s strategic culture as:

‘a singular entity which contains contradictory elements, various strains’ or ‘traditions’ or ... competing subcultures...[which]... present a different interpretation of a state’s international social/cultural context...[and which]... compete in public discourse for influence over strategic decision-making’(2012: 437-451).

Therefore, when a certain strategic policy has been in place for years or a state’s strategic behaviour has been consistent, Bloomfield’s concept assumes that ‘a particular subculture has been dominant: it has guided strategic decision-makers’ perceptions, their attribution of causality, and which behavioural responses they consider most appropriate during that period’ (2012: 452). In an

instance when a state's strategic behaviour deviates from its typical pattern, his model explains this aberrancy as a predomination of a subordinate subculture over the dominant one, which might lead to a profound change in state's security and foreign policy (Bloomfield 2012).

The fourth wave indeed has an edge over previous waves, suggesting acceptable solutions for long debated issues within strategic culture research. Nevertheless, some points are worth examining closer. Sticking to the Gray's example of British "strategically extraordinary behaviour" during the wars, the fourth wave's model will explain that this aberrancy occurred by the shift of competing subcultures in British strategic culture. And that Britain's return to its normal strategic mode after the wars again will be explained by the shift or return of the pre-war subculture to its dominant position within a state's strategic culture terrain. Therefore, while the Bloomfield's model explains this aberrancy and changes in strategic culture, he remained implicit how and why the shift between competing subcultures occurred or more importantly he remained too inexplicit to identify the underlying causal and social mechanism of the competition between subcultures. Furthermore, as Bloomfield asserts, different interpretations of a state's international social/cultural context are central to each competing subculture, while having reached a dominant

position a certain subculture with unique interpretations of how to approach security and foreign policy will exclude some policy options from the spectrum of the accepted ones within a state's strategic thinking. In other words, a certain subculture with a different worldview reaching a dominant or hegemonic position will inject its interpretations into a state's strategic culture, which in turn might profoundly change the strategic culture and outlook of a given state.

### *Strategic Subcultures*

In his work, Snyder viewed strategic culture as consisting of distinct competing subcultures (1977). By subculture, Snyder meant a 'subsection of a broader strategic community with distinct beliefs and attitudes on strategic issues' (1977: 10). Moreover, by his original definition of strategic culture as 'a set of semi-permanent beliefs, attitudes and behavioural patterns', Snyder (by semi-permanent) implicitly embraced the possibility of strategic culture change based on the assumption of the non-monolithic nature of the strategic culture (1977). Snyder's concise definition of strategic culture, however, was overlooked by the first, second and the third waves, which led to philosophical debates on the operationalization of the paradigm. (Johnston 1995; Gray 1999).

Only Alastair Johnston (1995) and later works of the fourth waves have raised a question of subcultures (Broomfield 2012; Libel 2016). Johnston recognized 'the possibility that different subcultures can undergird competitive strategic preferences', hence he accepted the possibility of the existence of multiple subcultures within given strategic culture (1995: 38). However, in his framework, Johnston argues that one subculture would hold a predominant position with devoted interests to keep a status quo (1995). This according to Johnston's framework is achieved by the manipulation and imposing cultural forms on other groups by the dominant subculture, which eventually limits the range of strategic options and pre-empts challenges to the status quo (1995).

Alan Bloomfield (2012) and Tamir Libel (2016) in the framework of the fourth wave argue for the existence of subcultures within given the strategic culture. According to Bloomfield 'strategic subcultures compete with each other in offering the "most accurate" interpretation of the given state's international context, and more importantly, which other states or other international actors should be treated as friends or foes' (2012: 453). While remaining implicit on to how particular subculture wins or loses the predominant position within the strategic culture, Bloomfield explicit in arguing that with the shift of subcultures state's strategic policy would change profoundly (2012). In other

words, an adaptation of new dominant discourses would necessarily lead to the exclusion of certain policy options from the spectrum of accepted ones.

Unlike Bloomfield (2012), Tamir Libel (2016) is more explicit on the "social mechanism" that underlies the competition among subcultures. Similar to Johnston's argument, Libel's framework states that among many one subculture would hold a "hegemonic" position that would marginalize alternative understandings (2016). However, during the crises, a dominant status of the hegemonic subculture could collapse, which would initiate a competition among subcultures (Libel 2016). Among many alternative strategies proposed by distinct subcultures as a response to the crisis, a strategic community will accept more the appropriate one, which would make a particular subculture the hegemonic (Libel 2016).

Overall, although there are some differences in frameworks, all these studies accept the existence of distinct subcultures within the given strategic culture (Snyder 1977; Johnston 1995; Bloomfield 2012; Libel 2016).

The fourth wave's assumption on strategic subculture can profitably be combined with insights from *epistemic communities* which was discussed earlier in this Chapter and *social network theory*. Such a merger may be beneficial in

studying states' strategic culture, based on a more rigorous strategic subculture approach. I therefore turn to social network theoretical concept in the following sections.

### *Social Networks*

The research on network studies demonstrates that individuals are inclined to be associated and bond with the like-minded others. This inclination or tendency in the literature is known as the "homophily" principle. As McPherson et.al noted, 'homophily is the principle that a contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people (2001: 416).

In the early 1950s Lazarsfeld and Merton distinguished between two types of homophily: *status homophily* and *value homophily*. Status homophily, it was argued, 'includes the major sociodemographic dimensions that stratify society—ascribed characteristics like race, ethnicity, sex, or age, and acquired characteristics like religion, education, occupation, or behaviour patterns, while value homophily includes the wide variety of internal states presumed to shape our orientation toward future behaviour' (McPherson et.al. 2001: 419).

The strongest divide according to the study is created by the status homophily with the main variables of race, age, religion, education and occupation (McPherson et.al. 2001). While this is valid for the given geographical space or particular community where will be the networks created by the status homophily, there might be divisions within the networks in the form of clusters<sup>1</sup> created by the value homophily; attitude, belief, and value similarity that led to attraction and interaction (Huston and Levinger 1978).

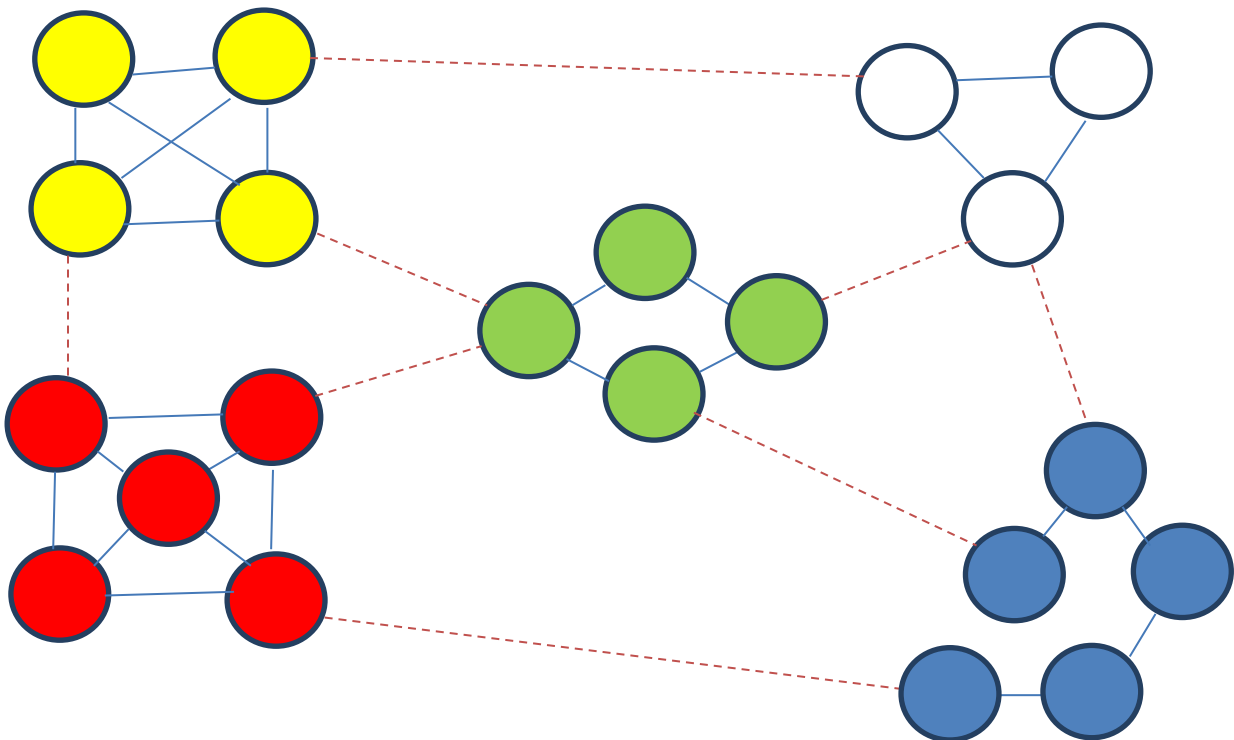
This framework could be applied to strategic culture theory in order to gain a more nuanced picture of how subcultures emerge and are consolidates. A strategic culture is based on network of individuals, which is foremost created by the ascribed factors such as nationality, language, geography and by acquired characteristics like education, religion and occupation. However, while these ties are created by status homophily, there will be the sub-networks within strategic community based on value homophily related to unique beliefs and attitudes. As a result, this will create number of clusters, sub-networks or subcultures of like-minded individuals, and these clusters will be linked to each other based on status homophily.

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<sup>1</sup> A sub-set in the network graph that possess certain common characteristics



**Graph 1.** Illustration of value homophily based on clusters within the network of status homophily principle



## 2.5 Strategic Culture 2.0: Towards a new Analytical Framework

In order to use it as a rigorous analytical framework, this thesis builds on the fourth wave's assumption on strategic "subcultures", and will use constructivist and critical geopolitics insights to enrich the strategic culture approach, for their assumptions mostly reconcile. For instance, their

perspectives foreground the intangible aspects of world politics, e.g., the mental, cognitive, and discursive constructions. They do not limit the state security considerations merely to physical security, and all approaches accept the broader notion of rationality (cf. Max Weber in Kalberg 1980).

*The strength of constructivism and critical geopolitics*

Both constructivism and critical geopolitics have an edge over strategic culture on their emphasis on the significance and practices of safeguarding security and continuity of states' identity structures. Although the fourth wave works on strategic culture mentions adding states' (de)securitization and identity (re)structure processes into the analysis, it has not been demonstrated in an applied theoretical framework. Moreover, critical geopolitics along with analysing the states' spatial conceptions and revealing states' geographical imagery, demonstrates how a specific discourse is produced, used and socialized and enter into the making of foreign policy (Agnew 2003).

By enriching strategic culture approach with some strong and applicable techniques of constructivism and critical geopolitics, this work seeks to gain a rigours analytical framework that will demonstrate a more thorough and

updated understanding of Russia's strategic culture and its effect on the foreign policy choices of the Russian Federation.

## **CHAPTER 3: RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC CULTURE AFTER THE COLD WAR**

The aim of this Chapter is to provide a knowledge of Russia's strategic culture after the Cold War. To this end Chapter begins with the discussion of developed analyses on Russian strategic culture and their weaknesses. Further Chapter discusses the Russian foreign policy infrastructure and Russia's strategic culture framework.

### **3.1 An Overview of the Development of Russian Strategic Culture analyses**

The first and foundational strategic culture analysis of Soviet Russia was undertaken by Jack Snyder in 1977. Indeed, the term itself "strategic culture" was coined by him and has been marked as a novel in the discipline (Gray 1981). By applying his work to a superpower nuclear dilemma, Snyder suggested that neither the Soviet nor the American strategists are culture-free and he proceeded to conceptualise the Soviet approach to strategic thinking as a unique strategic culture (1977). Soviet strategic thinking of the time as he described, 'may be more favourably inclined toward unilateral damage

limitation strategies than cooperative ones' (1977: 5). This, in Snyder's account, was due to the historical legacy, for 'a Russian's threshold of unacceptable damage to the homeland may be quite different from an American's...because Americans have never had the devastating war fought on their territory' (1977). Similarly, he argued, 'the rude experience of Russian history may explain Soviets' distrust of cooperative strategies of interwar deterrence and their preferable self-reliance' (Snyder 1977: 28). This historical legacy of self-reliance has stressed on the superior war-fighting capability and on a military build-up, as there was a conviction that even 'nuclear war can have winners and losers' (Snyder 1977: 10).

However, Snyder identifies another tendency in Soviet strategic thinking which was based on the belief that there can be no winner in a nuclear war (1977). This tendency or *subculture* as Snyder termed it, in contrast to the former one, emphasized deterrence and limited arms build-up as there was a conviction that enhancing war-fighting capabilities would undermine stability of a deterrent balance (1977). Both subcultures, as Snyder argued the case, were members of the broader strategic culture that share fundamental outlooks with each other but due to distinct beliefs and attitudes and separate institutional associations to deal with the strategic issues, the ideas would differ (Snyder

1977). Snyder found the first tendency associated with Soviet military, proponents of which, military professionals, were 'poorly attuned to the political and diplomatic aspects of the use of force...this professional preoccupation with war-fighting naturally leads to an appreciation of the benefits of superiority and scepticism regarding the idea of finite deterrence' (1977: 30-31). Whereas, the second tendency Snyder identified, was associated with certain political officials, analysts at research institutions and various journals, who questioned the possibility of meaningful victory in a nuclear war and the utility of ever-larger strategic forces (1977). Snyder concluded that the Soviet strategic culture at the time entertained more offensive war-waging characteristics (which was noticeable with the military build-up during the 1970s), with less inclination toward cooperative strategies of balancing (1977). This, Snyder concluded, was due to the general sympathy of the political leadership to the military's outlook and the Politburo's willingness to accommodate and compromise the military's view even if it differs from its own (1977).

David Jones, like Snyder, mainly viewed Soviet strategic culture as a product of Russian historical experience (1990). However, Jones did not limit it merely to the recent history, as Snyder had to mostly Stalin's period. Rather, as a

reference he took Russian history of war more beyond the 1917 October Revolution, to the Mongol and Swedish-German invasions of the mid-1200s to be precise (Jones 1990). Throughout their history of warfare, as Jones noted, Russians had developed a belief that they were surrounded by real enemies, a belief which has been later reinforced by the Marxist-Leninist ideology (1990). This belief has also been accompanied by 'the strategic realities' of the Russian empire, (at least until *c.* 1800, as Jones specified), specifically 'the problems posed by Russia's geography and topography' due to 'lack of natural boundaries' (1990: 38). With a conviction of the constant threat of invasions, 'Russian military traditions and policies naturally tend to reflect that conviction...so it is not unreasonable to explain Imperial Russia's expansion as resulting largely from the fact that a natural reaction to threats on all sides was to push the enemy farther and farther away' (Jones 1990: 38).

Therefore, as Jones formulated, Russia's unique historical and geographical circumstances have produced a unique Russian strategic 'pathology' or 'culture' (1990: 35). However, Jones' definition is not as definitive as Snyder's. While in his work Jones noted that Russia's approach to strategic issues had embraced more militarized elements, which has been developed from its suspicion of the outside world, accompanied with some strategic realities,

elsewhere he noted that Russia's strategic thinking 'increasingly emphasises diplomacy' (1990: 43). In other words, Jones accepted an active dualism in Russia's strategic culture, but remained implicit on how and why it was possible.

In his work, Henrikki Heikka sought to demonstrate that Russia's strategic culture of a time was gradually changing or reviving characteristics of the old Soviet period strategic thinking (2000). Like Snyder, Heikka emphasised the existence of dualism in the Soviet strategic thinking and distinguished them as distinct strategic approaches (2000). Specifically, he identified two distinct traditions, the "hardline" and the "realist" (Heikka 2000: 3). The "hardline" tradition as Heikka formulated it, was 'characterized by near-paranoid threat perception and a preference for offensive strategies' while the "realist" thinking was based on an 'understanding of security dilemma theory' (2000: 3). According to Heikka, until the mid-1980s, the Soviet strategic culture has been represented by the "hardline" tradition, which due to some internal and external constraints has been replaced by "realist" tradition (2000). However, the former tradition as Heikka identified, was revitalised and beginning to dominate the latter (2000).



In Heikka's account the 'structural and systemic changes' could be seen as driving forces in strategic thinking changes (2000). In this framework, the strategic culture changes of the 1980s were explained by the Soviet Union's inability to keep up on strategic equilibrium vis-à-vis the United States, which had strengthened the revisionist idea that 'the hostile encirclement of the Soviet Union was caused partly by its own past belligerency and...offensiveness' (Heikka 2000: 17). Changes in the late 1990s, was explained by US unilateralism in the Balkans and the NATO's growing geographical proximity to the Russian borders (Heikka 2000).

While presenting external constraints, Heikka (2000) scarcely discussed how these external developments were distinctively interpreted within Russian strategic culture.

Another work on Russia's strategic culture was undertaken by John Glenn in 2004. Despite the date of the work, Glenn's analysis covered much of Soviet period rather than post-Soviet Russia's strategic culture. Like the analysis of previous proponents, Glenn's work viewed 'geography and history as the main sources' of Soviet/Russian strategic culture (2004: 173). Generally, he proposed that Russian historical experience of conflict resulting from foreign invasions

without natural defensible borders, and the high numbers of casualties resulting from these wars, have made Russia's strategic culture embrace more offensive and expansionist strategies (2004). This vulnerability of invasions as Glenn noted, was later reinforced by Marxist-Leninist theories of class struggle, which generally remained unchanged until the late 1980s (2004). However, with 'the Gorbachev Revolution' the explanatory value of class struggle and the practicality of offensive military capabilities came under question (Glenn 2004). With the *new political thinking* the Soviet foreign and security policies have gone through dramatic changes and the importance of class struggle was subjugated by 'the priority of human values and by the survival of humankind' (Glenn 2004: 189). The new thinking called for a nuclear-free world with the absence of war where the international order would be formed under 'good-neighbourliness and cooperation' rather than military power and the systemic otherness (Glenn 2004: 189). This, as Glenn noted, has led to a shift in Soviet strategic thinking from an offensive to a defensive posture (2004).

However, Glenn like Heikka, in his conclusion identified a revival of some aspects of the pre-Gorbachev period strategic culture in the late 1990s (2004). Although the changing nature of strategic culture was accepted in Glenn's work, it was not interrogated why those changes occurred.

Norbert Eitelhuber offer an alternative examination of Russia's strategic culture. Like Glenn and others before him, Eitelhuber saw Russia's strategic culture as 'deeply rooted in its history and geography' (2009: 2). Throughout Russian history from the Imperial to the Soviet era, Eitelhuber noted, without an 'easily defensible geographical boundaries...the perception of being the object of aggressive imperial desires of neighbouring states prevailed and shaped Russian threat perception...this influenced Russia's ambitions to modernize its armed forces, its economy, and its political system in order to strengthen the state' (2009: 5-8). Feelings of vulnerability thus influenced the centralization of the state. Alongside the maximisation of offensive military capabilities, Eitelhuber, like Jones, highlighted an 'autocratic' political system to be an outcome of Russia' strategic culture, for that 'seemed to be the type of governance that was best suited to cope with the wide range of external and internal threats that cropped up throughout Russian history' (2009: 6).

Eitelhuber points to the significant changes after the break-up of the Soviet Union. Importantly, 'Russia's imperial ambitions vanished, along with the desire to spread an ideology...the role of military strength as source of power declined, while the prominence of economic power increased' (2009: 1). Those changes, however, as Eitelhuber formulated, have not changed Russia's

strategic culture altogether (2009). Russia's strategic culture of a time was still 'characterized...by an 'obsessive perception of a general threat towards Russian sovereignty and territorial integrity, and...by great power aspirations as a response...only autocratic leadership is seen to be able to cope with the challenges to which Russia is exposed' (Eitelhuber 2009: 27).

This view led Eitelhuber to conclude that Russia's strategic culture has not been changed much, rather, has been 'fairly stable' throughout history and 'enduring' aspects of Imperial/Soviet strategic thinking of was present in a contemporary Russia (Eitelhuber 2009: 1).

A similar view was presented by Fritz Ermarth (2009) in his work. Ermarth like others before him saw geography and Russian long history of war as the main components of Russia's strategic culture.

'Physical and ethnographic geography gave Muscovy and the Russian state no readily established and defensible borders...this condition invited attack...it inspired a combination of fear about vulnerability and an appetite for achieving security and status by expansion...this contributed greatly to the militarization of Russian strategic culture' (2009: 86).

While others described Russian expansion as a need for a “buffer zone” based on defence strategy, Ermarth (2009) viewed it as an Imperial “appetite” and “ambition”. Like Johns (1990) and Eitelhuber (2009), Ermarth (2009: 86) also highlighted a significant impact of “political culture” in shaping Russian strategic culture, arguing that Russian political culture ‘is itself very martial or harmonious with military values in that it is grounded on the principle of *kto-kovo* (who-whom), i.e., who dominates over whom...which, has been major contributor to strategic culture, especially to its militarization’ (2009: 87). Russian political culture and foreign policy culture to some extent, Ermarth continued, ‘have always had some elements of messianism, that is, a sense national and international mission beyond security and prosperity for the country’ (2009: 88).

Like Eitelhuber (2009), Ermarth viewed that the “traditional” Russian strategic culture (which has been one of the most ‘martial and militarized of such cultures in history’ (2009: 86)) as enduring and fairly stable beginning from Imperial Russia through most of the existence of the Soviet Union (2009). Unlike Eitelhuber, however, Ermarth accepted that ‘starting sometime in the 1970s, accelerating in the 1980s, dramatically so in the years after the collapse of the USSR, condition have arisen which open the possibility of ...significantly

demilitarizing Russian strategic culture' (2009: 85). Both concurred that the reassertion of traditional Russian strategic culture under Vladimir Putin could swiftly lead to remilitarization.

Alexander Litvinenko is another author falling within the post-Soviet period of thinkers on Russia's strategic culture, writing in the Russian language. His work, which appeared in 2013, sought to present the mechanisms of formation of Russia's strategic culture, its main characteristics and instruments (Litvinenko 2013). Litvinenko viewed institutional memory, education and writings as the main mechanisms of formation of Russian strategic culture (2013). While he remained implicit regarding the former, Litvinenko highlighted *Akademiya Genshtaba* (Academy of the General Staff) and *MGIMO* (Moscow State Institute of International Relations) as the two main educational establishments where the traditional approaches are explored, socialized into and thus preserved in a contemporary Russia (2013: 5). Under writings he included popular writings and what he labelled as *populyarnaya kul'tura* (popular culture) have significantly influenced the strategic culture of Imperial, Soviet and contemporary Russian leadership (Litvinenko 2013).

As Litvinenko argued, Russian strategic culture has been historically based on very strong cult of power, *kto sil'neye – tot i pervyy* (the strongest is the uppermost). This in his view has resulted from the traditional security dilemma (Litvinenko 2013). Given past history, Russia has been viewing the outside world as “untrustworthy” that has inclined towards the strategic idea of *annigilyatsii opponentov* (annihilation of opponents) (Litvinenko 2013: 6). This idea in turn had made Russia embrace and maximize its offensive military capabilities (Litvineko 2013). Russia has chosen a strategic expansion to create *poyas bezopasnosti* (a buffer zone), thus building an empire as a solution to the threats (Litvineko 2013: 7). Yet, due to the security paradox, as Litvineko (2013) noted, expansionism has not reduced Russian insecurity, but rather given rise to more threats.

Moreover, contrary to the argument of others (Snyder 1977; Johns 1990; Glenn 2004), Litvenenko viewed ‘insensitivity to losses’ as another main characteristic of Russian strategic culture (2013: 7). This in his view was best formulated by Stalin, *baby novykh narozhayut* (women will give birth to new ones). As Russia in the last two hundred years, had the largest manpower in the European strategic theatre, Kremlin could afford such an approach (Litvineko, 2013).

As the instruments of Russia's strategic culture, Litvineko emphasized structural power, soft power and economic dimension of hard power (2013: 17-18). To take advantage of structural power, as Litvineko argued, Kremlin has been using international organizations, such as Warsaw Pact, The Collective Security Treaty Organization (ОДКБ) and The Eurasian Economic Community (ЕвразЭС). This assisted Kremlin to keep other members of these organizations as dependent on Russia that perfectly fit with its "buffer zone" strategy (Litvineko 2013). Another unique feature is Kremlin's dependency strategy, is economic dependence (Litvineko 2013). This building of dependency relationships is best noticeable in an energy sector. By supplying energy, Kremlin has formed an economic dependence that fit with it's a buffer zone strategy and is also beneficial for political privilege (Litvineko 2013). As regards the soft power aspect, Kremlin has been using an idea of *Ruskiy mir* (Russian world) (2013). However, the use of soft power is the weakest among the Kremlin's strategic instruments in the contemporary period (Litvineko 2013). While Orthodoxy and communism have carried a character with global consequences, the idea of "Russian world" does not.

One of the recent works on Russia' strategic culture was undertaken by Polina Sinovets (2016). Unlike previous studies, Sinovets' (2016) work was not



dedicated to present the detailed “portrait” of Russian strategic culture. Rather based on other analyses, Sinovets sought to demonstrate “the main pillars” of Russian strategic culture, and applying it to gain an understanding of the motivations behind recent Russian foreign policy decisions (2016). Sinovets, like others before her, emphasized the role of geography and history in forming Russian ‘traditional threat perception based on a deep feeling of insecurity and a general geopolitical interpretation of international relations’ (2016: 419). Sinovets, like Ermarth (2009), highlighted Russia’s ‘messianic’ self-perception as its other component of strategic culture (2016: 418). To be certain, ‘Russia perceives itself as a great state responsible for the special mission in the world, which is a reflection of God’s commandment, a sort of higher truth and justice’ (2016: 418). This messianic mission is supported by consecutively strong ideologies, ‘Moscow as the Third Rome, Russia as the patron and the defender of all Slavs, USSR as the source and the tool of the world socialist revolution’ (Sinovets 2016: 418). Sinovets asserted that this messianic component of Russia’s strategic culture was still relevant and noticeable in the official rhetoric of Kremlin (2016).

While comparing contemporary Russia's strategic culture to the Soviet period, Sinovits viewed a continuity, arguing that 'from Stalin to Putin' Russia's strategic culture to certain extent followed the same tradition (2016: 420).

Another recent work on Russia's strategic culture was undertaken by the Danish scholar, Mette Skak (2016). Skak tried to challenge *neorealist* view that the Russian actions of a time in Ukraine were reaction to the US, EU and NATO dynamics in the region. Rather, as she formulated, it was 'security policy habits of mind...caused the Kremlin to intervene' (Skak 2016: 324).

In Skak's view it was domestic concerns of Russia behind Kremlin's 'resort to arms' (2016: 325). Precisely, as she formulated, 'the driver was a Kremlin perception that the Maidan Revolution might spill over into Russia, a perception shaped by *chekist* misperception of Maidan as a colour revolution instigated by the US' (2016: 325). By *chekist*, Skak meant key actors from the Soviet Era secret services (KGB) 'who were promoted to high positions after collapse of the Soviet Union' (2016: 325). *Chekisty* who have had *kto-kogo* (whom) mentality, as Skak noted, from the Soviet period to contemporary times have been obsessed 'with regime security' (2016: 328). This obsession with "regime security" for *chekists*, in Skak's view is more significant than 'national

security, let alone protection of citizenry' (2016: 328). Skak's point was that chekists have turned 'post-Soviet strategic culture into an obsession with regime security in continuation of the professional KGB ethic they were socialized into' (2016: 326). Therefore, while Ukraine was seen as vital geopolitically to Russia, as Skak puts it, in reality Kremlin 'was never pragmatic towards' it, rather it was regime security that mattered and triggered Russian actions in Ukraine (2016: 333).

Unlike other studies, Skak's work did not view Russian geography and history of war as main components of Russia's strategic culture (2016). Nor did her work view messianic self-perception elements as additional components as others did. While she did not reject pre-Soviet early Russian history's role in shaping Russian strategic culture, she viewed it only as marginal (2016). Therefore, although Skak had covered the historical background, she gave preference only to the post-Stalin period until 2016, which in her view was the most relevant time frame for Russian strategic culture analysis, as it was 'the time of the most outspoken institutional autonomy of the chekisty' (2016: 337).

As Skak concluded, Soviet strategic culture has continued in the post-Soviet Russia's strategic thinking (2016). This continuity between Soviet and post-

Soviet Russian strategic culture, as she formulated it, 'manifests itself in the chekist instinct of *kto kogo*' (2016: 330). This led Skak to argue that the chekisty were the keepers of Soviet/Russian strategic culture (2016).

Although Skak's work seems to be more about organizational culture (KGB), rather than general strategic culture, by arguing that chekists are the keepers of current Russia's strategic culture, she seemingly followed Snyder's (1977) argument of strategic *subculture* or Heikka's (2000) strategic *tradition*. If chekists are the keepers of current Russian strategic culture, apparently there must have been others who kept or dominated this culture long before the chekisty.

Possibly Skak acknowledges this, but complicated this possibility by mentioning elsewhere that 'Russian strategic culture is dysfunctional mainly because of a syndrome of perceptions, misperception and groupthink characterizing Russia's contemporary chekisty' (2016: 326). By this Skak seemingly viewed Russian strategic culture as distinct from the chekist beliefs, which was paralyzed by KGB's culture. If the chekists are keepers of current Russian strategic culture than what was the 'dysfunctional strategic culture'? Is it a competing subculture or a distinct strategic culture (or multiple strategic cultures?). This is uncertain in Skak's work.

In summary, the pioneer work of the paradigm, which was undertaken by Jack Snyder (1977) was dedicated to understand the Soviet strategic thinking in regards to the nuclear realm, rather than to present the entire dynamics and implications of the Soviet strategic culture. Snyder (1977) used some determinants such as history and geography to support his claims in a given time period (1977). All the subsequent works on the subject, except Skak (2016) have built their arguments on the determinants that were originated by Snyder (1977). While these determinants to some extent could be accurate for the studies in the first period, their accuracy for the second period and for the subsequent works could be questioned for discussing the post-Soviet Russian strategic culture. Using the same overarching strategic culture framework employed by the Soviet period pundits, which was labelled by Stuart Poore (2003) as methodologically and conceptually “under-explored” paradigm, will be misleading.

Indeed, the weakness of the analytic framework is the general flaw of the operationalisation of the strategic culture paradigm in the literature. Indeed, almost all of the works on Russian strategic culture suffer from inability to account for state’s aberrant strategic behaviour, having committed themselves to arguments about continuity and stability as well as solitary strategic cultures.

As a consequence, existent studies cannot adequately account for changes in strategic culture. Although some were able to identify changes, they did not develop analytic approaches to adequately explain them.

Overall, the studies on Russian strategic culture have not present a nuanced understanding of a contemporary Russia's strategic culture. Consequently, the present thesis seeks to move towards a new rigorous analytical framework within the broader strategic culture approach, in order to improve the conceptualization and operationalization of the paradigm in general.

### **3.2 Russia's Foreign Policy and Strategic Subcultures**

Russia's foreign policy priorities are formulated and shaped in accordance with the set of accepted views, perceptions, attitudes and beliefs about Russia and the outside world. While the external conditions play a significant role in shaping Russia's foreign policy priorities, the way policy-makers read and interpret these conditions is not insignificant. There are instances within the different historical junctions, where Russian decision-makers presented distinct strategic responses to the similar external conditions. While this is directly linked to the unique interpretation of the external factors, which may trigger

the change in foreign and security policy course, this is, I argue, generally a product of the non-monolithic nature of Russia's strategic culture.

Different subcultures have taken shape and operate within Russia's strategic culture. Each strategic subculture is based on shared views, perceptions, attitudes and beliefs about the outside world and Russia's role within it, which formulates often a unique conception of Russia's "self" and "geographical" imagery and distinct notions about state's national and security interests. These distinct notions are reflected in the official security and foreign policy discourses, conveying at times ambivalent and conflicting self-representations juxtaposed with rival representations of a significant Other. Most of a time, the role of the significant Other in the competing Russia's self-imagery socialization process is given to the West, particularly to the United States.

Russian foreign policy is the reflection of Russia's strategic calculus and the describing guideline in which the strategic objectives are to be achieved within the foreign policy sphere.

#### *The Foreign Policy Infrastructure of Russia*

By law the formulation process of the Foreign Policy Concept (FPC) of the Russian Federation (RF), is assigned to the two federal bodies: 'the President

sets the State's foreign policy guidelines, directs the country's foreign policy, and the Security Council of the Russian Federation (SCRF) formulates the State's foreign and military policy guidelines, and forecasts, identifies, analyses and assesses threats to Russia's national security, prepares proposals for the President of the Russian Federation regarding the adoption of special measures with a view to ensuring national security' (FPC 2000). The President chairs the Security Council and appoints its members.

By law the Russian President possess an executive power in decision-making in all spheres, including foreign policy. Within this "super-presidential" system the individual and institutional influences of other political actors have relatively little influence, except the president's close advisers. While, president is the member of a particular strategic community, he also undertakes a role of the arbiter among various subcultures. This role of the arbiter is mostly performed when a ground exists for the various strategic subcultures to compete for the influence. During the different external and internal circumstances e.g. crises and uncertainty, the arbiter may execute an implementation of particular strategic narratives that align with particular strategic subcultures.



By applying strategic culture approach in reconstructing Russia's MENA policy, this thesis argues that there have been changes in the Russian foreign policy priorities in the region. These changes are seen resulting mainly from the shift in the constitution of Russian strategic thinking. The shift occurs, when one (dominant) subculture within Russian strategic culture is eclipsed by a hitherto subordinate one or a competing strategic narrative of an otherwise subordinate subculture is included in the spectrum of ascendant ones. The new ascendant subculture with its new accepted strategic narrative may present a different understanding of Russia's international social/cultural context, a distinct interpretation of external conditions and unique understandings of the appropriate ways of defining and resolving the various strategic challenges and opportunities that Russia faces.

### **3.3 Russia's Strategic Culture Framework: Strategic Subcultures**

This work suggests viewing Russian strategic culture as non-monolithic entity, consisting of distinct and possibly contradictory beliefs and attitudes, derived from historical experiences and accepted narratives, which forms particular groups or subcultures that are associated not only with institutional or organizational characteristics but also with the homophily principle in social

networks that shape distinct collective identity or image and interactions with other groups and which compete in influencing the strategic course of the country by prescribing what I refer to as "articulations" in dealing with the strategic challenges.

### **3.3.1 The Two Clusters of Russia's Strategic Thinking**

Russia's strategic culture derives from the two opposing clusters of strategic thinking, which have been developed throughout Russia's course in the American dominated post-Cold War order. These clusters could respectively be labelled as "neo-Soviet" and "pro-Western" by their security and foreign policy stance and orientation. Each is an umbrella group of distinct strategic groupings or subcultures. While, the subcultures are distinct in their beliefs and attitudes and produce unique strategic 'articulations' in regards to Russia's foreign and security policy options, they also carry overlapping ideas, which bring them to cooperate under the specific circumstances.

#### **3.3.1.1 The pro-Western Cluster**

For the pro-Western cluster, the West was and to some extent is the referent for Russia's evolving state identity. Discourses of Russia's similarity with the West,

ideas for multilateralism and international cooperation and the need for Russian modernization all have roots in the pro-Western cluster. Under this cluster, it could be evaluated three main articulations of strategic thinking, which individually and collectively are distinct from the neo-Soviet groups, in their view of the world and the "self". These subcultures, which could be labelled as Late-Socialist Reformist, Liberal Integrationist and Institutional Modernist, generally share a belief of appreciation of the Western liberal values (political, economic and social) and articulate a more accommodative and to some extent a submissive foreign and security policy vis-a-vis Western states.

#### *Late-Socialist Reformist Strategic Subculture*

The Late-Socialist Reformist strategic subculture (LSRSS), arguably dominated the Russian strategic thinking in the late 1980s. LSRSS was probably best represented by Alexander Yakovlev<sup>2</sup>, Eduard Shevardnadze<sup>3</sup>, and Mikhail

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<sup>2</sup> During his student years spent a year in 1958-59 in the United States at University of Colombia, with the exchange program. In 1965 became a head of the central committee propaganda department. In 1973 Yakovlev was appointed as the Soviet Ambassador to Canada. In 1983 in Ottawa Yakovlev met Mikhail Gorbachev who was on a parliamentary trip in Canada. After, in the same year, Yakovlev was recalled to Moscow and was appointed as head of the prestigious think tank, IMEMO, the Institute of World Economy and International Relations. When Gorbachev became general secretary of the central committee in March 1985, Yakovlev was put in charge of ideology and two years later joined the politburo and acted as an adviser to Gorbachev.

Gorbachev<sup>4</sup>. At domestic level LSRSS represented the liberal values that were brought with policies of *perestroika* (restructure) and *glasnost* (openness) and at the international level, it offered a humanist and Universalist ideas, which, were manifested in the idea of *novoye myshleniye* (new thinking), and which dramatically changed Soviet security and foreign policies.

*Perestroika* referred to the reconstruction of the political and economic system, established by the Communist Party. On the political side, *perestroika* introduced a multi-party system, involving citizens in openly contested elections and allowing the Soviet people to have a say in government, thus reflecting the democratic practices of Western societies. Economically, *perestroika* suggested allowing some privatization within the Soviet Union, and offered decreasing government monopoly over the Soviet economy.

*Glasnost* was the idea to include more openness in the political process through freedom of expression. *Glasnost* allowed writers and journalists to expose news

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<sup>3</sup> Between 1972 and 1985 was the leader of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1985 after Gorbachev's elevation to power, Shevardnadze became the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union, and hold this post until the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

<sup>4</sup> In 1974 Gorbachev became the First Secretary to the Supreme Soviet and in 1979 became a candidate member of the party's governing Politburo. In 1985 Gorbachev was elected as the leader of the Soviet Union. In 1990 Gorbachev became a President of the Soviet Union and hold this post until the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

of government corruption, permitted criticism of Soviet officials and the views of the ordinary citizens about government, social and economic conditions, way of life etc., were allowed in a more open marketplace of ideas.

The Universalist aspect of this group was based on the notion that the world was increasingly interdependent and that it could be in danger of annihilation not only by nuclear exchange but by global challenges. The articulators of this group represented a view that required superpowers to put hostilities of the Cold War aside and cooperate on common challenges. They argued that the more important issues, such as universal (liberal) values, poverty, and environmental degradations or *sud'ba mira* (the fate of the world) had been forgotten due to the upper hand of the confrontational characteristics in East-West relations (Gorbachev 1989). As Gorbachev said:

'For all the contradictions of the present-day world, for all the diversity of social and political systems in it, and for all the different choices made by nations in different times, this world is nevertheless one whole. We are all passengers aboard one ship, the Earth, and we must not allow it to be wrecked. There will be no second Noah's Ark' (1987: 12)

The values common to all humankind in the discourses of this strategic vision subjugated the Marxist class struggle philosophy, which had been an ideological foundation of the Soviet Union since its creation (Gorbachev 1986;

Shevardnadze 1988; Yakovlev 1993). Indeed, they 'emphasized peaceful relations at the state-to-state level while virtually ignoring the revolutionary role of international communism' (Odom 1998: 106). However, proponents of this group did not reject socialism altogether. They desired to embrace liberal and social democratic qualities and signed up to the possibility of the existence and cooperation of multiple social systems within the international structure (Gorbachev 1989). The difficulty in their view lay in the widespread belief that 'what is meant by overcoming the division of Europe is actually overcoming socialism', which set a 'course of confrontation' and inevitably became an obstacle for 'European unity' (Gorbachev 1989: 4). Therefore, articulators of this group opposed an outdated belief where Europe was viewed as an area of 'military confrontation...divided into spheres of influence or seen as a theatre of war' (Gorbachev 1989: 3). Rather, for them, Europe's historic role for centuries has been making 'an indispensable contribution to world politics, economy, culture and to the development of the entire civilization' (Gorbachev 1989: 3). Moreover, as they articulated 'the Soviet Union and the United States are a natural part of the European international and political structure...their involvement in its evolution is not only justified but also historically

conditioned. No other approach is acceptable. In fact, it will even be counterproductive' (Gorbachev 1989: 4).

With its articulation, the LSRSS de-securitized foreign relations, especially the relations to US (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde 1998). By the dominant Soviet strategic culture, 'all non-socialist states with economies based on private ownership of the means of production' had been referred as a threat to the Soviet Union (Odom 1998: 113). 'Accordingly, Soviet military forces had to be adequate to defeat them all' (Odom 1998: 113). However, the strong state/strong military agenda of the traditional strategic culture has been revised down by the new articulation, instead designating destructive WMDs as a threat to humankind, not particular nations or ideologies (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde 1998). Indeed, the priority of humankind above class interests dictated military cooperation with the erstwhile imperialists in pursuit of global/universal interests (Odom 1998: 114). Moreover, the LSRSS also dictated the character of the Soviet military doctrine to be strictly defensive (Gorbachev 1987). As William Odom observed:

'Gorbachev rejected the MoD and the General Staff's views on the feasibility of victory in nuclear war or the traditional party view of fighting a nuclear war. At the same time, Gorbachev was rejecting the American concept of strategic

stability maintained through mutual vulnerability. Also, he was rejecting Clausewitzian approaches to the use of nuclear weapons, seeking to make them serve political purposes, though in quite different and incompatible ways' (1998: 113).

Overall, with the domination of the LSRSS, the Cold War doctrine of deterrence was replaced with a doctrine of restraint (Gorbachev 1989). Indeed, LSRSS demilitarized Russia's strategic culture, which eventually led the Soviet Union to arms control agreements, remarkable unilateral arms and force reductions *razoruzheniya* (disarmament), withdrawal from the Eastern Europe and Third World countries (Odom 1998; Heikka 2000; Glenn 2004; Ermarth 2006; Chomsky 2012; Tsygankov 2013).<sup>5</sup> The Soviet Union also proposed a nuclear-free zone from the Arctic to the Black Sea that was rejected by NATO (Chomsky 2012), and a nuclear-free world by the year 2000 (Odom 1998). However, although the Western leaders expressed their readiness to negotiate arms-control agreements, they did not share a vision of the LSRSS of a complete demilitarization and denuclearization of the world (Tsygankov 2013).

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<sup>5</sup> The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) signed in December 1987 between Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan. The INF Treaty eliminated all of the two nations' land-based ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and missile launchers with ranges of 500–1,000 kilometres (short medium-range) and 1,000–5,500 km (intermediate-range). START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) was a bilateral treaty between the United States Soviet Union on the reduction and limitation of strategic offensive arms. The treaty was signed between Gorbachev and George H. W. Bush in July 1991.



### *Liberal Integrationist Strategic Subculture*

Liberal Integrationist strategic subculture (LISS) was associated with liberal figures such as Andrei Kozyrev<sup>6</sup>, Anatoly Sobchak<sup>7</sup>, Galina Starovoytova<sup>8</sup> and Boris Yeltsin<sup>9</sup>. Arguably, in the early 1990s, LISS replaced the dominant LSRSS in Russian strategic culture. Adherents to this group were attracted to the Western model of development and the underlying notion was to transform Russia to the Western economic, political and security system via rapid

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<sup>6</sup> Kozyrev joined the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1974 and served as head of the Department of International Organizations from 1989-1990. He became the Foreign Minister of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic in October 1990 and retained his position when the Russian Federation gained independence in 1991. He was removed from the post of the Russian Foreign Minister in 1996, and became a representative of the northern city of Murmansk in the Russian Duma until the year 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Sobchak completed advanced legal studies in Leningrad and was appointed in 1983 the first professor of economic law at Leningrad State University. He was briefly a member of the Communist Party and served (1989–91) in the U.S.S.R.'s newly democratized parliament, the Congress of People's Deputies. Sobchak was elected mayor of Leningrad in 1991 and retained his position until 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Galina Starovoytova was elected as a representative to the Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union from Armenia in 1989. In the USSR Congress, she became a member of the reformist faction, the Inter-Regional Group of People's Deputies. In 1991, Starovoytova served as spokesperson for Yeltsin in his successful campaign for the presidency of the Russian Federation. After she became president Yeltsin's advisor on interethnic issues until the end of 1992. In 1995, she was elected to the Russian State Duma from the political movement "Democratic Russia - Free Workers Union".

<sup>9</sup> In 1987, Boris Yeltsin was candidate member of the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee and first secretary of the Moscow City Committee of the Communist Party. In 1990, Yeltsin was elected as the chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet. In June 1991 he was elected to the post of President of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and became the first President of the Russian Federation after disintegration of the Soviet Union. Yeltsin was re-elected in the 1996 Presidential elections and resigned from his post in December 1999.

membership in Western-dominated institutions. LISS differed from the LSRSS with its argument that the latter was not accepting the superiority of the Western Civilization and the backwardness of Socialism, but simply making pragmatic, rather than principled, concessions. In their view, Russia would have to *rastorgat's Sovetskim naslediyem* (divorce its Socialist past) and adopt the Western capitalist model of development. In other words, to integrate Russia with the Western liberal system. This required a complete break with the Soviet system, and bring reforms in a liberal democratic framework. To this end, the new Russian constitution was to be formulated in order to recreate such a framework, in which Anatoly Sobchak and Galina Starovoytova played paramount roles in drafting a new Russian liberal legal system (*RIA Novosti* 2006; EMKIR). Therefore, proponents of this group by suggesting Russian integration with the West, to some extent suggested isolation of Russia from the autocratic states, which was rooted in its Socialist past. From a geographical perspective, this suggested Russia's relative disinterest in the East; China, India and the Global South, including Central Asia, the Middle East, and the North African states.

Moreover, in LISS's view, common human values, which are liberal democracy with the Western scientific-technological development, were epitomised in

Western civilization (Kozyrev 1992). The “West” to this group, therefore, was an ultimate moral authority and the model to follow.

Furthermore, LISS viewed Russia as an organic part of Western civilization. In their view, it was Bolsheviks and the Soviet system, which separated Russia from its natural core. This idea of the West as a core inevitably creates a belief that Russia is a periphery of the Western civilization, dependent or lower in rank. This idea of dependency was well illustrated by the Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev when he asked for assistance to formulate or identify Russia’s national interests from the former US President Richard M. Nixon (Vasilyev 2017).

Since Russia was originally part of the *Bol’shogo Zapada* (greater west) all western countries were natural allies, therefore, Russia is placed in a non-threatening environment (Kozyrev 1992: 8; Lukin 2016). Accordingly, the assertive agenda of military power and expansionist geopolitics has not been used in the discourses of this group. Security and stability, they argued could not be achieved by confrontation and coercion but only through legitimate international institutions with cooperative state members. This view suggested rejecting a self-reliant military power, relying instead on collective security,

thus continuing of the demilitarization of Russia's strategic culture started by the LSRSS. Indeed, in the early 1990s articulators of this group proposed to invite the peacekeeping forces of the UN and OSCE to provide security in the former Soviet countries. Furthermore, during these years Moscow sought to gain full Russian membership in all European security institutions, including NATO (Tsygankov 2013; Karaganov 2014). Russia even raised no objections to NATO's initial announcement of inclusion of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to the alliance (Bogaturov and Averkov 2010). Moreover, despite Russia's long traditional ties with the region, Kremlin supported the Western agenda in the Balkans in 1992-1993 (UN 1993; *Kommersant* 1995; Tsygankov 2013).

In the arms control negotiations, the LISS proposed to continue unilateral arms reductions and to support Western sanctions against Libya and Iraq although they were Russia's partners for arms sale. The main idea of the LISS was reflected in the draft of the official document of *Foreign Policy Concept*, describing that 'Russia was returning to the community of democratic and civilized countries after half a century of Soviet totalitarianism' (Foreign policy concept 1992).

### *Institutional Modernist Strategic Subculture*

Institutional Modernist is another strategic subculture (IMSS) in Russia's strategic culture, which like previous two in pro-Western cluster articulates a liberal approach to foreign and security policies.

This group consists of liberal, modernist and technocrat figures such as Arkady Dvorkovich<sup>10</sup>, Natalya Timakova<sup>11</sup> and Dmitry Medvedev<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Dvorkovich graduated from a math-intensive high school in Moscow in 1989 and continued his studies in the Faculty of Economics at Moscow State University (MGU). In 1994, Dvorkovich received his M.A. in Economics from the New Economic School. Dvorkovich also received a Master's degree from Duke University in the United States. Dvorkovich served as an Assistant to the President Dmitri Medvedev from May 2008 to May 2012. Later, from 2012 to 2018 he served as the Deputy Prime Minister in Dmitry Medvedev's Cabinet. In 2018, Dvorkovich was elected as the co-chair of the Skolkovo Foundation board of the Skolkovo Innovation City.

<sup>11</sup> In 1995 Timakova worked as a political journalist for *Moskovsky Komsomolets*. In 1996 Timakova was part of the Presidential pool of journalists and she covered the election campaign of first Russian President Boris Yeltsin for the 1996 presidential election. In 1997 Timakova became a senior political correspondent at *Kommersant*. Later, in a similar position she work for *Interfax*. In 1999, Timakova was appointed as Deputy Head of the Government Information Department of the Russian government. In 2008, Timakova became a press secretary to President Dimitri Medvedev. In 2012, she was appointed as the Spokesman of the Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev.

<sup>12</sup> In 1987, Medvedev graduated from the Faculty of Law of Leningrad State University. Holds a PhD in law and the title of associate professor. Taught at St Petersburg State University between 1990 and 1999. Between 1990 and 1995 Medvedev worked as an adviser to Chairman of the Leningrad City Council, expert consultant with St Petersburg City Hall's Committee for External Affairs. In 1999, was appointed as the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office. Between 2000 and 2003 worked as the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Gazprom. In 2003, Medvedev was appointed Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office and in 2005 as the First Deputy Prime Minister. In 2008 assumed the office of President of the Russian Federation and after the Putin's re-election was appointed as Prime Minister of Russia.

Unlike, LISS, IMSS perceives Russia as a Great Power with its own national interests, and with the capability to protect them. However, like, other groups within the stream, IMSS is against pursuing an antagonistic policy towards the West. 'Of course, no relationship is free from contradictions. There will always be controversial topics, reasons for disagreement. But resentment, arrogance, various complexes, mistrust and especially hostility should be excluded from the relations between Russia and the leading democratic countries' (Medvedev 2009, translated from Russian). Therefore, this subculture articulates a more diplomacy-based approach to finding consensus with the US and EU on controversial issues such as NATO expansion, nuclear weapons treaty, the question of Iranian nuclear program etc.

IMSS was revived under the presidency of Dimitri Medvedev (2008-2012), during whom it was most influential. Being attracted by Western models of development, this group articulated the need for modernizing the Russian economy, its political system, civil society and bringing technological changes to the country (Medvedev 2009). The foreign policy course of the Russian Federation, according to this group, has not been performing well, and in their account, all the elements of the country's foreign policy must be realigned to achieving the above-mentioned reforms, in order to improve living standards

in Russia (Medvedev 2010). This, in a sense, meant a revision of Russian foreign policy, which was hitherto based on the assertive and antagonistic posture started by Counterhegemonic and the Neo-Conservative strategic thinking (discussed below) due to suspicions of the geopolitical ambitions of the West, particularly the United State. The IMSS's idea of a nuanced approach towards the West soon reflected in the official documents, calling 'to create favourable external conditions for the modernization of Russia, transformation of its economy along innovative lines, enhancement of living standards, consolidation of civil society, strengthening the foundations of the constitutional system and calling for "modernization alliances" with the Western nations' (The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2008; "Go Russia" Dmitri Medvedev 2009; The Foreign Ministry Document February 2010, translated from the Russian).

With the influence of the Institutional Modernism subculture, Russia has begun a gradual departure from its assertive foreign policy course, and in the words of Bobo Lo (2014: 165), these years mark one the Russia's 'three brief smooth engagement periods with the West'. During this period, Kremlin has affected a "reset" in US-Russian relations, initially desired by Washington. President Obama visited Moscow in 2009, and the following year, Russia and the United

States signed and ultimately ratified the New START by replacing the old treaty of 1991 (Tsygankov 2014). Moreover, Moscow allowed the US military overflights in Russian airspace and approved NATO use of an airport in Volga city of Ulyanovsk (553 miles east of Moscow) as a transit hub for moving cargo and military personnel to and from Afghanistan (Timofeychev 2015). Furthermore, during this period Russia joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) after 18 years of negotiations (Lo 2014).

Additionally, Moscow during this period demonstrated a less suspicious posture towards the United States and its policy in the Russian periphery and was more accommodative to the Western Middle Eastern agendas. During the 2010 Kyrgyzstan crisis, Kremlin invited the United States to help to stabilize the country after the fall of Bakiyev's regime<sup>13</sup>. Prior to this, Moscow had 'resisted on principle any U.S participation in post-Soviet conflict management' (Lo 2014: 170).

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<sup>13</sup> President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's regime faced a swift, violent rebellion in Kyrgyz capital Bishkek in early April 2010, which started by anger of a population at painful utility price increases and the corruption of the Kyrgyz leadership. Within days of development Bakiyev had fled. Some 85 people were killed and the centre of the capital was looted.



In June 2010, Kremlin supported sanctions against Iran under UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1929, and cancelled the sale of S-300 air defence system to Tehran, the \$800 million worth deal, which was agreed two years earlier (Nizameddin 2014). Iranian president Ahmadinejad condemned Medvedev, 'whose country is a strategic partner of the Islamic state, to have "sold-out" Iran to the United States' (Haaretz 2010).

Moreover, in the region, during this period, Kremlin 'sought to distance itself from the old leaders such as Libya's Muammar Qaddafi' (Tsygankov 2016: 222). Kremlin approved the UN resolution, which imposed an arms embargo against the Libyan government, and later abstained from voting at the UNSC, which allowed a "no-fly" zone over Libyan airspace, and which ultimately ended with the removal of Col. Muammar Gaddafi's regime.

### **3.3.1.2 The neo-Soviet Cluster**

For the neo-Soviet cluster, Russia's state identity is distinct and "unique" from the West, and Russia is a *Derzhava* (Great Power), which is mainly illustrated or prescribed by the reference to the selective historical events. The neo-Soviet cluster is statist: It views the state as a central actor governing and preserving the social and political order. Unlike, the pro-Western, strategic subcultures in

neo-Soviet cluster generally do not perceive the West, particularly the United States, as a partner, but as a "rival" and, to some groups, it is a constant enemy whose elements of power are all directed towards the domination of the world and to the destruction of any adversaries, including Russia. Arguably, after the Cold War, there are three main strategic groups under the neo-Soviet cluster, which could be labelled as Eurasianist, Counterhegemonic, and Neo-Conservative.

#### *Eurasianist Strategic Subculture*

The Eurasianist strategic subculture (ESS) is comprised of Russian nationalist and ultranationalist groups. Eurasianists represent the ideas of the early Russian Eurasianist thinkers such as Nikolay Trubetskoy<sup>14</sup> and Peter Savitsky<sup>15</sup>. Being mostly influential in the mid-1990s, Eurasianists criticized the Russian

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<sup>14</sup> Nikolay Trubetskoy (1890-1938), Russian linguist and philosopher. Trubetskoy was a member of one the noblest families in Russia. In 1913 he went to Leipzig University to study Indo-European Comparative Linguistics. In 1915 Trubetskoy became an Associate Professor at Moscow University. Trubetskoy is perceived in Russia as one of the founder of the ideological movement of Eurasianism. Source: [www.eurasianist-archive.com](http://www.eurasianist-archive.com) and [www.isfp.co.uk](http://www.isfp.co.uk)

<sup>15</sup> Peter Savitsky (1895-1968), a Russian geographer, geo-politician and philosopher. Between 1916 and 1917 Savitsky worked in the Russian Embassy in Norway. In 1921 Savitsky moved to Czechoslovakia, where he became a privat-associate professor of the Russian law faculty in Prague. In the 1930s, he taught Russian and Ukrainian languages and Russian studies at Prague German. In the 1940s was the director of the Russian gymnasium in Prague. Author of the works: *Pivot to the East* and *The Geographical and Geopolitical Foundations of Eurasianism*. Source: [www.eurasianist-archive.com](http://www.eurasianist-archive.com)

foreign policy course set by LISS for serving Western interests at the expense of Russia. In ESS account, Russia's national interests were by definition antithetical to Western interests. For Eurasianists, Russia's historic mission was to prevent the 21<sup>st</sup> century becoming the American century (Kortunov 2009). They articulated the need of Russia's immediate divergence from the Western-oriented policy towards a more "resistant" course, by preserving control over the former Soviet territories and creating a strategic alliance with other Eurasian states. These are the Arab countries of the Middle East and North Africa, Iran, India, and China. In relation to the West, the priority was cooperation with European countries, which unlike the United States, were no longer the embodiment of the "world evil" (Kortunov 2009).

One of the prominent groups within the ESS are Nationalist Communists, whose vision was primarily inspired by the Stalin's doctrine of "socialism in one country" (Stalin 1924), which articulated the need for Russia to focus on the complete Soviet sphere. The most active promoter of this idea is Gennady Zyuganov<sup>16</sup>, the leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation

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<sup>16</sup> Between 1963 and 1966 Zyuganov served in a Radiation, Chemical, and Biological Intelligence unit of the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany. In 1969 Zyuganov graduated from Oryol Pedagogical Institute in the Department of Physics and Mathematics. 'Upon graduation,

(CPRF). While highlighting the communist political system as the better alternative to Western liberal democracy, national communists also emphasize a distinctiveness of Russia's social/spiritual values and culture, which in their view forms the core of the *Yevraziyskoy tsivilizatsii* (Eurasian civilization) (Zyuganov 1997).

Like all civilizations, in the nationalist-communist register, Eurasian civilization (EC) has its own general laws and social development and is represented foremost by collectivism, spirituality, harmony, discipline, order and tolerance (Zyuganov 1997).

Zyuganov (1997) argues for the incompatibility of Western civilization and Russia. He claims that Russia has been subordinated by the West and has become a mere source of raw material (1997). Furthermore, the Western

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Gennady taught higher mathematics at his university while doing post-grad studies. He also rose quickly through the ranks of the Communist Party, becoming second secretary of the Party in the Oryol Region, in charge of propaganda'. In 1980 Zyuganov moved to Moscow to complete his PhD at the Academy of Social Sciences. Within three years Gennady received the high post of instructor in charge of ideology and propaganda in the highest body of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union – the Central Committee. 'Gennady Zyuganov had made a name for himself as one of the harshest critics of President Mikhail Gorbachev and his perestroika and glasnost policies. He criticized the liberal reforms that eventually led to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of Communist Party rule. In the early 1990s Gennady Zyuganov helped form the new Communist Party of the Russian Federation and became its chairman in 1993'. Source: *RT*, Russiapedia.

civilization, which is seen as a moral authority by LISS is expansionist and conflictual in nature and in constant clash with other civilizations (Zyuganov 1997). Communists believe that there are fossilised traces of "antiquity" and "Judaism" in Western civilization, both of which they view negatively (Zyuganov 1997). According to this view, antiquity has paved the way for the division of society into, respectively, free and enslaved citizens, whereas Judaism has brought the 'idea of "chosen people" which legitimizes the unchristian social division of antiquity in the context of modern capitalism' (Zyuganov 1997 cited in Heikka 2000: 26). Therefore, as Zyuganov (1996) noted, most of Russia's problems were caused by the attempt to import Western liberalism into a Eurasian country, which could be understood in the context of causing ethnocentrism.

Russia, according to Zyuganov is *yadro yevraziyskoy tsivilizatsii* (core of the Eurasian civilization), and it must restore its great power role and reposition itself within the region by controlling the former Soviet borders. Military force is seen as the most reliable tool in achieving these goals (Zyuganov 1997).

Other articulators of the ESS, such as Alexei Dugin<sup>17</sup>, Alexander Prokhanov<sup>18</sup>, and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy<sup>19</sup>, also share Zyuganov's view on the incompatibility of Western civilization and Russia and believe that the latter represents a distinct Eurasian civilization (Dugin 2002; Zhirinovskiy 2006; Prokhanov 2017).

The geopolitical imaginary takes a primary position in the discourses of the ESS. Similar to Mackinder and Mahan's view, this group believe that the world is in constant war between sea-based and land-based powers (Dugin 1994; 1997; Zyuganov 1997). The dominant sea-based power of our time, to Eurasianist, is the United States, whereas the land-based power has been locked-up into

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<sup>17</sup> Dugin holds PhD in Social and Political Science. In the 1990s he was the editor in chief for the political opposition journals such *Den'*, *Elementy*, and *Zavtra*. In 2001, Dugin founded a pan-Russian Eurasia Movement and a year later in 2002 founded the Eurasia Party. Between 2009 and 2014, Dugin taught at Moscow State University (MGU). Dugin is the author of more than thirty books.

<sup>18</sup> A Russian writer. In the late 1960s, Prokhanov worked for two high-profile Soviet newspapers, *Pravda* and *Literaturnaya Gazeta*. In the mid-1980s he was an active contributor to *Molodaya Gvardiya*, *Nash Sovremennik*, and the newspaper *Literaturnaya Rossiya*. In 1989–1991, Prokhanov worked as the editor-in-chief of *Sovetskaya Literatura*. In the 1990s, he worked for the political opposition journals such as *Den* later *Zavtra*.

<sup>19</sup> In the 1960s, Zhirinovskiy studied in the Department of Turkish Studies, Institute of Asian and African Studies at Moscow State University (MGU). Zhirinovskiy holds PhD in philosophy. Between 1972 and 1975, Zhirinovskiy worked in the Western European sector of the international department of the Soviet Peace Committee. From 1975 to 1977 worked at the dean's office with foreign students of the Higher School of the trade union movement. Between 1975 and 1983 worked at the USSR Ministry of Justice. From 1983 to 1990, Zhirinovskiy headed the legal department of the publishing house *Mir*. From 1990 and onwards the leader of the LDPR.

Russia (Dugin 2003). Moreover, inspired by Halford Mackinder's ideas, Eurasianists view that Eurasia occupied by Russia is:

'the heart of the world [add in Russian] and the geographical axis of history around which the global historical process is developing. The outcome of the struggle for it decides the fate of the world, so the West will, by all means, by any means, try to eliminate Russia's domination over the Eurasian core' (Zyuganov 1997, translated from Russian).

Therefore, through the perceptual lens of ESS, the West, particularly the United States, is viewed as an enemy, or rather the enemy with global hegemonic ambitions, which is the immediate threat to Russia's sovereignty and to its social and spiritual values (Zyuganov 1997; Dugin 2002). ESS, therefore, articulates that Russia must rebuild its pre-emptive capabilities both military and politically, reforming its economy on state-oriented style and making alliances with other Eurasian countries such as China, India, Iran and the Arab states in order to respond and contain the US threat.

#### *Counterhegemonic Strategic Subculture*

The Counterhegemonic strategic subculture (CHSS) is another subgroup of Russia's strategic culture, which is best represented by Russianist figures such

as Yevgeny Primakov<sup>20</sup>. Counterhegemonic thinking appeals to the historic notion of Russia as *Derzhava* (Great Power), which to some extent means as a *derzhatel'* (keeper) of the international balance of power (Primakov 1996).

An immediate threat to Russia, as CHSS argued, was the unipolar structure of the world under the economic and military domination of the United States (Primakov 1995). Counterhegemonic adherents articulated that Russia must restore its great power status in an increasingly multipolar world, and re-establish its role in maintaining the world equilibrium. The idea of Russia's role in the maintenance of the balance of the world is given by its geographical location. Unlike, the Liberal Integrationist and Eurasianist subcultures, CHSS does not place Russia to the particular limited geographical affiliation or civilization. Russia's geographical culture, by this group, is articulated in a wider sense as being both Europe and Asia. This is the idea, which allows

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<sup>20</sup> In 1953 Primakov graduated from the Moscow State Institute of Oriental Studies and later in 1956 completed a post-graduate course at the Moscow State University. Between 1956 and 1962 Primakov worked as a correspondent, editor-in-chief, deputy editor-in-chief, editor-in-chief of the Main Department of Radio Broadcasting for Foreign Countries. From 1962 to 1970 as an analyst, deputy editor, staff correspondent of the newspaper Pravda in the Arab countries. Between 1970 and 1989 Primakov hold different prestigious academic positions. In 1989. In 199, he was appointed as a Director of the Central Intelligence Service of the USSR and retained this position after collapse of the Soviet Union. In 1996, Primakov was appointed as the Foreign Minister and in 1998 as the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation. Source: <https://tass.ru/politika/1537192> and <http://www.un.org/News/dh/hlpanel/primakov-bio.htm>



Russia to act as a political bridge between Western and non-Western civilizations, and the right to tackle the issues in the given geographical space on an equal footing with the other actors (Primakov 1996). Therefore, CHSS suggested that the foreign policy of Russia should correspond to its geopolitical location (Primakov 1996). In other words, this group argue against the validity of the LISS unequal approach, which suggested that Russia should position itself with the Western countries at the expense of relations with the key non-Western Eurasian actors like China, India and the *Arabskiy Mir* (Arab World). Nor do they accept the Eurasianist ideas of the complete isolation from and the confrontation with the West, especially the US, but articulated on pursuing a more balanced but self-interested policy.

This suggests that Counterhegemonic group do not view Russia as inherently anti- American, as Eurasianists do. Arguably, they view the world from within realist perspective, the world where selfish and power-seeking state actors must be balanced to maximize peace and stability (Waltz 1979).

According to the CHSS, Russia must remain a sovereign state and to this end become self-reliant politically, militarily and economically. It must further secure the post-Soviet space, and seek tactics of coalitions and alliances with

great powers, in order to resist an American hegemony (Primakov 1995). This group hence highlighted the role of the United Nations (UN) in establishing a multipolar world order. Being a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Russia could exercise its veto power to contain Western, particularly American unilateral actions (Primakov 2016). Therefore, strategic counter-hegemonism insist on maintaining the efficacy of the United Nations as the primary institution for defining and enforcing rules of conduct in international relations.

During the influential years of the CHSS, its ideas reflected the Russian official strategic documents (discussed in Chapter 4) and Russia began improving its ties with the countries outside the Western Hemisphere while keeping Russia's pragmatic cooperation with the West.

In 1997, Russia and China signed the "Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Formation of a New International Order". Moscow, also improved relations with India and mooted an idea of "strategic triangle" consisting of Russia, China, and India in order to counterbalance the American hegemony and build a multipolar world structure. During these years, Russia showed a renewed interest in the Middle Eastern states. As Primakov stated, 'Russia has

been and will be present in the Middle East...we have our interests and responsibilities there and we shall act in the interests of peace and stability' (Primakov 1996 in Freedman 2000: 157).

As a Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov visited the region a number of times and sought to mediate the Arab-Israeli peace process during the Israeli military operation in Lebanon in 1996, and the US threat to attack Iraq in 1997. Alongside increasing arms sale to the region, Moscow also improved its strategic relations with Iran. Russia saw Iran as a strategic partner in containing the Taliban and Turkey's influence in Central Asia and another global ally in resisting American hegemony (Tsygankov 2014).

Furthermore, Russia also became active in the former Soviet space. However, unlike Eurasianists, proponents of CHSS demonstrated no desire for re-creating an empire and preferred Russia's relations with the former Soviet states to be on the level of "multilateral integration" (Primakov 1996).

#### *Neo-Conservative Strategic Subculture*

The Neo-Conservative is another strategic group within the neo-Soviet cluster. This group is mainly associated with *siloviki* (members of security services; armed forces etc.) including Putin himself. With its strategic preferences, Neo-

Conservative strategic subculture (NCSS) is very close to the Counterhegemonic position. Like, the CHSS articulation, Neo-Conservatism views Russia as a European and Asian Great Power, which geopolitical interests stretch well beyond the Russian national borders.

Moreover, like other subcultures in the neo-Soviet cluster, this group has a sense of Russia's global "mission", which manifests in the idea of the *Russkiy mir* (Russian World). NCSS brings the cultural, spiritual and religious dimensions to the fore. Accordingly, Russia is destined to fight against evil (such as terrorism) as the protector of the civilizational ideas and values, the guardian of the Christendom, the restorer of "equity" in international relations long dominated by the West.

Like in other subcultures within the neo-Soviet cluster, geopolitics takes a primary position in the Neo-Conservative thinking. The post-Cold War global geopolitical developments according to Neo-Conservatism, are nothing but the geopolitical ambitions of the United States, in order to dominate the world according to its rules (Putin 2014a). Moreover, like in Eurasianism, conspiracy thinking is strong in NCSS. Accordingly, the current Russia is seen as a "victim" of the geopolitical game, which has been continuing for centuries in an

attempt to destroy her, which ultimately brought about the collapse of the Soviet Union (Klintsevich 2018; Zhirinovskiy 2018). This geopolitical game has been organized and operated by an unnamed political establishment despite of the policy choices of their temporary country leaders (Klintsevich 2018).

In Putin's words 'throughout history there have been attempts to contain Russia as soon as it became stronger, especially attempts to contain the growth of its military capability...we see such attempts nowadays' (2018, translated from Russian). This view reflected in the National Security Concept of the Russian Federation (2000), stating that "threats to the Russian Federation's national security in the international sphere can be seen in attempts by other states to oppose a strengthening of Russia as one of the influential centres of a multipolar world". Like, Eurasianists, Neo-Conservatives believe that Russia is under constant attack and could be a subject to destruction if Russia falls weak and shows incompetence in protecting its national interests (Putin 2012; Patrushev 2015). Therefore, the Neo-Conservatives stresses the need for a strong state with a stable economy and above all a powerful military.

NCSS adherents to some extent align themselves with the idea of the Russian Emperor Alexander III that Russia has just two allies, her "army and her navy".

Putin noted during the Direct Line question-and-answer session televised live in April 2015 that he quite agrees with a phrase once coined by Russian Emperor Alexander III. In other words, a strong military to NCSS is one of the main principles of the statehood of Russia, and in their view, Russia must have a self-reliant army, capable of protecting its national interests, in order for Russia to be truly herself.

Like in the Counterhegemonic account, Neo-Conservatism views unilateral American actions similar to the Thucydides' interpretations that the "might is right" or "justice only exists between equals", which is analogous with the group's understanding of *slabykh b'yut* (weak get beaten) (Putin 2004; 2014b). As stated by Putin, 'in practice the United States prefer to be guided not according to the international law but according to the law of the might/strongest' (2014c).

According to the view of NCSS, Russia that has been constantly bullied by other countries, in particular, America and its NATO allies. In Putin's words 'they have lied to us many times, made decisions behind our backs, placed us before a *fait accompli*...they are constantly trying to sweep us into a corner...But now, finally, the era of appeasement is over...Russia found itself in a position it

could not retreat from...if you compress the spring all the way to its limit, it will snap back hard' (Putin 2014c, translated from the Russian).

Therefore, NCSS articulates that in order for Russia's interests to be considered, it needs to be strong militarily (Putin 2018). Moreover, while Russian Neo-Conservatism believes in the productivity of the hard power it is not reluctant to use force when perceived as necessary. This belief has also reflected in the National Security Concept (2000), stating that 'Russia considers the possibility of employing military force to ensure its national security...use of all available forces and assets, including nuclear' (discussed in Chapter 4).

During the influential years of Neo-Conservative strategic thinking, Russia was involved military in the Georgian War in 2008, the Russian army was deployed to Crimea in 2014 Ukrainian Maidan Revolution, which eventually was annexed by Russia, and in September 2015 Russian armed forces on were deployed to Syria.

**Table 1.** Russian Strategic Subcultures

Subculture	Self-imagery	Geographical imagery	Main Articulations	Posture towards the West	Posture towards the MENA
Late-Socialist Reformism	Eurasian/Global Superpower	Eurasia	Soviet Union and the United States must work together in achieving a better world. Overcome a class struggle. Military reduction, nuclear disarmament	The West is the partner in achieving a better world.	Any state in the region with the war prone and anti-American orientation is not priority for Social Democratic reforming Soviet Union
Liberal Integrationist	Western; part of the western family	Western	Russia must integrate to the Western family which was separated by Bolsheviks and Soviet System	The West is the natural part of Russia and the model to follow	Any non-Western state in the region is not priority for Liberal Democratic reforming Russia
Institutional Modernist	Euro-Atlantic; Russia is one of the three branches of European civilization	Euro-Atlantic	Russia and the West must overcome Cold War mentality and should work together towards the common challenges	The West is the partner in facing modern challenges. Russia and the west must work together	The MENA signifies a general disinterest to Russia; Priority is given to Euro-Atlantic foreign policy vector



Eurasianist	Eurasian; Russia is a unique Eurasian civilization	Eurasia	Russia must restore its imperial control over the former Soviet territory and align with other Eurasian countries	The West, especially the United States is the enemy of Russia trying to turn it to source of raw material	The MENA is the part of the Eurasia and Russia must align with Arab states
Counterhegemonic	Eurasian Great Power; keeper of balance of power in the world	Eurasia	Russia should restore its great power status as the holder of world equilibrium	Russian- Western relations must be based on pragmatic thinking;	The MENA carries a significant importance to Russian Federation due to its geopolitical location
Neo-Conservative	Eurasian Great Power/ with the special role in keeping peace and stability in Eurasia and beyond	Eurasia and Beyond	Russia must restore its great power capabilities; military, political and face the challenges	The West especially, the US is continuously containing Russia due to American hegemonic ambitions; limited and self- beneficial relations with the West is permissible and necessary	The MENA is geopolitically, economically and culturally vital to Russia. AS the Eurasian great power Russia must restore its influence in the region and keep regional stability.

## CHAPTER 4: RUSSIAN STRATEGY DOCUMENTS: FORMAL AND PRACTICAL STRATEGIC CULTURE

With shifts in strategic culture, new thinking or ideas are reflected in the everyday practice of statecraft. This practise with the insights of the critical geopolitics, is termed as a *practical strategic culture* in this thesis. Statecraft reproduce, perpetuate and socialize particular imageries about the Self, the Other, relationships, interests and “realities” about the international system. While these imageries operate on the day-to-day practice of state officials through foreign and security policy discourses they are also spread within the wider public through mass media. This practice in this thesis is termed as *popular strategic culture*. More importantly, the new thinking and ideas find their reflection within the discourses of official documents. This practise in this thesis is termed as a *formal strategic culture*. The formal strategic culture is a product of a particular strategic subculture that by dominating the state’s strategic thinking, locks its often-unique strategic narratives and articulations as the formally adopted views in the official strategic documents. Official documents per se function as setting the guidelines for achieving strategic objectives, as identified and informed by the unique strategic understandings of the

dominant strategic subculture. In other words, the formal strategic culture informs and prescribes the implications. This implication practice in this thesis is termed as *operational strategic culture*.

Based on this framework, in this Chapter, this thesis seeks to identify the unique strategic discourses of distinct strategic subcultures within central official security and foreign policy documents of the Russian Federation over the period 1993-2016. This analysis will assist to identify the dominant strategic subculture(s), the time period of their domination and more importantly, will demonstrate and confirm the hypothesis on the shift(s) in Russian strategic culture. This Chapter will also briefly discuss the foreign policy implications or operational strategic culture derived from the strategic cultural shift.

#### **4.1 Official Strategic Documents of the Russian Federation**

The main Russian official strategy documents are: the *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation* (MD) that defines the military-political, military-strategic and military-economic bases for ensuring the military security of the Russian Federation; The *National Security Concept of the Russian Federation* (NSC), which is the concomitant political document reflecting the set of officially adopted views on the strategic objectives and requirements for maintaining national

security, including the security of citizens, society and the state from external and internal threats of political, economic, social, military, technological, environmental, informational nature. Likewise, the *Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation* (RMD) reflects the officially adopted views and strategic responses within maritime policy and naval national security of the Russian Federation. Finally, the *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation* (FPC) provides a systemic vision of the basic principles, priority areas, goals and objectives of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation. The FPC is based on the NSC and the MD of the Russian Federation.

Since the emergence of the Russian Federation, four MDs (1993; 2000; 2010 and 2014), four NSCs (1997; 2000; 2009 and 2015), bearing in mind that in 2009 NSC was renamed to National Security Strategy (NSS), two RMDs (2001 and 2015) and five FPCs (1993; 2000; 2008; 2013 and 2016) have been published.

## **4.2 Analysis of the Official Documents**

In the analysis, the Russian versions of the documents are used in order to gain an authentic and less ambiguous meaning of the terms and concepts used in the text. The paragraphs and lines from the documents that are presented below in English, are published in the Russian official governmental websites and were

compared to the Russian original text in order to verify the authenticity of the translations. The English version of some documents which are not in public domain were translated from the original Russian text to English by the author of this thesis.

The documents are analysed in the chronological order starting from the Yeltsin's presidential terms (MD 1993; FPC 1993 and NSC 1997), followed by Putin's two presidential terms (MD 2000; NSC 2000; FPC 2000 and RMD 2001), Medvedev's term (FPC 2008; SNS 2009 and MD 2010) and finally Putin's third presidential term (FPC 2013; MD 2014; SNS 2015; RMD 2015 and FPC 2016).

**Table 2.** Chronology of Russian Strategy Documents

<b>Year</b>	<b>Strategy Document</b>	<b>Leadership</b>
1993	Military Doctrine	Boris Yeltsin
1993	Foreign Policy Concept	Boris Yeltsin
1997	National Security Concept	Boris Yeltsin; Yevgeny Primakov
2000	Military Doctrine	Vladimir Putin
2000	National Security Concept	Vladimir Putin
2000	Foreign Policy Concept	Vladimir Putin
2001	Maritime Doctrine	Vladimir Putin
2008	Foreign Policy Concept	Dmitri Medvedev
2009	Strategy of National Security	Dmitri Medvedev
2010	Military Doctrine	Dmitri Medvedev
2013	Foreign Policy Concept	Vladimir Putin
2014	Military Doctrine	Vladimir Putin
2015	Strategy of National Security	Vladimir Putin
2016	Foreign Policy Concept	Vladimir Putin

#### **4.2.1 Yeltsin's Presidential Terms: the 1990s**

In the 1993 Military Doctrine (MD), the international situation is described as:

“confrontation generated by ideological antagonism is being overcome, partnership and all round cooperation are expanding, trust in the military sphere is strengthening, and nuclear and conventional armaments are being reduced, political-diplomatic, international legal, economic, and other non-military methods and collective actions by the world community regarding

threats to peace, violations of peace, and acts of aggression assume paramount importance in preventing wars and armed conflicts" (MD 1993).

Proceeding from this premise, in the doctrine it is stated that 'the immediate threat of direct aggression being launched against the Russian Federation has considerably declined" or similarly a view is applied that the Russian Federation "regards no state as its *protivnik*" (opponent). In other words, in the doctrine Russia is seen as having no enemies and for the international system to be a non-threatening environment.

However, while the general view on the international situation is non-confrontational, the sources of instability according to the 1993 MD remains, and they mainly originated from "local wars and armed conflicts" (MD 1993).

While the doctrine outlined the main objectives of the 'use of the Russian Federation Armed Forces and other troops in armed conflicts and local wars is to localize the tension and terminate military operations at the earliest possible stage', priority is given to contain such conflicts with "non-military methods" in cooperation with regional and international institutions and in adherence to international law (MD 1993).

Although in the 1993 MD, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is not directly mentioned, implicitly a sceptical note is added when it is stated that 'the expansion of military blocs and alliances is to the detriment of the interests of the Russian Federation's military security' (MD 1993). However, the expansion of military blocs and alliances is seen as potential danger (*opasnost*) rather than threat (*ugroza*) and it is mentioned only as the ninth out of ten potential military dangers to the Russian Federation. Indeed, NATO is at best an ambiguous risk in that further in the doctrine it is suggested that Russia aspires to membership and the goal is for 'the inclusion of the Russian Federation in collective security structures' (MD 1993).

In the sphere of nuclear weapons, the doctrine states that it is right for Russia to keep nuclear weapons in order 'to eliminate the danger of nuclear war by deterring the launching of aggression against the Russian federation and its allies' and it retains the right to employ nuclear weapons in the cases of 'an armed attack against the Russian Federation...or its allies by any state, which possesses nuclear weapons...or by any state, which is connected by alliance agreement...or in joint actions with the state that does possess nuclear weapons' (MD 1993). In other words, in the 1993 doctrine it is stated that the Russian Federation will not employ nuclear weapons against any state that



does not possess or does not have an access to nuclear weapons, but the policy of deterrence with nuclear weapons against nuclear weapons is retained.

In addition, the 1993 MD highlighted that 'ensuring the Russian Federation's military security and vitally important interests depends first and foremost...on resolving economic, political, and social problems and successfully implementing reforms', thus valorising domestic reform and internal affairs, and only thereafter on foreign relations, viz. 'on the state of relations with the surrounding world, primarily with Russian immediate neighbours and the leading powers' (MD 1993).

The 1993 *Main Provisions of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation* is the general reflection of the 1993 Military Doctrine. In the 1993 foreign policy concept (FPC) the main objective was formulated as, 'to create the most favourable external conditions for ensuring the reliability, security and development of the country, the successful implementation of democratic and economic reforms' (FPC 1993). Like in the 1993 MD, in the 1993 FPC a view was applied that the main sources of instability originated from "local wars and armed conflicts". Therefore, the main task of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation was described in the document as the 'establishment of stable

positive relations with the countries of the “near abroad” [ближнее зарубежье]. However, unlike the 1993 MD, neither NATO, nor the expansion of any military blocs and alliances is mentioned in the 1993 FPC. This is largely due to the formulation process of the documents that while the MD was drafted by the Military Staff, the FPC was prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The 1997 National Security Concept of the Russian Federation was the third and final document which was adopted during the Yeltsin presidential terms.

Unlike, the previous two documents, the 1997 NSC defines Russia as ‘an influential European-Asian power with the national interests in Europe, the Middle East, Central and South Asia and in Asia-Pacific regions’ (NSC 1997). Moreover, in the document, ‘the situation in the international arena is primarily characterized by the increasing tendency towards the formation of a multi-polar world’ and that Russia’s ‘national interests in the international sphere require the implementation of an active foreign policy course aimed at consolidating Russia's positions as a great power -- one of the influential centres of the developing multi-polar world’ (NSC 1997). Although the document does not mention the United States by name, it implicitly brings it to the fore in the context of unipolarity: ‘there are still strong attempts to create a structure of

international relations based on unilateral actions, including military force, in resolving the key problems of world politics' (NSC 1997). In containing these attempts, which would have related to the war in the Balkans and the situation in the Arab world, the document highlights the need for 'strengthening the role of mechanisms of collective governance' especially the role of the UN Security Council (NSC 1997). In this context, the document states that 'multilateral mechanisms for maintaining peace and security both at the global level (UN) and regional (OSCE) are still not effective, which limits Russia's ability to use such mechanisms to ensure the interests of Russia's national security by political and legal means' (NSC 1997). The strengthening of these institutions thus is seen as instrumental in the making of a multipolar world order.

Unlike the 1993 MD, the 1997 NSC mentions NATO by name. 'The prospect of NATO expansion to the East is unacceptable for Russia, as it represents a threat to its national security' (NSC 1997). Apart from mentioning alliance by name, in the 1997 NSC, the military bloc is represented as a "threat" (*ugroza*), which was in the 1993 MD represented as a danger (*opasnost*).

Revisions also were done in the 1997 NSC on the subject-matter of the deployment of the nuclear weapons. While the 1993 MD stated that Russia will

employ nuclear weapons, as a response to an aggression but only against states which possess or is in concert with a state that does possess nuclear weapons, the 1997 NSC states that 'Russia reserves the right to use all the forces and means at its disposal, including nuclear weapons, if as a result of unleashing armed aggression there is a threat to the very existence of the Russian Federation as an independent sovereign state' (NSC 1997). Although the scope of the use of nuclear weapons is thus wider, they are posited only as weapons of last resort.

#### *Formal and Operational Strategic Culture*

As indicated, already in the documents discussed above, falling within the Yeltsin period alone, there are noticeable changes. The 1993 documents view the world as less threatening and see the potential sources of conflicts in Russian's immediate neighbourhood as deriving from local security problems rather than the international constellation. They prioritise the establishment of stable positive relations with the countries of the "near abroad" and to enact deep-reaching internal reforms, in order to bring Russia up to the status of a major power. The 1997 NSC does already represents Russia as a Eurasian great power, and one of the centres of the "multipolar world" with broader foreign

policy interests in Europe, the Middle East, Central and South Asia and in Asia-Pacific regions. Moreover, the 1997 document views the NATO's potential expansion as a potential threat (*ugroza*) to Russia's national security. Furthermore, the 1997 document implicitly resists US attempts to create a "unipolar world" structure by means of unilateralism and military force. The reflection of this idea in the document is noteworthy, as it predates the American-led NATO bombings of Kosovo in 1999, and before the global War on Terror, but was after the Bosnian War.

The changing formulations of the Russian view of the world are not necessarily the result of changing external conditions, since much of the 1990s, the outside world had been much more stable relative to the Russia's internal instability both in relation to ongoing reforms and the campaign in Chechnya. The differences, however, were due in large part to the distinct subcultures operating within Russian strategic communities. To be certain, two different interpretations of the outside world (particularly the West) manifested two distinct ways of strategic thinking, which found their reflection in the differing formulations within the above-mentioned documents.

The strategic thinking that became formal strategic culture in the both 1993 documents is linked to the Liberal Integrationist strategic subculture (LISS), which dominated Russian strategic thinking in the early 1990s. The LISS views Russia as the part of the Western world and articulates the break-up from the Soviet legacy and the socialist state system and the Russia's move towards the Western model of development through far-ranging reforms, which are mentioned in the 1993 documents. The security notion of the LISS, therefore is directly linked to its view of the West and its admiration towards it. The West for Liberal Integrationists is not a danger but a model to emulate. The real threat to Russia according to LISS is its socialist totalitarian background, which needs to be overcome via implementation of advanced reforms. The absence of a global enemy in the form of the United States, is well illustrated in the 1993 MD, where it is mentioned that 'Russia regards no state as opponent'. Rather the potential military threats to the Russian Federation carried pure regional characteristics, which allowed Russia to maintain a much less powerful military, sufficient enough to respond to local theatres but not to fight a world war, even as priority was given for non-military means of conflict resolution. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the defence budget of the Russian Federation in 1993 was 4.6 per cent of GDP (SIPRI), while

to some estimates calculate the USSR's to be around 15 per cent of GDP in the late-Cold War period (Renz and Smith 2016).

The distinct security notion of the LISS saw a strategic prioritization of two sets of relationships the near abroad (former Soviet States) and the leading world powers (especially, Western). In regards to the MENA, in the LISS thinking the region is less important and almost signifies disinterest. Since the LISS perceived Russia as being the part of the Western world, it does not prioritise developing foreign policy directions towards secondary non-Western states. Additionally, most of the Arab states in the region had a connection to the Soviet past, a past, which the LISS so strived to break with. The only exception in the region was Israel, with which Russia kept a good relation during the 1990s, and which is considered as representing the Western world in the non-Western MENA (Kozhanov 2016).

The strategic thinking that reflected in the 1997 NSC, however, is linked with the *Counterhegemonic* strategic subculture (CHSS), which influenced the Russian strategic thinking in the late 1990s. The CHSS does not accept the unilateral form of global governance by the United States. Nor does it accept Russia's

belonging only to the West by its geopolitical imagery, but views Russia as being Eurasian, thus both geopolitically situated in Europe and Asia.

The CHSS viewed the NATO's enlargement as the direct threat to Russia's national security and in general linked the alliance's regional actions to the US global hegemonic ambitions. As the strategic response, CHSS articulated a desire to moving towards creating a multipolar world, where Russia would act as one of the poles of this aspired structure. Imaging Russia as one the centres of multipolar world and as the Eurasian great power, the CHSS prioritized the scope of Russian foreign policy much broader than in the early 1990s, indeed broad enough to cover the entire Eurasian continent.

In regards to MENA, CHSS saw the region as the Russia's sphere of interest, and committed to Russia's involvement in the regional developments, especially in the Arab-Israeli peace process to add a Russian contribution to the formulation of peaceful resolutions on equal footing with the US (Freedman 2000). Already in 1996 Russia began advancing its relations with the most of the states in the Middle East including North Africa. Governmental visits were paid by the Russian officials to the region, and Russia got involved in the Arab-



Israeli peace process during the Israeli military operation in Lebanon in 1996 (Freedman 2000).

#### **4.2.2 Putin's Presidential Terms: 2000-2008**

In 2000, with the start of Vladimir Putin's first Presidential term, four official documents were published. Following the publication of the revised 2000 NSC, new versions of MD and FPC were adopted. A new additional document that did not have any previous version in the 1990s was the *Naval Policy of the Russian Federation until 2010*, which was further elaborated into the *Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation until 2020* (RMD), published in 2001.

Generally, all the documents represent a similar view of the international situation, perception of threats and Russia's strategic preferences as a response.

Contrary, to the previous documents e.g. the 1993 MD, the 1993 FPC and even the 1997 NSC, the description of international situation in the documents during the first decade of the twenty-first century, are generally pessimistic in outlook (NSC 2000; MD 2000; FPC 2000). While the 1993 MD described the international situation as being based on strong trust and cooperation, reduction of nuclear and conventional armaments, collective security and a preference for non-military methods in resolving regional and international

crisis, the documents after 2000 formulate the security situation as 'the increase of the arms race' and 'proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction', stress on some 'attempts to weaken and ignore the existing mechanisms for ensuring international security, primarily the UN and the OSCE' and bring to attention, 'the [illegitimate] use of military force as a means of "humanitarian intervention" without the approval of the UN Security Council, by passing generally accepted principles and norms of international law' (NSC 2000; MD 2000; FPC 2000).

Similarly, while the 1997 NSC was more optimistic with respect to the possibility of the emergence of a new multilateral system and described the international situation as 'characterized primarily by the strengthening of trends toward the formation of a multi-polar world', the 2000 version describes the situation in a less rosy manner. According to the 2000 version, the current situation in the world is characterized by the co-existence of 'two mutually exclusive tendencies'. The first of these tendencies manifests itself towards the strengthening of the 'economic and political positions of a significant number of states and of their intergovernmental organizations' which results in 'improved mechanisms for multilateral management of international processes'. The second tendency manifests itself in attempts 'to create an international relations

structure based on domination by developed Western countries in the international community, under US leadership and designed for unilateral solutions (including the use of military force) to key issues in world politics in circumvention of the fundamental rules of international law' (NSC 2000).

However, the 2000 MD states that at the present international juncture, 'the direct military aggression in the traditional forms against Russia and its allies is declined' (MD 2000). The main credit for the lack of aggression towards Russia in the document is given to the maintenance of the Russian 'nuclear deterrence' (MD 2000).

Indeed, special attention in the documents is given to Russia's desired self-sufficient military capability. While stressing the need for the 'raising and maintaining the state's military potential on a sufficiently high level' in order to 'provide the capability to respond adequately to any threats that may arise in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, by bearing any reasonable expenditure for national defence' the 2000 NSC also implicitly blames previous inactions in Russian military reforms on the previous political and military leadership: 'The negative tendencies in the military domain is the protracted reform process in the Russian military organization and defence industrial complex, along with

inadequate funding for national defence' (NSC 2000). Accordingly, delays in the military reform seems "irrational" to the view adopted in the revised documents, as it is believed that 'the Russian Armed Forces play the chief role in ensuring the military security of the Russian Federation' and 'the national interests of the Russian Federation require sufficient military power for its defence' (NSC 2000).

In the section on the policy of the deployment of the nuclear weapons, the main amendment in the documents from the 2000s came with broadening the scenarios in which the nuclear arsenal could be used. The difference from the previous 1990s documents, in the language used in the nuclear policy section is noteworthy. While the 1993 doctrine starts the paragraph with 'the Russian Federation will not employ its nuclear weapons', the 2000 version starts with the 'Russian Federation reserves the right to use nuclear weapons'.

Another dramatic change, moreover, came in the conditions in which Russia reserves the right to use its nuclear arsenal. The 2000 MD states that 'the Russian Federation reserves the right to use nuclear weapons in response to the use of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction against it or its allies, as well as in response to large-scale aggression with the use of conventional

weapons in situations critical to national security of the Russian Federation' (MD 2000). Similarly, the 2000 NSC states that 'employing all the manpower and resources, including nuclear weapons, in its possession in the event of need to repulse armed aggression, if all other measures of resolving the crisis situation have been exhausted or proven ineffective' (NSC 2000). Unlike, in the 1990s documents, the 2000 MD and the 2000 NSC state that Russia will employ its nuclear arsenal against any aggression whether conventional or nuclear. While this revision in the 2000 documents is born out of the weakness of Russian conventional forces, it is also demonstrating a dramatic shift in strategic thinking.

The 1993 MD stated that the Russian Federation will not use its nuclear weapons against any state which does not possess or does not have access to them via alliances or joint actions with other states that possessing nuclear weapons. In other words, Russia will employ its nuclear weapons only against nuclear adversaries. Giving preference to conventional means during the conflict and employing nuclear weapons only in the event that there is a threat to the very existence of the Russian Federation, as it is stated in the 1997 NSC, does not demonstrate the professed sufficiency of conventional means, but does

demonstrate the understanding of applicable conditions and norms pertaining to when nuclear weapons can be used.

Special attention in the 2000s documents is given to the role of the international organizations and collective security mechanisms, particularly, to the roles of the UN and the OSCE in crisis resolution. While the 1997 NSC states the need for 'strengthening the role of the mechanisms of the collective governance, especially the role of the UN Security Council', the documents from the 2000s explicitly blame some 'particular states and intergovernmental organizations in undermining the role of existing mechanisms for ensuring international security, above all the UN and the OSCE' (NSC 2000). Similarly, the FPC from 2000 states that 'there is a strengthening tendency to create a unipolar world structure with the economic and military dominance of the United States...In solving fundamental issues of international security, the priority has been given to Western institutions and forums of limited composition, and on weakening the role of the UN Security Council' (FPC 2000). The authors of the documents from the 2000s indirectly refer to the NATO's military actions in the Balkans and criticise NATO's unilateral and self-bestowed responsibility in solving international security, which leaves non-NATO member Russia outside of the security framework. While this reality is perceived as threat to the Russian

national security (FPC 2000), it also does not correspond to the desired “Eurasian great power” status of the Russian Federation. The Western idea of bypassing Russia is rejected in the 2000 FPC stating that by its ‘geopolitical position Russia is one of the largest Eurasian powers... giving Russia responsibility for maintaining security in the world both on global and regional levels’ (FPC 2000). In this context, attempts to undermine the role of the UN Security Council is seen as attempts to weaken the Russian role internationally. As it is stated in the 2000 NSC, ‘attempts to ignore Russia’s interests when solving major issues in international relations, including conflict situations, can undermine international security and stability’ (NSC 2000). Therefore, as stated in the document, ‘the Russian Federation will resolutely oppose any attempts to undermine the role of the United Nations and its Security Council in world affairs’ and recalls the ‘immutable right of veto by all permanent members of the UN Security Council’ (FPC 2000).

Like, in the 1997 NSC, the 2000 NSC, the 2000 FPC and RMD 2001 mention NATO by name, while in the 2000 MD it is implicitly referred as “military blocs and alliances”. In the all documents, NATO’s east expansion is viewed as one of the main external threats (*ugroza*) to the Russian Federation. Within the pages of the RMD 2001, the NATO’s eastward expansion is seen as ‘drastically

reducing the capacity of the Russian Federation to carry out its maritime activities' (RMD 2001). In this context, the 2000 MD posits as priority 'the protection of facilities and structures of the Russian Federation in the world oceans' and views 'the creation of forces...near the state border of the Russian Federation and the borders of its allies, as well as in the seas adjacent to their territories, as external threats' (MD 2000). As a strategic response, the RMD 2001, articulates the need for 'improving the legal framework for the functioning of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation in the territory of Ukraine, the preservation of the city of Sevastopol as its main base', 'creation of conditions for naval bases... for ensuring the protection of sovereignty and international rights of the Russian Federation in the Baltic, Arctic and Pacific regions', and 'ensuring sufficient naval presence of the Russian Federation in the Mediterranean Sea' (RMD 2001).

Another distinction of the documents from the 2000s in relation to those from the 1990s is the reflection of the conspiracy thinking in the texts. This thinking manifests itself in the belief that there are ongoing external efforts in containing Russia's political, economic, and military developments in order to weaken Russia. This belief is reflected in all of the documents of the 2000s (including the 2001 RMD) but is phrased as the 'upholding of sovereignty' and to threats



to national interest. In the American dominated post-Cold War order there has been a general liberal shift in views of security from state-centred focus (national security) towards a more international centred view (global security), which does not valorise state interests or sovereignty to the same extent, and allows international interventions in the name of human rights (Renz and Smith 2018). This idea is viewed as a threat and objected to in the 2000 FPC as 'attempts to introduce into the international parlance such concepts as "humanitarian intervention" and "limited sovereignty" in order to justify unilateral power actions and the unacceptable bypassing of the UN Security Council' (FPC 2000).

The reflection of conspiracy thinking is further noticeable in the multiple places in the documents: The 2000 MD states that 'the creation, equipping and training in the territories of other states of armed militia and groups for the purpose of their transfer into the territories of the Russian Federation and its allies is seen as an external threat' (MD 2000). At the same time, it was noted that 'foreign special services and the organizations they use are increasingly active on the territory of the Russian Federation' and 'internationally, threats to Russian national security are manifested in attempts by other states to counteract its strengthening as one of the centres of influence in a multipolar

world, and to hinder the realization of its national interests and to weaken its positions in Europe, the Middle East, Transcaucasia, Central Asia and the Asia-Pacific Region' (NSC 2000). Similarly, it was declared that 'a number of states are stepping up efforts to weaken Russia, politically, economically, militarily and in other ways' (NSC 2000).

#### *Formal and Operational Strategic Culture*

The strategic thinking that reflected in the document from the first decade after year 2000, is linked to the Neo-Conservative strategic subculture (NCSS), which dominated Russia's strategic thinking most of the 2000s. The self-imagery of Russia in the NCSS thinking is that of a Eurasian great power with "special" security responsibilities not only on the regional level (Eurasia) but globally (FPC 2000). Therefore, Russia's geopolitical and security interests stretch well beyond Russia's national borders and also beyond the former Soviet space. In strategic argument of the NCSS the main stress is on achieving Russia's national security interests via the country's powerful military capabilities. This thinking led Russia to diverge from the previous strategy of international collective/institutional and diplomacy/political based national defence to the militarily self-reliant approach. This idea is reflected in the documents from the

early Putin period: 'the national interests of the Russian Federation require sufficient military power for its defence' (NSC 2000). According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute data, Russia increased its military expenditure from around 13\$ million in 1998 to 20\$ million in 2000, further reaching around 40\$ million in 2008 (SIPRI). In the first half of the 2000s, joint large-scale military exercises and combined operations were introduced. Moreover, Russia resumed long range patrols of TU-95 bombers (which was stopped in 1992) and its naval activities outside the Russian maritime zone (Shunevich 2007).

The primacy of hard power is strong in NCSS thinking, which is reflected in the above discussed documents as well as the practices of the time (cf. NSC 2000; MD 2000).

Another major attribute of NCSS which is reflected in the official 2000s documents is the strength of conspiracy thinking. The geopolitical developments occurring in the wider Eurasian continent in the context of NATO expansion, unilateral US actions, ethnic conflicts, colour revolutions and the spread of extremism, to NCSS, are all the part of a grand geopolitical strategy that is designed to destabilize the Russian periphery and later Russia

itself. In this context, the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), which is the major institutional successor of the Soviet KGB, was reformed in the early 2000s, assigned among previous tasks of intelligence and counterintelligence, dealing with organized crime, counter-terrorism, information security also now with guarding Russia's vast state borders.

The security notion of NCSS expands Russian foreign policy interests beyond the Eurasian continent. In regards to MENA, the NCSS perceives the region as a vitally important to Russian national interests. Between 2000 and 2008 Russia dramatically improved its relations with almost all the states in the Middle East and North Africa, resuming many Soviet-era aspects of cooperation in economic and military spheres (Nizameddin 2013).

#### **4.2.3 Medvedev's Presidential Term: 2008-2012**

During the presidency of Dimitri Medvedev (2008-2012), the main official strategy documents (FPC, MD, and NSC) were revised. The first published document was FPC in July 2008 and the NSC, which was renamed as *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* (NSS), was published in May 2009, while the revised MD was issued in February 2010. As the previous round of published documents, the revised documents represented similar views on the

international situation as well as the situation within Russia. The main idea that functions as a foundation of all documents, especially in the NSS 2009, and the core that links them with each other is the idea of “modernization” needed almost in all spheres of Russian political, economic, military, social-education, healthcare etc.

In the 2008 FPC, one of the main foreign policy goals in achieving ‘the utmost national security policy, i.e. protection of interests of the individual, society and the state’, must be concentration on creating ‘favourable external conditions for the modernization of Russia, transformation of its economy along innovative lines, enhancement of living standards, cohesiveness of society, strengthening of the foundations of the constitutional system, rule of law and democratic institutions, realization of human rights and freedoms, and, as a consequence, ensuring the [economic] competitiveness of the country in a globalizing world’ (FPC 2008).

Unlike the 2000 FPC, the general view on the international situation in the 2008 version is optimistic, which is viewed as resulting from ‘the end of ideological confrontation and the steady overcoming of the Cold War legacy and its prejudices and stereotypes, the strengthening of Russia and its international

position', which all have 'contributed to significant enhancement of global cooperation' (FPC 2008). The strategy document also stresses the impracticality of the 'traditional cumbersome military and political alliances' in contracting 'the whole range of modern challenges and threats with transnational characteristics' and that in the modern world, the 'bloc approaches to international problems are being replaced by a network diplomacy based on flexible forms of participation in international structures for the search of joint solutions to common tasks' (FPC 2008).

The absence of the Cold War thinking is demonstrated in the text more than once, in different forms (the end of ideological confrontation; overcoming of the Cold War legacy; impracticality of bloc approaches; impracticality of the Cold War security architecture). The inability to overcome contention is seen as holding back the mutual cooperation between Russia and leading Western countries, particularly, the United States. While, in the document it is stated that the Cold War legacy has been overcome, this could be understood as an aspiration rather than assertion. This is directly linked to the worldview of the authors of the document, who contrary to the early 2000 embodied less conspiracy notion, but view the modern world as being still based on some outdated Cold War thinking. This view suggests on total dereliction of the Cold

War legacy, and reformation of the security architecture of the Euro-Atlantic region.

In the FPC 2000, the European direction of foreign policy of the Russian Federation is stated as 'the main aim of Russian foreign policy in Europe is the creation of a stable and democratic system of European security and cooperation...Russia is interested in the further balanced development of the multi-functional character of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and will make efforts in this direction' (FPC 2000). In the 2008 version the same direction of foreign policy is emphasised again as 'the main objective of the Russian foreign policy in the European arena is to create a truly open, democratic system of regional collective security and cooperation that ensures the unity of the Euro-Atlantic region, from Vancouver to Vladivostok, in such a way as not to allow its new fragmentation and recreation of bloc-based approaches which still persist in the European architecture that took shape during the Cold War period...This is precisely the essence of the initiative aimed at concluding a European security treaty, the elaboration of which could be launched at a pan-European summit' (FPC 2008). The European Security Treaty is the initiative of Dimitri Medvedev, which emerged during

his presidency to establish an indivisible security throughout the wider Europe region.

The authors of the FPC of 2000 did not include NATO in the stated cooperative framework and limited it to the OSCE, whereas the 2008 version not only includes NATO but offers to reform the existing institution and create a united Euro-Atlantic collective security system, which will include the Russian Federation. Another distinction in the text, which might seem insignificant is the line 'to create a truly open democratic system [*po-nastoyashchemu otkrytoy*]', which finds expression in the 2008 version, and as such openly embraces the idea of domestic modernization as a matter that leads to a more viable Russia and as such as foreign policy implications.

Another example of the absence of the conspiracy thinking in the worldview of the authors of the 2008 documents is reflected in the part of FPC 2008, where the main international challenges and threats identified and discussed. Where in the 2000 FPC, 'new challenges and threats to the national interests of Russia' are identified in relation to the 'growing trend towards the establishment of a unipolar structure of the world with the economic and power domination of the United States,' in the 2008 FPC, the reference to US unilateral actions or the



upper hand of Western-led international institutions is omitted. Rather a broader view of global security is offered, whereby a litany of common international challenges emerges:

'new challenges and threats (first of all, international terrorism, narco-trafficking, organized crime, spread of weapons of mass destruction and the means of their delivery, regional conflicts, demographic problems, global poverty, including energy poverty, as well as illegal migration and climate change) are global problems that require adequate response of the entire international community and solidarity efforts to overcome them...The ecological factor is playing an increasingly important role, the problem of prevention of and counteracting infectious diseases is becoming ever more urgent...The complex nature of challenges facing the international community requires development of a balanced strategy for their solution, based on the interrelationship of issues of security, social and economic development and human rights protection' (FPC 2008).

While the detrimental effects of "unilateral actions" is mentioned later in the document, it is not as explicit as it is in the 2000 FPC. Nor is it addressed specifically to the US (as it is in the 2000 FPC) but is a more generalised observation, whereas the implications not drawn in relation to Russia alone but to the world at large.

'The unilateral action strategy leads to destabilization of international situation, provokes tensions and arms race, exacerbates interstate differences, stirs up

ethnic and religious strife, endangers security of other States and fuels tensions in intercivilizational relations' (FPC 2008).

Another major distinction of the 2008 FPC in this context is the non-inclusion of the critique of "humanitarian intervention" and "limited sovereignty" concepts, which was included in the 2000 FPC.

Although the 2008 FPC was published in June 2008, i.e. after the "colour revolutions" in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005) and Putin's Munich speech in 2007 but before Barak Obama's election as the US President, and almost a year before the start of the "reset" policy in the Russian-US relations, it demonstrates a remarkable shift in strategic thinking.

Like, in the 2008 FPC, the NSS 2008, NATO is not explicated and is not mentioned in the parts discussing the main international and military threats to the Russian Federation as it is in the earlier strategy documents. Although Russia's objections based on the previous interpretations are raised in the 2008 document, they are now formulated in the context of Russia-NATO cooperation, as obstacles holding back mutual cooperation and in the context of the impracticality of the alliance based on its initial, outdated structure that is deemed to be requiring reforms. However, in the 2010 MD, the NATO's

position remained, in the main, an external military 'danger' (*opasnost*) as in the 2000 MD. The different perception of the NATO in the 2010 MD from the 2008 FPC and the 2009 NSS is based partly on the nature of the document. Unlike, other documents, *Military Doctrine* is dedicated to the identification of potential military threats with designing strategic responses in the military realm. Therefore, NATO's association to six out of ten main military dangers to the Russian Federation, as is identified in the document is unsurprising.

The employment of the nuclear weapons part of the doctrine had some revisions, however. Specifically, the condition of the deployment of nuclear weapons has changed from 'situations critical to national security' in the 2000 NSC to situations in which 'the very existence of the state is under threat'. (MD 2010). The existence of the state can be at stake not only in nuclear armed conflicts, but also by conventional armaments:

'In the event of the outbreak of a military conflict involving the utilization of conventional means of attack (a large-scale war or regional war) and imperilling the very existence of the state, the possession of nuclear weapons may lead to such a military conflict developing into a nuclear military conflict' (MD 2010).

### *Formal and Operational Strategic Culture*

The strategic thinking that is reflected in the documents during Medvedev's presidential term is linked to the Institutional Modernist strategic subculture (IMSS) within Russian strategic culture. This thinking is based on the notion that the identification of permanent external enemies and the suspicious stance of Russia towards the world order are all consequences of an outdated Cold War thinking, and bloc-based security system, which isolates and fragments Russia from leading Western powers. IMSS seeks to overcome such a binary thinking and reform the security architecture inherited from the Cold War to the form of a common security structure, viz. 'collective security and cooperation ensuring the unity of the Euro-Atlantic region' (FPC 2008). While it demonstrates the attempt of the IMSS to terminate the previous discourses on Russia's self-imagery and representation of the West that was perpetuated within the wider strategic community, it also demonstrates the absence of the conspiracy thinking in the IMSS. With the absence of suspicions towards the outside world, the IMSS presented less militarized policy options. This is reflected in the statement that 'for the defence of its national interests, Russia,

while remaining within the boundaries of international law, will implement a rational and pragmatic foreign policy, one which excludes expensive confrontation, including a new arms race' (NSS 2009).

With the view of the world as less confrontational, IMSS prioritized Russian a foreign policy orientation towards the creation of favourable external conditions for the modernization of Russia (mentioned in the 2008 FPC). Since IMSS thinking was attracted by the Western way of development, and articulated "modernization imperatives" through "special modernization alliances" in order to confront the challenges of the modern world, it represented Russia's self-imagery in alignment with major powers, such as the G7.

Between 2008 and 2012 Russia went through a number of administrative, political, military, and social reforms; announced the creation of its own Silicon Valley (Skolkovo Innovation Centre); and reached the "reset" policy with the US, while also joining the World Trade Organization (WTO).

In regards to MENA, the region played a less significant role in the IMSS foreign policy priorities. Russian military and economic cooperation with MENA states declined during these years. Russia, along with Western partners,

imposed sanctions on some regional states, which has been seen as unfavourable for the Russian economic and national interests. Russia, likewise, abstained from the vetoing the UNSC 1973 Resolution imposing a no-fly zone in the Libyan airspace, which eventually paved a way for NATO's military intervention and the regime change in Libya.

#### **4.2.4 Putin's Presidential Term: 2012-2018**

In March 2012, Vladimir Putin was elected as the Russian President for the third term. After his election all the official documents discussed above were subject to revision. The revised documents were published in the following order: The FPC in February 2013, the MD in December 2014, the RMD in July 2015, the NSS in December 2015 and a new version of the FPC in November 2016.

The general view of the contemporaneous international situation in the revised documents is pessimistic as it is in the strategy documents of the early 2000s. Along the 'military build-up and modernization of offensive potentials, financial and economic crises, international terrorism, and transnational organized crimes', the 'attempts to manage crises through unilateral sanctions and other coercive measures, including armed aggression, outside the

framework of the UN Security Council' were presented as the risk to world peace and stability (FPC 2013). In this context, both in the FPC 2013 and the FPC 2016 a voice is raised against military interventions and other forms of interference that undermine 'the sovereign equity of States' under the pretext of contested concepts such as "humanitarian intervention" or "responsibility to protect" (FPC 2013; FPC 2016). This notion of insecurity is also mentioned in the 2000 FPC, but is omitted in the 2008 FPC, due to the unique strategic understandings of IMSS.

In the context of military intervention, the FPC 2016 blames external interference for strengthening extremist behaviour in some regions. External interventions

'led to the destruction of traditional governance and security mechanisms and the illegal spread of weapons and ammunition at an even larger scale...The ideological values and prescriptions imposed from outside these countries in an attempt to modernize their political systems have exacerbated the negative response of their societies to current challenges...Extremist forces have exploited these trends using distorted interpretations of religious values to promote violence in pursuit of their goals in the political, interethnic and interreligious rivalry they are engaged in' (FPC 2016).

The belief pertaining to “efforts to weaken Russia by some states” (FPC 2000), which was omitted in the 2008 FPC, is back again in the FPC 2016. Moreover, unlike, in the 2000 FPC, the revised concept names the US as the main initiator of such efforts: ‘the containment policy adopted by the United States and its allies against Russia, and political, economic, information and other pressure Russia is facing from them undermine regional and global stability’ (FPC 2016). This statement takes place in the context of the ‘geopolitical expansion pursued by NATO and the European Union’ (FPC 2016) and particularly, with their refusal to create a common security and cooperation framework, initiated by President Dimitri Medvedev.

The view of the authors of the document on the genuine reasons behind the existence of NATO is not only the legitimate security concerns of its members but the containment and weakening of Russia

Similarly, the containment policy against Russia is mentioned in the 2015 NSS as well: ‘The Russian Federation’s conduct of an independent foreign and domestic policy causes opposition from the United States and its allies, seeking to maintain their dominance in world affairs...Their policy of containing Russia



is aimed at applying political, economic, military, and informational pressure on her' (NSS 2015). The Ukrainian crisis is discussed in this context:

'The position of the West, aimed at countering the integration processes and creating sources of tension in the Eurasian region, has a negative impact on the realization of Russian national interests...The support of the United States and the European Union for an unconstitutional coup d'état in Ukraine led to a deep split in Ukrainian society and the emergence of an armed conflict. The strengthening of the far-right nationalist ideology, the purposeful formation of an enemy image within the Ukrainian population in the form of Russia, the overt reliance on the use of force to resolve intra-state contradictions, and the deep socio-economic crisis turned Ukraine into a long-term source of instability in Europe, directly at the borders of Russia' (NSS 2015).

NATO and its actions, as in previous documents, is discussed in the all revised versions of the strategy documents (FPC; NSS; MD and RMD). While, in the 2014 MD the part discussing the alliance and its actions has remained unchanged from the 2010 version, in the NSS 2015 a new paragraph is dedicated to NATO:

'Increasing the strength of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and assigning global functions to it in violation of international law, intensifying the military activities of the member countries, further expanding the alliance, bringing its military infrastructure close to Russian borders creates a threat to its national security' (NSS 2015).

Like, the 2001 RMD, the 2015 version articulates a strategic response to NATO's actions in relation of naval strategy, and thus the need for 'strengthening the Russian Navy in ensuring the protection of sovereign and international rights of the Russian Federation in the Black Sea, Baltic, Arctic and Pacific regions', and 'ensuring sufficient naval presence of the Russian Federation in the Mediterranean Sea' (RMD 2015).

Different from the 2010 MD, the 2014 version, in the part discussing the characteristics of modern warfare adds two more characteristics, which portend an increased spectrum warfare, e.g. by seeking 'impact on the enemy throughout the depth of its territory simultaneously in the global information space, in aerospace, on land and sea', and the 'use of externally funded and managed political forces and social movements' (MD 2010).

Moreover, the 2015 NSS discusses the potential threat of implementation of the US Missile Defence System extensively, arguing that the 'possibilities to maintain global and regional stability is significantly reduced with the installation of the components of the US MDS in Europe, Asia-Pacific and the Middle East, and the deployment of strategic non-nuclear weapons systems in

space, in the context of the practical implementation of the concept of "global strike" (NSS 2015).

### *Formal and Operational Strategic Culture*

The reflection of the strategic thinking in the above discussed documents demonstrate the return of the Neo-Conservative strategic thinking to dominate the Russia's strategic culture. Like the early 2000s documents, the unilateral US actions, NATO's expansion, the US-led NATO operations and the conspiracy thinking surrounding containing and weakening Russia, are all finding expression in the revised strategy documents.

Between 2012 and 2018 Russia had been involved in the Ukrainian crisis; sent troops to Crimea, which eventually became part of the Russian Federation, supported the separatists in the eastern Ukraine, has been engaged military in the Syrian crisis; demonstrated the new scope of its military power, and strengthened its military presence in the Middle East.

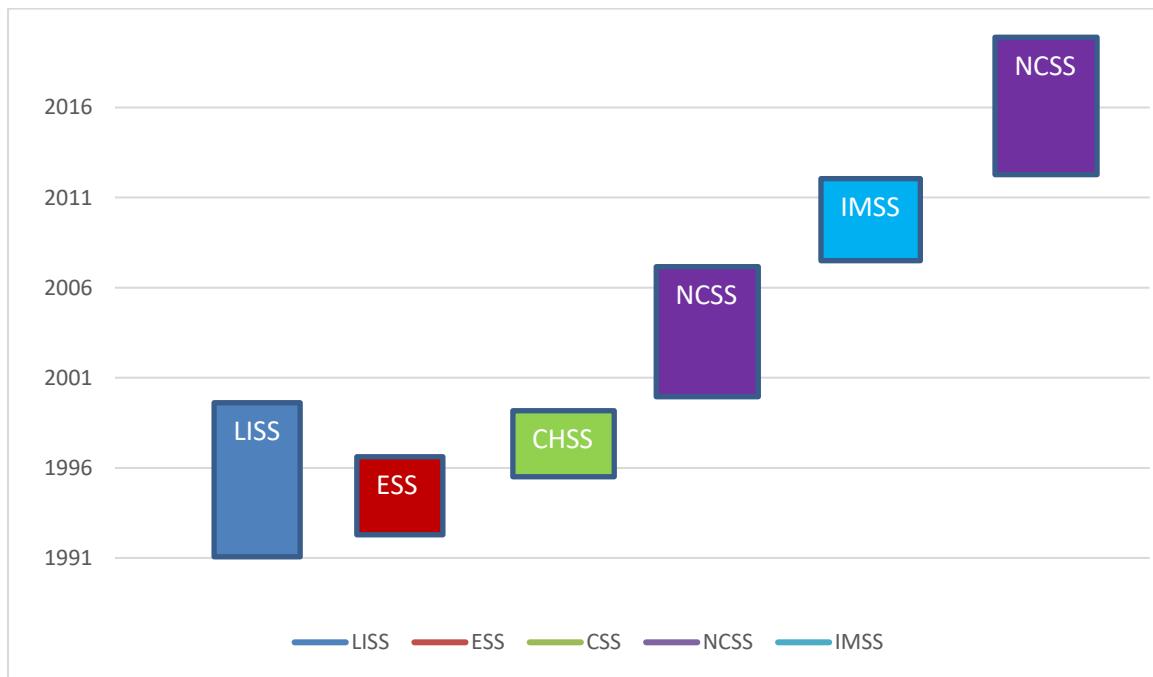
According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute data, Russian military expenditure increased from 53\$ million in 2012 to almost 70\$ million in 2016 (SIPRI). During this period, despite the US objections, Russia concluded a significant arm deals with Ankara on deliveries of S-400 to Turkey and

resumed its deal with Iran on S-300, which has been cancelled by President Dmitri Medvedev in 2010. Moreover, along with its uncompromised stance on the resolution of the Syrian crisis, Russia has demonstrated its interest in resuming its military-technical cooperation and economic ties with Tripoli, which Moscow had prior the regime change in Libya.

### **4.3 Summary**

Overall, this Chapter demonstrated that distinct subcultures with their distinct worldviews and strategic preferences reflected the official strategic documents of the Russian Federation and became a formal strategic culture. In the analysed documents four distinct strategic subcultures were identified. Two of them LISS and CHSS were influential in the 1990s and informed the foreign policy practise of the Russian Federation or became an operational strategic culture. The other two, NCSS was influential from 2000 to 2008 and IMSS was influential between 2008 and 2012. As the official strategic documents demonstrate the NCSS has been dominating Russian strategic culture since 2012 as most of its articulations which took place in the 2000s documents again reflected in the revised documents, published after 2012.

**Chart 1.** Influential years of Strategic subcultures



## **CHAPTER 5: MOSCOW'S SYRIA POLICY 1986-1999**

After a historical overview, this Chapter discusses how Moscow's foreign policy behaviour towards Syria has changed concomitant with the shifts in strategic culture, arguing that four distinct strategic subcultures have been influential in formulating Russia's foreign policy priorities in the context of its Syria policy.

### **5.1 Historical Background: The Cold War Years**

Moscow's diplomatic links with Syria were established in 1944, even before the creation of modern Syrian statehood, with formal recognition as an independent state following in 1946 (Howard 1974). A trade agreement between the Soviet Union and Syria was concluded in 1955, and the same year, the Legations of the both countries were upgraded to full embassy level and Soviet-Syrian cooperation flourished from 1956 to 1957 (Ramet 1990). In the meantime, the United States considered the developments in Syria "unacceptable" and believed that the United States 'could not afford to have a Soviet satellite not contiguous to the Soviet borders' (Kreutz 2007: 13).

The February 1966 military coup in Syria brought a more radical wing of the Ba'ath Party to power. The new regime was quick to display its pro-Soviet

stand and showed a willingness to increase cooperation with the Soviet Union (Ramet 1990). They declared that 'socialism is their goal and intended to modernize the economy and build a strong army to oppose the Western powers and Israel' (Kreutz 2007: 14). Kremlin supported the new regime and in April 1966, offered military aid and financial assistance for Syrian infrastructure developments (Kreutz 2007, Kass 1978).

The overwhelming defeat during the Six Day War in June 1967 increased Syrian dependence on the Soviet Union's protection and assistance. Indeed, the Soviet Union was quick in compensating Arab losses after the war, shipping \$300 million worth of Soviet arms including 400 tanks and 120 aircrafts to Syria and offering about 1,000 Soviet military advisers (Ramet 1990).

Hafiz Asad's consolidation of power in late 1970 dramatically changed the nature of Soviet-Syrian relations. The reliance on Soviet arms and military training probably dictated Asad to declare his intentions for continuing and expanding relations with the Soviet Union and softened his earlier anti-communist campaigns in Syria (Seale, 1988, Hinnebusch 2002). From the Soviet perspective, Syria was strategically important, offering both a stable Soviet presence in the eastern Mediterranean and in the heart of the Middle East and,

later, the Soviet 'exodus' from Egypt, made Syria even more attractive (Ramet 1990: 94).

Likewise, Libya became one of the Soviet's closest partners in the region, after the 1969 coup d'état in Libya, which brought to power anti-Western foreign policy orientations under the leadership of Muammar Qaddafi.

In Moscow, there was a view that cooperation with the new Libyan regime would recuperate some of the losses incurred in Egypt, especially the marine facilities alongside the Mediterranean Sea (Lahwej 1998). Secondly, Libya was a lucrative market for arm sales with the Libyan government paying for the goods in hard currency or by oil concessions (Dakheel 2014).

Overall, Soviets arms aid to Arab states as it has been since the late 1950s, played a greater role for Soviet penetration of the MENA and contributed to keep close relations with Syria and Libya (Kohler 1974).

Between 1971 and 1972, the Soviets expanded the Syrian anti-aircraft defence system and the port of Latakia, where the Soviet's naval also was given a docking privilege (Ramet 1990). Moreover, the Soviet Union delivered SAM-2 and SAM-3 systems, which later were installed around Damascus and along



the border with Israel (Ramet 1990). Until the October 1973 war, Syria had received about 2,000 Soviet tanks and 330 Soviet combat airplanes (Maoz 1995).

During the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war, Syria had received the bulk of the military supply by Soviet airlifts, which were counted from 60 to 90 flights per day to the Syrian and Egyptian airfields (Ramet 1990).

Similarly, in 1974, the Libyan Prime Minister Jallud visited Moscow, where he signed a \$1.2 billion worth arms agreement. In addition to this, a new agreement was reached in December 1974, to provide Libya with TU-22 supersonic bombers, Mi-8 helicopters, SA-3 and SA-6 SAM missiles, anti-tank missiles and MIG-23 Floggers (Ronen 2014). From the same year onwards, Moscow supplied the Libyan regime a vast amount of the military hardware, which, as one observer noted, was well beyond the Libyan military requirements and abilities of the country's armed forces (Haley 1984). The arms link brought Libya even closer to the Soviet Union, as Tripoli was increasingly dependent on the Soviet military experts for the training of the Libyan armed forces in the use of the Soviet made weaponry (Dakheel 2014)

In November 1977, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat visited Israel in a peace-making effort. His visit brought Libya and Syria even closer to Soviets. Sadat's

move was disappointing for Damascus and Tripoli, which left Syria alone to confront Israel in the Arab-Israeli struggle and converged Libyan and Soviet interests in their effort to remove Sadat's pro-American regime from power in Egypt.

A day after the Camp David agreement, signed between Egypt and Israel in March 1979, the Soviet minister of foreign affairs Gromyko visited Syria, which indicated the Soviet readiness for further strengthening the Syrian military capability (Karsh 1991). Already in August 1979, Syria received the first shipment of the most advanced Soviet T-72 tanks. Following Gromyko's visit, Asad paid visit to Moscow in October 1979, when the largest arms deal until then was concluded including MiG-27 aircrafts (Karsh 1991). Moreover, during Asad's visit, the Soviets wrote off some 25 per cent of the Syrian military debt (Ramet 1990). According to Andrej Kreutz (2007), in the late 1970s alone, Syria had received a \$3.67 billion worth of Soviet weaponry.

By sending SAM-5 missile system to Syria after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, ostensibly to challenge the Israeli air force's superiority and publicly warning Israel, the Soviets, under Yuri Andropov were demonstrating to Arabs their willingness to stand by their allies in the region. This as consequence

boosted Soviet prestige in the region. During these years, Moscow and Tripoli signed a new major arm deal and the Soviet navy organised visits to the Libyan marine facilities (Dakheel 2014).

The death of Andropov in February 1984 and the death of his successor Konstantin Chernenko on 10 March 1985 paved the way for the last leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, who was appointed as General Secretary on the following day. This was the beginning to the end of predictable support to Middle Eastern allies.

After consolidating power, Gorbachev articulated the idea that some domestic and foreign policy reforms had to be undertaken in the Soviet system, the idea, which manifested in the concept of *novoye myshleniye* (new thinking). Gorbachev's new political thinking suggested abandoning such a concepts and approaches in the Third World as 'spheres of influence', and 'zero-sum game' (Freedman 1991: 206). After assuming power in spring 1985, Gorbachev sought to reduce the Soviet's dependence on the radical Arab camp by broadening its MENA base through the centrist Arab states and other states in the region. Moscow established its diplomatic ties with Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar and paved the way to normalize its relations with Cairo by

rescheduling Egypt's military debt (Karsh 1991). While to some extent this Soviet move was alarming for Libya, probably most alarming for both Libya and Syria was the Gorbachev's emphasis on the importance of normalization of the Soviet-Israeli relations (Kreutz 2007).

Indeed, Syria was concerned about the normalization of Soviet relations with its main enemy, which would threaten to diminish the Soviet military support to maintain Syria's strategic parity with Israel. In June 1985, President al-Asad and Gorbachev met in Moscow for the first time. The main concern during the meeting however, was not the future course of bilateral relations nor the Soviet military support for Syria, which were prominent for Asad, but the hijacked American TWA plane by a Shi'a militia group under the leadership of Amal, which was supported by Syria during the camp war in Lebanon with the PLO in the spring of 1985 (Freedman 1991). In Gorbachev's view this entailed 'the perplexing prospect of a new Syrian-American confrontation in Lebanon' (Kreutz 2007: 17), which would clearly involve the Soviet Union, hence, Kremlin pressured Asad to make efforts to achieve the release of the hostages (Freedman 1991). The hostages were soon released and probably it was with joint contribution of Moscow and Damascus (Kreutz 2007). Similarly, in 1985, Qaddafi visited Moscow where he met with Gorbachev and sought to bolster

ties with Moscow by officially signing a friendship treaty (Dakheel 2014). Soviet-Libyan trade volume during the 1970s and 1980s reached approximately \$100 million per year (Katz 2008).

However, both for Libya and Syria it became clear that Moscow was moving in a different direction and it was less likely that Kremlin would assume its role as their patron and protector as it was prior the mid-1980s. This idea has strengthened during the United States' air strikes on Tripoli and Benghazi in 1986, when Qaddafi openly condemned the Kremlin's lukewarm reaction to these strikes and with the Moscow's decision to resume its diplomatic relations with Israel in the late 1980s. Despite the growing distrust, Moscow kept its ostensible alliance with Syria and Libya until the collapse of the Union, although it was an alliance characterised by indifference and reluctance.

## **5.2 From Gorbachev to Yeltsin: the Late-Socialist Reformist Strategic Subculture in operation on the MENA Policy arena**

The Middle East, a region with enormous oil reserves, access to sea lines and adjacent to its southern borders has historically been viewed by Moscow as one of the most critical regions in the Third World, entailing vital Soviet interests (Vassiliev 1993; Blank 2014). The Middle East including North Africa for the

USSR was also a battle ground with the United States in the American “containment policy”<sup>21</sup> where the key Soviet policy priority was to minimize the American influence in the region (Karsh 1991; Ramet 1990). However, with the shift in Soviet strategic culture in the mid-1980s, the rivalry with the West lost its rationale and the previous Soviet Middle Eastern policy priorities gradually began to disappear.

In the mid-1980s, the Late-Socialist Reformist strategic subculture (LSRSS) subordinated the previous traditional Soviet strategic thinking that characterized most of the Cold War period in articulating an antagonistic stance towards the West. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the most prominent articulators of this thinking Alexander Yakovlev, Eduard Shevardnadze, and Mikhail Gorbachev represented a “new thinking” that required superpowers to put hostilities of the Cold War aside and cooperate on common challenges. They argued that the more important issues, such as universal human rights, poverty, and environmental degradations or *sud'ba mira* (the fate of the world)

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<sup>21</sup> Visit the US Department of State for the “containment policy” <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/kennan>

had been forgotten due to the upper hand of the confrontational characteristics in East-West relations (Gorbachev 1989).

In 1986, at the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the General Secretary Gorbachev urged not to consider the conflict between socialism and capitalism as the main problem of the time (for this and other important events see Appendix 1). Rather, the universal human values and the survival of humanity were to be prioritised and consolidated as the basis of Soviet foreign policy (Ponomarev 2010). Therefore, as LSRSS articulated, there should not be any confrontation between capitalism and socialism, rather the focus had to be on achieving peace for the increasingly non-divisible world (Gorbachev 1986).

LSRSS not only shifted the traditional Soviet notion of *national* security to *common* or *global* security, but also drew attention to the impossibility of security by military defence and deterrence measures alone. Rather, as was articulated, 'ensuring security is increasingly a political task, and can be accomplished with political means' (Gorbachev 1986: 81). This understanding manifested in the concept of 'reasonable sufficiency', which was used by the

General Secretary at the 27<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in the context of reducing the Soviet military potential (Gorbachev 1986).

The articulated conceptual apparatus of LSRSS related to common international security in the military sphere, which was published in the political report of the CPSU Central Committee in 1986, suggested a cessation of all nuclear weapons tests and total destruction of such weapons, disbandment of military alliances and renunciation of their enlargement as well as of the formation of new ones, and the reduction of military budgets (1986).

LSRSS had indeed begun to inform Soviet security policy, also in multilateral contexts. In May 1987, the Warsaw Pact formally incorporated Gorbachev's concept of 'reasonable sufficiency' into its military doctrine (FitzGerald 1990). While, with reflection of the Soviet traditional strategic thinking, the Soviet Military Doctrine (SMD) had been formulated as 'a system of scientifically founded and officially endorsed views on questions of the preparation and the victorious waging of war' (FitzGerald 1990: 487). With the reflection of the LSR strategic thinking SMD was formulated as 'a system of fundamental views on the prevention of war...it is subordinated to resolution of the cardinal task...not permitting war, nuclear or conventional' (FitzGerald 1990: 487).



Speaking at the 43rd session of the UN General Assembly on 7 December 1988, Gorbachev stated the need for a decisive renunciation of the use of force in solving international issues, recognition of the freedom of choice of development paths for all peoples, multivariate social progress in the modern world with the key role of universal human values and principles of common security. Moreover, Gorbachev announced that unilaterally, the USSR decided to substantially reduce conventional armaments, reduce the size of the armed forces by 500,000 people, and also partially to withdraw tank divisions from the territory of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Czechoslovakia and Hungary (Ponomarev 2010).

At the domestic level, the “new thinking” of the LSRSS was supported and operated through the policy of *perestroika* (restructure) and *glasnost* (openness). The strategic understandings of the LSRSS, which operated in the Soviet official discourse at the time, assisted in the gradual re-socialization of the Soviet self-imagery from at one time confrontational anti-Western to the more Universalist, which was based on social democratic understandings. This new self-imagery has begun to find reception at home and justified the urge of the LRSS to seek internal reforms, as *perestroika* and *glasnost* also led the wider public into questioning the entire Soviet system (Kaiser 1991).

With all these dramatic changes in Soviet strategic thinking Moscow showed reluctance to support its long-time allies in the Middle East and North Africa. For instance, Moscow's did not protect the Libyan regime during the American bombings of Tripoli and Benghazi in 1986. Qaddafi was traumatised 'by the fact that the Soviet Union was withholding diplomatic and military support from Libya at its most difficult hour' (Ronen 2014: 87). Moreover, a short while after the US attack on Libya, Qaddafi faced exerted pressure from Moscow demanding to repay its debt of \$5 billion (Ronen 2014). Furthermore, Qaddafi's fear that the Soviet Union was sacrificing him for Moscow's desired rapprochement with the United States, was increased when in 1986, the Libyan request for urgent military equipment and weaponry vital for the Libyan ongoing war with Chad, was rejected by Moscow (Ronen 2014). With no other alternative sources of arms purchases and strategic support, Qaddafi had to withdraw its defeated army from Chad in 1987 (Ronen 2014).

Similarly, Moscow was not interested in fulfilling the Syrian aspiration of strategic parity with Israel. This was noticeable during the Asad's visit to Moscow in April 1987, when Gorbachev stated that the Arab-Israeli conflict should be solved merely by political means and reliance on military force to settle the problem lost its credibility (Karsh 1991). This statement indicated the

Soviets unwillingness to maintain sufficient military support to Syria. Moreover, in a joint communique after the meeting alongside emphasizing the importance of the “convocation of a fully-fledged international conference” for the Arab-Israeli settlement, Gorbachev stressed on the importance of the Soviet-Israeli diplomatic relations labelling the absence of it as an ‘abnormality’ (Karsh 1991: 170). This statement from the Soviet leader was an additional confirmation for the Syrian leadership that their strategic aspiration was decreased. Indeed, the Soviet-Israeli rapprochement took place after Soviet and Israeli consular delegations were instated in Moscow and Tel Aviv between 1987 and 1988 (Karsh 1991). It was clear for the Syrian leadership that the Soviet Union was moving in a different direction and it was less likely that Kremlin would assume its role as the Syrian protector as it was before the mid-1980s (Vassiliev 1993). The Soviet arms supply to Syria was gradually declining (Vassiliev 1993) and ‘at the onset of the 1990s the Soviet-Syrian relations appeared to be at one of their lowest ebbs in two decades’ (Karsh 1991: 177).

However, the most salient manifestation of LSRSS thinking in Soviet Middle East policy was Moscow’s decision to withdraw the Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1988, despite, the grave risk to the survivability of the Afghani communist regime (Karsh 1991).

Moscow also did not support the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein against the coalition forces during his occupation of Kuwait in 1991, despite the fact that the Soviet Union had a friendship treaty with Iraq since 1972. Rather, Moscow condemned Iraqi actions and sided with the coalition forces headed by the United States. Moreover, as Matar and Tahbit argued, Moscow even provided Washington with significant military data regarding its Middle Eastern clients (2004).

Within the Soviet Union, the pursued policy of the LSRSS has not been without controversy, however. Soon LSRSS was challenged by other two distinct strategic groups. The first group represented by Boris Yeltsin and some liberal figures such as Anatoly Sobchak and Galina Starovoytova. This group were associated with the Liberal Integrationist strategic subculture (LISS), which would dominate the Russia's strategic thinking most of the 1990s. They questioned the profundity of the stated reforms by LSRSS. In October 1987, Boris Yeltsin, then a candidate member of the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee and first secretary of the Moscow City Committee of the Communist Party, gave a speech at party congress criticizing the pace of *Perestroika* (restructure) and the situation in the party, especially the privilege given to its members over ordinary people. Yeltsin's speech which was

eventually ended with his removal from his post and his speech was published in 1989 in the journal *Izvestiya* of the Central Committee of the CPSU and found a great interest among the wider public (*Kommersant* 2017). According to Boris Minayev, a biographer of Boris Yeltsin, there was a demand within the public for a genuine *glasnost* (openness), as there was an understanding that unlike previous Soviet leaders, the current leadership has been protected from criticism (2010). The second group, which was associated with the traditional Soviet strategic subculture sought to achieve a status quo as they viewed the reforms as weakening the Union. The ongoing ineffective reforms and the *glasnost* (openness) policy, has greatly contributed to discrediting socialism and the entire Soviet system. Boris Yeltsin's criticism of socialism had increased after his first unofficial visit to the United States in 1989, then as the Public Deputy and member of the USSR Supreme Council (Minayev 2010; Poltaranin 2011). Later, with his popularity increasing Boris Yeltsin was elected as the chairman of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RFSR), and in June 1990 the new Russian Parliament adopted the declaration of state sovereignty of the RFSR (Minayev 2010). Soon the similar tendencies occurred in the other states of the Soviet Union. In January 1991, Baltic States of the USSR Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia through popular demonstrations demanded their

sovereignty and showed little interest to the negotiations with Moscow. As a consequence, Gorbachev ordered to involve military force and rejected all the new laws which were against the unity of USSR (Karpenko 2017). Boris Yeltsin on the other hand flew to Baltic States and supported their demands (Minayev 2010). Moreover, during the Yeltsin's visit, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Russia made an announcement that they recognize each other's sovereignty (Minayev 2010; Karpenko 2017).

In July 1991, Boris Yeltsin was elected as the first and the last President of the RFSR and within a few months as the Soviet Union has weakened and dissolved in December 1991, he became the first President of the Russian Federation (Minayev 2010). As a consequence, the LSRSS was eclipsed by Liberal Integrationist strategic subculture.

Overall, with the collapse of the Soviet Union the international system shifted in favour of the United States, which experienced a triumphant victory in the Cold War over the Soviet Bloc. These new developments had some immediate negative repercussions on a number of countries, which were close to Soviet Union. Undoubtedly, Qaddafi's Libya was not an exception. Syria, however, immediately changed its foreign policy orientation and sought for new allies

and sources reconciled its relations with Egypt and shifted to the Western side during the First Gulf War. Thus, in contrast to other Third World countries for Syria the collapse of the Soviet Union brought minimal repercussions (Shad 1995).

### **5.3 The Liberal Integrationist Strategic Subculture in operation within the MENA Policy arena: the early 1990s**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation was immediately recognised as a successor to the USSR and as a legitimate sovereign country by the United Nations and preserved its seat at the UN Security Council as a permanent member.

The main articulators of LISS, Boris Yeltsin and Andrei Kozyrev who became the new government's principal foreign policy makers, were attracted to the Western model of development and the underlying notion was to transform Russia to the Western economic, political and security system via rapid membership in Western-dominated institutions (Yeltsin 1992; Kozyrev 1992). In his article in the *American Foreign Affairs*, Kozyrev stated that 'Russia's current opening to the rest of the world is undertaken through concrete steps such as joining the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the General

Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, becoming more active in the European Bank, establishing in deeds rather than words an interaction with the Group of Seven industrial nations' (1992). Furthermore, Moscow suggested on creating a common security institution (Yeltsin 1992) and sought to gain a Russia's membership in the Western security organisations (FPC 1993; Tsygankov 2013).

The LISS differed from the LSRSS with its argument that the latter was not accepting the superiority of the West model and the backwardness of Socialism. Furthermore, LISS viewed Russia as an organic part of Western civilization and therefore, viewed 'the United States and other Western democracies are as natural friends and eventual allies of the democratic Russia as they are foes of a totalitarian USSR' (Kozyrev 1994). Similarly, speaking at the UN Security Council in January 1992, Boris Yeltsin in the context of the main directions of Russian policy in the field of arms reduction and disarmament stated that 'Russia considers the US and other Western states not only as partners, but rather as allies' (UN 1992).

In the view of the LISS, it was Bolsheviks and the Soviet system, which separated Russia from its natural core. This idea also reflected in the 1993 Foreign Policy Concept (FPC) of the Russian Federation, which was formulated



as Russia was returning to the community of democratic and civilized countries (Foreign Policy Concept 1993). Similarly, in Andrei Kozyrev's words:

'The totalitarian ideology of the Russian Bolsheviks, which came to supplant totalitarian attitudes of the Russian tsars, emasculated these processes of their democratic essence. Not only was the erstwhile empire reinstated under new ideological colours, it became more despotic and repressive, trampling upon the freedom and very existence of human beings' (1992).

In the view of the members of LISS Russia must thus divorce its socialist past and adopt the Western model of development (Kozyrev 1992). Therefore, articulators of this group suggested Russian integration with the West and isolation of Russia from the autocratic states (Kozyrev 1994), by departing from the 'subordination of foreign policy to [Socialist] ideological doctrines but derived from the primacy of democracy' (Yeltsin 1992, translated from Russian).

In this light, the Russian course of action was abandoning former Soviet friends in the Third World. The Middle East, a region which was formerly perceived by Moscow as 'the Soviet Rimland' was not an exception (Karsh 1997: 271). Thus, when the Middle East questions did arise, Russia supported the US policies on these issues. For instance, Moscow supported US-led sanctions against Iraq by

dispatching two Russian warships to help enforce the anti-Iraqi embargo in the Persian Gulf (Freedman 2001). Similarly, Moscow reacted to US airstrikes in Iraq in 1993 with a general approval (Baker 1994). Furthermore, during the multilateral Arab-Israeli talks that took place in Moscow in late January 1992, Russian officials failed to use their position as hosts to push Israel to accept a more accommodating stance in the settlement, instead they allowed the Israelis to control the entire agenda of talks for their own advantage (El-Doufani 1994). To host such a conference had been the goal of the Soviet leadership since the 1970s, yet Boris Yeltsin had chosen not to attend (Freedman 1995), as he did not want to get in the way of American diplomacy. Russia's disinterest in the Middle East in the early 1990s were sufficient to convince the Arab allies of the former Soviet Union that they could not count on Moscow's support as during Soviet times.

In the new post-Cold War world order dominated by the United States, Libya was in the list of the so called "rogue states", which were considered as posing a danger to the stability of the Western Powers and to their interests all over the world (St John 2002; Dakheel 2014). In the early 1990s, by pressure from the United States and Britain, the UN Security Council imposed a number of sanctions on the Libyan regime, accusing its association with some terrorist

activities, namely with the West Berlin nightclub bombing and the Pan Am and UTA flights incidents<sup>22</sup>. Moscow supported the UNSC resolutions against Tripoli. According to the Russian news agency *ITAR-TASS*, the volume of the trade between Russia and Libya immediately dwindled to a mere \$1 million per year (2008). Moreover, Libya could not clear the debts in full by the demise of the Soviet Union (Katz 2008). The Libyan outstanding debt amount at that time estimated by *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* was about \$3.8 billion (2000).

The relations between Moscow and Tripoli, which had begun to deteriorate with the LSRSS thinking, did not improve after the demise of the Soviet Union (Katz 2008; Dakheel 2014). According to Katz (2008), the debt issue was one of the main obstacles holding the improvement of the Russian-Libyan relations in the early 1990s, as Tripoli claimed that due to the sanctions imposed, Libya was unable to repay debts to Moscow (Katz 2008). However, while the debt amount

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<sup>22</sup> 1986 West Berlin discotheque bombing, also called La Belle discotheque bombing, attack carried out on April 5, 1986. La Belle discotheque, a nightclub frequented by U.S. soldiers stationed in Germany during the Cold War. The bomb, packed with plastic explosives and shrapnel, killed two American soldiers and a Turkish woman and injured 229 others, some of whom lost limbs and were permanently disabled. The Reagan administration accused Libyan regime for the incident. Source: [www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com); On December 21, 1988, Pan Am Flight 103 exploded 31,000 feet over Lockerbie, Scotland, 38 minutes after take-off from London. Two hundred fifty-nine people on board the New York-bound Boeing 747 were killed, along with 11 people on the ground. The Libyan regime was accused of the incident. Source: [www.ccn.com](http://www.ccn.com)

owed by Libya was significant to the economically weak Russia of a time, arguably it was more significant to Kremlin to follow the American initiatives regarding the region, including the Libyan government, which was faced with harsh sanctions that were supported by Moscow in the UNSC in 1992-93. As a result of its anti-Libyan policy, Russia received a criticism and an attack on its embassy in Libya in April 1992 (Freedman 1995).

The repayment of Soviet debt was also a contentious factor in Moscow's relations with Damascus in the early 1990s. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in order to avoid the debt repayment, the Syrian government initially tried to refuse the recognition of the Russian Federation as a successor state to the USSR (Pushkov 1992), although Damascus later changed its stance and accepted the Russian succession with the condition of the writing off of Syrian debts (Pushkov 1992), Kremlin also viewed the Syrian actions as a ploy to make Russia provide certain guarantees concerning its future arms supply (Kreutz 2007). Damascus was indeed concerned in this regard since the Syrian army was largely equipped with Soviet weapons, which demanded the continual Russian supply of spare parts and Russian specialists to repair them (Kreutz 2007). In this light, in September 1991, Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shara visited Moscow and met with Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev to

discuss the new directions of the bilateral relations. During the talks, Kozyrev told to his Syrian counterpart that the new direction of the bilateral relations between Moscow and Damascus would be maintained but in a way that eliminated the “anti-Western” ideological dimension, which had characterised the Soviet-Syrian relations (Kreutz 2007). This and an upcoming multilateral peace conference in Moscow in January 1992, where the Russian officials did not play a facilitating role for Arab interests, were indications for Syria that Moscow was not going to provide a political and military support as in Soviet times. Although the arm sales and trade in other spheres could have supported in some ways its unstable economic situation, Russia did not prioritise developing closer foreign relations towards these non-Western states. The only exception in the region was Israel, with which Russia had kept good relations during the 1990s (Kozhanov 2016).

The pursued policy of the LISS soon became a point of contention between other strategic groups and the Liberal Integrationists. Two groups within the neo-Soviet strategic cluster, namely, the Eurasianist and Counterhegemonic strategic subcultures criticised the productivity of the “destructive reforms” and the foreign policy course set by LISS for serving Western interests at the expense of Russia (Khasbulatov 2018). The supreme legislative body in Russia

at that time was the Congress of People's Deputies, which had the right to demand a report from the president and if there were grounds to dismiss him from the post with two-thirds majority (Nazarov 1999). During the years of reforms, the number of supporters of Yeltsin among deputies steadily decreased and reached a third, mostly those who simultaneously worked in presidential structures (Nazarov 1999). As the criticism on Yeltsin, Kozyrev and on the presidential administration has increased, in September 1993 Boris Yeltsin signed decree No. 1400, terminating the activities of the Supreme Soviet and the Congress of People's Deputies, which led the parliament and president to direct armed confrontation. The Parliamentary leader Ruslan Khasbulatov, in his interview to *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* stated that the American Embassy in Moscow actively participated in the foreign and security policy of the Russian Federation, and he did not exclude the possibility of involvement of the US intelligence services in support of Yeltsin in the Russian constitutional crisis of 1993 (*Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 2018). According to Nazarov (1999) and *Gazeta.ru*, during the crisis, Yeltsin's administration closely coordinated its actions with Washington, which gave its full support to Yeltsin's decision on the new decree

on constitutional changes. Other main opponents of Yeltsin were the Russian Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi<sup>23</sup> and Gennady Zyuganov who both were adherents to ESS. As *Gazeta.ru* noted, during the crisis, both Rutskoi and Zyuganov actively promoted anti-Yeltsin rhetoric (2018). Yeltsin's decree was accepted as unconstitutional and the parliament appointed the Russian Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi as an acting president of the Russian Federation (Bendersky 2005). Yeltsin issued an order to confront the rebellion by military means, which was eventually crushed in early October 1993 (Rosenberg 2003).

During the crisis the former Moscow's allies in the Middle East were closely following the situation in Russia (Kreutz 2007). In the view of the Syrian leadership Rutskoi 'talked like an old communist leader and asked Syrian government to stand up to imperialist aggression and promised that under his leadership Russia would help them' (Kreutz 2007: 19).

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<sup>23</sup> A Russian Politian and former Soviet military officer. In 1988, Rutskoi was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for his combat missions. In 1990, Rutskoi was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR and in 1991, he was selected as a Vice Presidential candidate together with presidential candidate Boris Yeltsin for the 1991 election. Rutskoy was Vice President of Russia from 1991 to 1993. In 1996, Rutskoi was elected to the post of governor of Kursk Oblast and served in that office till 2000.

Yeltsin's victory over Parliament had diminished the Syrian earlier hopes for the Russian support, but after the 1993 constitutional crisis the LISS had almost lost its dominance in Russia's strategic thinking.

Yeltsin's decree No. 1400 on dissolving the parliament also created two new federal legislative bodies, the Council of the Federation and the State Duma. The election of deputies for new legislative bodies was set to 12 December 1993, but did not yield the expected results for Yeltsin. The electoral bloc *Vybor Rossii* that was associated with Liberal Integrationists received only 15.51% of the vote, and consequently, taking into account single-mandate deputies, 66 seats in the State Duma. The political parties associated with the Eurasianist strategic thinking were the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) who received respectively 12.40% and 22.92% of the vote respectively, and over 100 seats in the State Duma (ITAR-TASS 2011). In the new Duma, the members of the opposition groups outnumbered the members of the Liberal Integrationists. Therefore, while still influential along with the LISS, Yeltsin had to consider the strategic preferences of other subcultures in the foreign and security practice of the Russian Federation.



Indeed, after the 1993 October crisis, Russia has not necessarily followed a Western-oriented foreign and security policy. Along with constitutional changes there were other factors that influenced Kremlin to pursue a distinct approach. A civil war in Tajikistan and the emergence of Taliban in Afghanistan threatened the penetration of extremist Islam into Central Asia where the potentially hostile Islamic movements were scattered along the Russian southern rim. Furthermore, the most prominent factor was the Chechen 1994 rebellion, which not only threatened the unity of the Russian Federation but also opened up the Caucasus to penetration and domination by the regional rival and the NATO member Turkey (Nizameddin 2013). While, Liberal Integrationists might have entertained uncertainties towards some of these developments, undoubtedly, other Russian strategic subcultures had a unique strategic response and suggestion to Yeltsin that derived from their distinct ideas for dealing with strategic challenges.

After the elections of the State Duma, and with the increase of the influence of the other strategic subcultures, Yeltsin had to actively arbitrate the competing strategic preferences in foreign and security policy practice of the Russian Federation. One of the influential groups within Russia's strategic culture became the Eurasianist strategic subculture (ESS).

Eurasianists criticized the Russian foreign policy course set by LISS for serving Western interests at the expense of Russia's. In the Eurasianist account, Russia's national interests were by definition "anti-Western" (Zyuganov 1997). They articulated the need for Russia's immediate divergence from a Western-oriented policy towards a more "resistant" course, by preserving control over the former Soviet territories and creating a strategic alliance with other Eurasian states (Zyuganov 1997). Through the perceptual lens of Eurasianists, the West, particularly the United States, is viewed as an enemy—an enemy with global hegemonic ambitions, which is an immediate threat to Russia's sovereignty and to its social and spiritual values (Zyuganov 1997; Dugin 2002). Eurasianists, therefore, proffered that Russia must rebuild its pre-emptive capabilities both militarily and politically, reforming its economy on a state-oriented style and making alliances with other Eurasian countries such as China, India, Iran and Arab states in order to respond and contain the US threat.

In order to quell the Eurasianists' criticism, Yeltsin removed from his government a controversial deputy Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar and decreased the influence of the foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev. Yeltsin became far more insistent in protecting Russian interests in the "Near Abroad" and even applied

economic and military pressure to intransigent states, such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Georgia in attempt to make them toe the line (Freedman 1995: 244). Moreover, in 1994, Yeltsin openly confronted the United States diplomatically on the former Yugoslavia by preventing military actions against Serbia and Bosnian Serbs (Cohen 1994). Russia also intervened in Middle Eastern affairs: During 1994-95, Russia worked towards lifting the US sanctions on Iraq (Dannreuther 1998). Moscow, also stepped up involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Immediately, after the incident in Hebron in February 1994, when an Israeli settler killed 29 Arabs praying at the Cave of the Patriarchs, Yeltsin without coordinating with the American officials 'urged to return to Madrid to save the peace talks and called for the introduction of international observers to protect the Palestinians' (Freedman 1995: 244). Soon after Yeltsin invited both Arafat and Rabin to official visits to Moscow in attempt to co-sponsor the Arab-Israeli peace talks (Freedman 1995). Eventually, an agreement was reached on 4 May when Israel and the PLO decided to return for peace talks under conditions of an international presence in Hebron (Freedman 1995: 244).

In the context of the Arab-Israeli peace process, Russia showed an interest to renew its hardened relations with Syria as well. This was marked by series of

visits by Russian top diplomats to Syria in 1994. The first of which was made by the first Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Soskovets in April 1994. Soskovets during his visit delivered Kremlin's message which suggested that the Syrian debt repayment from the Soviet period could be made easier for Damascus by the Russian import of Syrian goods (Kreutz 2007). Even more, following this new understanding, Russian delegation signed a new military-technical cooperation agreement with Syria, which was regarded as a 'first step toward resurrecting the close relations that existed between Damascus and Moscow during the Soviet period' (Kreutz 2007: 20). In a follow-up visit by Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev in November 1994, Kozyrev's tone had changed significantly to imitate a more sceptical approach to relations with the West, which centred on the ESS's idea (Nizameddin 2013). This was apparent in the meeting with the Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad when Kozyrev stated that 'Russia's presence in the Middle East provided a balance and counterweight to the American hegemony in the region' (Kreutz 2007: 20).

Shortly after Kozyrev's visit a special delegation and Middle East envoy for the Russian President, headed by Victor Posuvalyuk, arrived in Damascus in November 1994. In the meeting, the Russian delegation sought to persuade the Syrian government to conclude a peace agreement with Israel (Eggert 1994).

Even more, as an encouragement Moscow agreed to write off \$2 billion of the Syrian debt (Eggert 1994). Although Damascus was aware of Russia's weakness and domestic instability, with lacking other alternatives, Syrian government welcomed Moscow reactivating role in the Arab-Israeli settlement (Kreutz 2007). With the sense of isolation and under unceasing Israeli and American pressure Damascus tried to use Russia as a counterbalance and source of assistance (Kreutz 2007).

However, Syrian's expectations regarding Russian potential in the Middle East proved to be too premature. An earlier signed military-technical cooperation agreement between Moscow and Damascus did not bring any positive changes in relations of two countries nor strengthened the Syrian military position in the region. Even more, Kremlin rushed to reassure Israeli government that the nature of the agreement was to provide Syria with mainly spare parts to Soviet weaponry with defensive qualities (Freedman 1995). Thus, Kremlin rapprochement efforts with Syria characterized a more symbolic nature rather than genuine assertive foreign policy vis-à-vis the West. Rather, more than anything else, 'Yeltsin's government played to Russia's domestic audience, trying to prove its nationalist Russian credentials' (Kreutz 2007: 20). Similarly, Dmitri Trenin (2006) noted that trying to salvage the situation within in the

country, Yeltsin's team was forced to manoeuvre or possibly flirt with domestic oppositional groups in order to demonstrate their independence from Western partners.

#### **5.4 Counterhegemonic Strategic Subculture in operation within the MENA Policy arena: the late 1990s**

With further demands for a more assertive foreign policy and heavier criticism addressed against the *Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) from competing strategic groups, in January 1996, Yeltsin removed Andrei Kozyrev and appointed Yevgeny Primakov to the position of the Russian foreign minister. Yeltsin's decision of the appointment of Primakov to replace Kozyrev was welcomed and supported by the all factions in the State Duma (Trunov 2012).

The removal of Andrei Kozyrev marked the break with the Russian policy of *интеграция с Западом любой ценой* (integration with the West at any cost), which has been set by the LISS. The appointment of Yevgeny Primakov on other hand, signalled the beginning of the distinct policy of "demanding and defending Russia's national interests", as Primakov had long argued for an

independent and active position for Russia in the world affairs (Dannreuther 1998; Freedman 2000; Nizameddin 2008).

Yevgeny Primakov was associated with the Counterhegemonic strategic thinking, which argued that the unipolar structure of the world under the economic and military domination of the United States was an immediate threat to Russia's national interest (Primakov 1992; 1999 in Tsygankov 2013). CHSS articulated that Russia must restore its great power status in the multipolar world, and re-establish its role in maintaining the world equilibrium.

CHSS considered Russia's self-imagery as a great power of the first rank, which corresponded to its geographical imagery of "Eurasian". This allowed Russia to act as a political bridge between West and non-Western countries, and the right to tackle issues in the given geographical space as a matter of its national interest (Primakov 1992 in Tsygankov 2013). In practise this meant, abandoning the 'unequal' Western-oriented approach at the expense of relations with the key non-Western Eurasian actors, while conceding the impracticality of an approach of complete isolation from and confrontation with the West promoted

by the Eurasianists. Rather the argument of the CHSS was to pursue a more balanced approach based precisely on balance of power.

While, in the late 1990s the notions of the CHSS were practiced in foreign and security policy discourses, they also became an officially adopted view of Russia's strategies in engaging with the outside world. In other words, the CHSS articulations were integrated to the formal strategic culture of the Russia Federation and became an operational strategic culture (discussed in Chapter 4).

During these years, Russia began actively oppose Western plans of NATO expansion. Even in the early 1990s, when the Russian government did not object to Eastern European states joining the alliance, Yevgeny Primakov then the Director of Foreign Intelligence Service, in his report on NATO, opposed the idea and tried to change the minds of the leadership in Kremlin (*Gazeta Kommersant* 1993). Although unsuccessful in the early 1990s, Primakov's idea became one of the main foreign policy priorities in the mid-1990s. Moreover, the CHSS eagerness to respond to the threat of NATO's expansion was adopted in the formal strategic culture, formulated in 1997 NSC as following: 'The



prospect of NATO expansion to the East is unacceptable for Russia, as it represents a threat to its national security' (NSC 1997).

In the context of its southern strategy, Russia already in 1996 had actively involved itself in the Arab-Israeli peace process and sought to improve its relations with the old Soviet MENA allies Iraq, Syria, Iran and Libya. In the context of promoting the idea of multipolarity. Moscow attempted to create a strategic alliance with China and India. Primakov mooted an idea of a "strategic triangle" consisting of Russia, China and India as a geopolitical response to the US ambition to build a unipolar world (Ayrapetyan 2011). Similarly, Moscow actively called for strengthening the role of the UN Security Council in which it continued to veiled the VETO power.

The Middle East at that time had been experiencing some negative developments. The most prominent of them were Israel's abandonment of the Oslo Peace agreement after Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated and the growing American pressure on Iraq that was grounded in accusations that Baghdad had resumed its programme of developments of the weapons of mass destruction (Freedman 2000). Kremlin used these regional developments to exhibit that 'the remaining self-proclaimed superpower, the United States, was

incapable to find solution when it came to resolving the complex issues of the Middle East' (Nizameddin 2013: 48). Moreover, 'Russian foreign policy promoted the idea that Moscow's cooperation, joint with the support of the European Union and other major world powers, would be a valuable factor in helping the United States overcome the myriad Middle Eastern challenges' (Nizameddin 2013: 48). This was well illustrated with the Russia's diplomatic success in contributing to the resolution of the US-Iraqi deadlock in 1997-98 (Dannreuther 1998).

During the Israeli military operation in Lebanon in 1996, Primakov in order to mediate the ceasefire had a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres. During the meeting as quoted by Freedman, Peres tried to downgrade the Russia's role in the peace process and pointedly noted, that "I prefer efforts in this direction [working out a ceasefire in Lebanon] to be concentrated in single hands, those of the United States' (2000: 157). Ultimately, it was Washington with the mediation of the US Secretary of State Warren Christopher that reached the ceasefire. The US unilateral actions in this process without the Russia's participation was heavily criticized by Primakov, who stated that 'Russia has been and will be present in the Middle East...we have our interests

and responsibilities there and we shall act in the interests of peace and stability' (Primakov 1996 in Freedman 2000: 157).

Primakov viewed Syria as an indispensable partner in the Middle Eastern peace process and emphasized the importance of Moscow's co-operation with Damascus in a genuine Arab-Israeli settlement (Primakov 1999: 373-375). Primakov visited the Middle East three times between 1996 and 1997 and each visit included Syria and Israel. During his visits to Damascus, Primakov had long talks with Hafiz al-Asad and other Syrian leaders (Kreutz 2007). The Syrian government also demonstrated a desire to end US monopoly in regional affairs and 'welcomed the Russian overtures led by Primakov as well as European and the United Nations participation to use as leverage in relations with the United States' (Nizameddin 2013: 178). This was apparent during the Hafiz al-Asad's visit to Moscow in July 1999, where he endorsed Primakov's 'idea of a multipolar world and called for strenuous efforts to strength the role of the United Nations' (Kreutz 2007: 23). However, the Israeli government with the newly elected Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu was reluctant to accept Moscow's attempts to mediate the peace process and rejected Primakov's proposal to request from Syria security preconditions in return for a settlement on the occupied Syrian territories (Primakov 1999: 381).

Nevertheless, the Syrian government still had counted on Russia's assistance in the resumption of the Israeli-Syrian negotiations which were annulled in 1996. This issue was high on the agenda during Hafiz al-Asad's visit to Moscow in July 1999. During the meeting with Boris Yeltsin, the Syrian government pointed out that Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in the final peace agreement had agreed, in principle, to return the Golan Heights to Syria, however, as the negotiations were suspended in 1996, both Prime Ministers Netanyahu and Barak demanded to 'restart the talks from the scratch' (Kreutz 2007: 24). Moscow supported the Syrian position and stressed the need to resume the talks where they had been interrupted (Kreutz 2007).

Another main issue during the Hafiz al-Asad's visit to Moscow was Syria's import of Russian armaments. While in Moscow, Asad met with Russian Defence Minister Igor Sergeyev, with whom he discussed the \$2 billion worth of Russian arms exports to Syria which was expected after negotiations in February 1999 (Douglas 1999). After reaching an agreement in 1998 to import 1,000 anti-missile systems from Russia, Syria tried to enhance its military capabilities by another massive arms deal with Moscow which would include Sukhoi planes, T-80 tanks and air defence system using S-300 missiles (Douglas 1999). The Syrian leadership expected that 'securing Russian agreement to

supply Syria with weapons would strength its position in negotiating with Israel' (Kreutz 2007: 22). Moreover, according to Davis Douglas, 'the deal would return Russia as a major player in the Middle East, an ambition that is believed to have been accelerated since the appointment of pro-Arab Yevgeny Primakov' as a Russian Foreign Minister (1999). However, due to the US and Israeli objections, the expected transfer did not happen until the mid-2000s (SIPRI Arms Transfers Database).

Although CHSS was less inclined towards the confrontation with the West, it was indeed Yeltsin, rather than Primakov who sought to avoid any contradiction with the West. This was noticeable with the Russian decision to delay the promised arms deliveries to Syria, as well as with the "Gore-Chernomyrdin" agreement that limited Russia's arms sales to Iran, which ultimately, was terminated with Russia's unilateral withdrawal from the agreement after Putin's coming to power in 2000 (Broder 2000). However, the best example of Yeltsin's manoeuvre was observed during the Yugoslav crisis in 1999. After the NATO bombings, Russia, headed by Yevgeny Primakov then as a Prime Minister, involved itself in mediating the crisis. Primakov 'formulated tough conditions for ending the war, which included guarantees for Yugoslavia's preserved sovereignty, a broad autonomy for Kosovo, and the

UN assuming leadership in the post-war settlement' (Tsygankov 2013: 110). However, as Yeltsin 'out of fear of Russia-West political escalation' dismissed Primakov as a key negotiator and replaced him with former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, settlement was reached more on the West's rather than on Russia's terms (Tsygankov 2013: 111).

The CHSS which had been influential during the Primakov's political tenure, became an operational strategic culture that sought to shape a distinct and independent approach in foreign affairs. Russia, accordingly, actively promoted multipolarity, engaged with regional powers such as China and India, and demonstrated a renewed interest in the Middle East including by engaging in the Arab-Israeli peace process. Moreover, Russia sought to improve its relations with the old Soviet allies in the MENA. Also, during these years Moscow, with Primakov played the role of Iraq's political advocate in the stand-off with Washington and reached diplomatic success in 1997 and 1998. However, with Primakov's removal from office and the weakening of the influence of the CHSS, Russia under the Yeltsin's leadership decided to abstain from voting the UN Security Council's 1248 resolution, which was imposed on Iraq in December 1999. Moscow's particular decision to some extent has brought the

sense that Russia's foreign policy towards the MENA allies was less committed, precisely as in the early 1990s.

## CHAPTER 6: RUSSIAN SYRIA POLICY 2000-2010

In this Chapter thesis discusses the shift in Russia's strategic culture caused by two competing strategic subcultures between 2000 and 2010. Starting with subcultural attributes Chapter proceeds with internal and external implications of the new strategic thinking and looks at implications on Russia's Syria policy, along with the main aspects of Russian-Libyan relations.

### 6.1 Neo-Conservative Strategic Subculture in operation

As many observed, by the late 1990s, the reforms started by the Yeltsin's team has left Russia in a deep social, political, and economic turmoil. These reforms Mikhail Nazarov in his book *Tayna Rossii* (1999) would formulate as "razrushitel'nyye reformy" (destructive reforms). Similarly, in the report of the Russian think tank *Sovet po Vneshney i Oboronnoy Politike* (SVOP), which was published in February 1999 and later in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, the outcome of the reforms of the 1990s was articulated as leading to 'general instability and uncertainty about the future' (translated from Russian). According to the report, 'the main factor of the Russian crisis at the time was the decisive role of its political component... its main feature is the growing weakness of the state and, first of all, the general reduction of trust and respect for the executive



branch' (SVOP 1999, translated from Russian). Similar beliefs about the weakness of the government existed within the wider public as well (Volkov 2000). This was only increased by Yeltsin's deteriorating health, the 1998 economic default, the NATO bombings of the Slavic nation of Serbia and the instability in the North Caucasus, the consequences of which had made itself felt in the capital in the form of bombings of apartment buildings that killed almost 300 people in Moscow in 1999.

It was in this context of general uncertainty that Vladimir Putin had been climbing up political ladder to the top position in the country. Vladimir Putin is associated with the Neo-Conservative strategic subculture (NCSS) the main attribute of which is the readiness to utilize hawkish and harsher means, including military force in the promotion and defence of Russia's national interests in the international affairs. The self-imagery of Russia in NCSS is represented as the Eurasian great power, the geographical imagery of which, stretches well beyond Russian national borders.

Vladimir Putin's elevation to the position of Prime Minister in August 1999, and acting President of the RF in December 1999 and the elected President of the RF in May 2000, led to an increasing strength of NCSS in Russia's strategic

thinking, signalling an end to the Russian domestic and international appeasement period. Indeed, while NCSS's ideas had become formal strategic culture (discussed in Chapter 4), they soon turned into operational strategic culture and were practised in the official political discourses, which was noticeable already in Putin's the first Presidential address to the Federal Assembly in 2000, when he states that 'the only real choice for Russia is the choice of a strong country. A country that is strong and confident of itself' (Putin 2000a in Kremlin 2000, translated form Russian).

In the domestic political administrative structure, Putin has reduced the decision-making power of the regions, which were viewed as weakening Russia and linked them to the centre, to the President that became a structure of the 'vertical power' (Putin 2000b in Kremlin 2000).

In the case of the crisis in North Caucasus, contrary to the constant political meddling of politicians during the first Chechen war (1994-1996), in the second, Putin then a Prime Minister has given a full control to conduct the war to military staff in order to achieve a decisive victory and the total destruction of Islamist fighters (Dannreuther and March 2008). Putin implicitly criticised the earlier approach taken to the resolution of the instability in North Caucasus and

criticized the practicality of the “Khasavyurt Accord”, which was a formal ceasefire agreement between Russia and Chechnya signed by General Alexander Lebed and Aslan Maskhadov in August 1996. Putin’s approach suggested decisiveness and complete destruction of Islamists without compromise. Indeed, ‘the constant mantra of the second war was that there would be no negotiation with the terrorists’ (Dannreuther and March 2008: 100). Behind this uncompromised approach, despite the heavy criticism and pressure from the West (Guseynov 2000), was the distinct beliefs on the causes of the situation in North Caucasus. Adherents to NCSS have not believed that the instability in the region occurred due to the genuine desire of some parts of the Russian Federation to be independent from Moscow. Rather, it has been viewed through the geopolitical prism as some external powers seek to destabilise and weaken Russia and eventually to destroy it. This conspiracy thinking is another main attribute of NCSS. As Putin formulated in the early 2000s:

‘What actually did not suit Chechnya in 1999? Chechnya was de facto completely independent state. What actually made some people with arms penetrate the territory of Dagestan and demand the secession of additional territories from the Russian Federation from the Caspian to Black Sea? Was it a struggle for independence of Chechnya? This is absolute nonsense, it has nothing to do with

the interests of the Chechen people. But this desired territory could be used as a foothold for destabilising Russia and eventually undertake an attack on the Russian Federation' (Putin 2000c in Giuseppina Dyer 2017, translated from Russian).

*Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (1999) observed that in the meeting of Vladimir Putin, then as Prime Minister, with Ministry of Defence Igor Sergeyev and Chief of the General Staff of the RF Armed Forces Anatoly Kvashnin, a general conclusion was that the 'military-political situation in the world was extremely unstable and that the US intends to weaken Russia and establish full control over the North Caucasus...it is in the national interests of the United States that there remain an option to externally fuel conflict in the North Caucasus' (1999, translated from Russian).

The Chechen conflict became the subject of discussion at almost all international forums and meetings held as early as 2000: a meeting of finance ministers and heads of central banks of the G-7 in Tokyo (where Russia's First Deputy Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov was invited), meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the European Union, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe session in Strasbourg, the World Economic Forum in Davos (Guseynov 2000). Furthermore, at the meeting of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in November 1999, the United States proposed the

adoption the draft resolution on Chechnya. The draft did not accept the Russian operations in Chechnya as antiterrorist and accused Russia of violating international law and human rights, in particular the Geneva agreements, and called for appeals to immediately sit at the negotiating table with Aslan Maskhadov, and even did not exclude NATO's humanitarian intervention in the Caucasus, bypassing the UN and the OSCE (Guseynov 2000).

However, Putin at the end of the meeting with Ministry of Defence and the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces stated that despite the external pressures, 'the antiterrorist operation in Chechnya will continue and there will be no negotiations with the bandits...and a specific decisions will be taken on the mobilization of all resources in order to make the army more powerful and effective so that it can undertake the tasks facing the state' (Putin 1999a in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 1999, translated form Russian).

The NCSS's worldview articulates the need of the self-assured economy and self-reliant military power. NCSS articulates that Russia has to rely on her military strength, rather than on illusions about international justice and good intentions in international relations. With its notions NCSS to some extent align itself with the idea of the Russian Emperor Alexander III that Russia has just

two allies, her army and her navy. Putin noted during the Direct Line question-and-answer session televised live in April 2015 that he quite agrees with a phrase once coined by Russian Emperor Alexander III. A strong military to NCSS is one of the main principles of the sovereignty of Russia, and Russia must have a self-reliant powerful military, capable of protecting its national interests, in order for Russia to be truly herself.

The NCSS's articulations on a strong military was integrated into the Russian formal strategic culture as one of the primary objectives of the Russian Federation (discussed in Chapter 4).

The strength in economy and military were coterminous. As the situation was interpreted, the course that Russia has been following since the early 1990s, left Russia dependent on loans from the Western financial institutions, with the internal social-political turmoil and instability in the North Caucasus. As such, Russia had become a type of 'Third World' country (Putin 2000d in Kremlin 2000, translated from Russian). As they were interpreted, the events of the late 1990s had demonstrated that the West, particularly the United States had dominated not only economically and militarily, but its ideas and views on international norms and values were globally accepted. The world's powerful

institutions headed by the United States, including the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), condemned Russia's military actions in the Caucasus accusing it of violations of international human rights, while in reality, 'Russia faced a challenge to state sovereignty and territorial integrity in the form of international terrorism and has been left face to face with forces seeking a geopolitical restructuring of the world' (Putin 2000e in Kremlin 2000, translated from Russian). As it was presented, the West, particularly the United States had been cynically using the dominance of its power and ideas in undermining the fairness of the international system. Therefore, in the NCSS's interpretation, Russia was engaged not only in geopolitical struggle with the West but also in an ideational or civilizational struggle.

NCSS views Russia as a great Eurasian power with thousand years of history and with the traditional values that unite all Russians and that allow Russians to be called one nation (Putin 2000 in Kremlin 2000). These values, according to Putin, should be kept and protected, despite the developments both in the world and in Russia and should serve Russians for 'finding our own answers to the questions of spirituality and morality' (Putin 2000f in Kremlin 2000, translated from Russian). This idea of Russia's understanding of traditional values was emphasized in July 2000 during the Putin's first address to the

Federal Assembly. This idea soon became practical in Russia's foreign and security policy discourse, which offered an alternative understanding of international norms and values and their practical dimensions and found their manifestations in the concepts like *suverennaya demokratiya* (sovereign democracy) and *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World). While the latter to some extent encapsulates the former, *Russkiy Mir* is defined not exclusively by ethnicity, nationality, religion, or territory but defined as linking all the people in the world, who have a spiritual, language and cultural connections to Russia. As it was stated in the *Provisions of the State Cultural Policy* (2014) of the Russian Federation, the moral values, which are traditional for Russian World, are based on the norms developed by mankind and requirements that are common for all world religions. However, those identical values have been forsaken by the West (Putin 2013). 'We can see how many of the Euro-Atlantic countries are actually rejecting their roots, including the Christian values that constitute the basis of Western civilisation...they are denying moral principles and all traditional identities: national, cultural, religious and even sexual. They are implementing policies that equate large families with same-sex partnerships, belief in God with the belief in Satan' (Putin 2013a in Foer 2017).



The NCSS views Russia as a defender of the traditional values, the protector of civilization against evil and unfairness. 'Standing up for fairness and truth has been deeply embedded in Russia's honour code, and no threat is great enough to make us give up our values and ideals' (Putin 2014a in Kremlin 2014, translated from Russian).

### **6.1.1 Neo-Conservative Strategic Subculture and the MENA**

With its self-imagery of the Eurasian great power, the MENA carries a vital importance to the NCSS. The most prominent aspect is the Islamic factor. By some estimates, about 20 million of Russians practise Islam, and there are some regions of the Russian Federation in which the population practising Islam is the majority. Therefore, 'Russia is intertwined with the Islamic world with traditional, natural connections and the Russian Muslims are an inseparable, full-fledged, and active part of the multi-ethnic and multi-denominational nation of Russia...and such interfaith harmony is the strength of Russia...its wealth, wealth and advantage (Putin 2003a in Kremlin 2003, translated from Russian). In other words, Islam is the part of Russian identity presented by NCSS's the Eurasian self-imagery, which also manifests itself in the idea of *Russkii Mir*.

Russia's Soviet-Communist past of atheism and the record of waging a war against the resurgent Afghans, have served as a foundation for strengthening the anti-Muslim image of Russia in the Islamic World after the outset of Chechen War. Generally, among the Muslims, Chechnya was seen as a legitimate defensive *Jihad* against a Judaeo-Christian attack on Islam (Maleshenko 2006; Dannreuther 2012). Moreover, at the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in 2000, the Saudi representative openly criticized the Russian military campaigns in the North Caucasus calling them 'inhumane act against the Muslim people of Chechnya' (Dannreuther 2012: 547).

In the NCSS's view, the situation in the North Caucasus as well as the enemy within the Islamic World is not indigenous but has been created by the West instrumentally. 'Some exploit religious slogans to carry out armed aggression...fight against lawful authority, provoke separatism and are involved in terrorism...Others use this situation as a tool of political pressure to achieve their own goals, which have nothing in common with the interests of Islam, with protecting human rights, or with international law in general' (Putin 2003b in Kremlin 2003, translated from Russian).

In the view of the NCSS, this was the consequence of Russian weakness and of Russia's previous neglect of the MENA in a concession to the West. Therefore, NCSS articulated the need for strengthening Russia's influence in the region, in order to act as counter-weight to American regional power.

Furthermore, in the NCSS geographical imagery the MENA, the region is part of Russia's responsibility as it has undeniable impact on Central Asia, Russia itself, and Eurasia (Putin 2007 in Kremlin 2007).

In the Neo-Conservative strategic thinking, Russia must use all means available (e.g. politico-diplomatic, economic, military, cultural, religious etc.) in asserting its influence in the all regional spheres in order to balance the American presence in the MENA. The MENA, therefore, is part of Russian grand strategy.

In the economic sphere Russia demonstrated interest on building a trade ties with the all countries of the region. In the political and diplomatic sphere, 'Russia, as a unique Eurasian power, which has always played a special role in building relations between the East and the West' (Putin 2000g, in Kremlin 2000a, translated form Russian), demonstrated its desire to re-establish its role of a co-sponsor of the Middle East peace process, and stated its readiness 'to do

everything within its power to help restore normal life and resume the negotiating process' (Putin 2000h in Kremlin 2000a, translated from Russian).

In the military sphere, along with exporting military hardware to the region, Russia demonstrated its willingness to establish the Russian military presence in the MENA, particularly the presence of Russian Navy in the Mediterranean. This idea also was integrated into the formal strategic culture, in the 2001 *Russian Maritime Doctrine*, which was discussed in Chapter 4.

In the cultural and religious sphere, Russia showed interest in the integration with OIC and became its observer member in 2005, organized official delegations from Russian Muslim regions to the Middle Eastern Arab states, demonstrated its readiness to protect Christian minorities in the region, and launched the Arabic service of the state television channel *Rusiyā al-Yaum* (Russia Today).

### **6.1.2 Neo-Conservative strategic subculture in operation: Implications on Syria and Libya**

After Putin's consolidation of power, Russia's relations with Syria and Libya have started to take a new shape. In August 2000, Libyan Foreign Minister Abdel Rahman Shalgham visited Moscow, where he met President Putin and

other senior officials (Black 2004). During his visit Shalgham handed Putin an invitation from Muammar Qaddafi to pay a state visit to Tripoli, which was accepted by Putin (Katz 2008). Also, during Shalgham's visit, Moscow agreed to repair and upgrade Libyan military hardware and nuclear plants and build new electric power lines (Black 2004). In May 2001, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov visited Tripoli, the first Russian Foreign Minister to visit Libya, in order to promote economic relations between the two countries (Andres 2006). In the meantime, the Syrian President, a seventy-year-old Hafiz al-Assad died of a heart attack in June 2000. His death, among the some of the top Russian diplomats was perceived as the "end of entire epoch in the Middle East" and Russian leadership expressed 'sincere and deep condolences' to the new Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad and to all people of Syria (Kreutz 2007: 25).

Already, in July 2000, Kremlin announced its intention to start a 'constructive interaction' with the new Syrian leader, which was responded positively to through Syrian Ambassador to Russia, Wahib Fadel, who expressed the hope that Moscow and Damascus despite temporary difficulties would be able to improve bilateral relations (Kreutz 2007: 26). This mutual understanding was followed by the visits of Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Shara in April 2001 and by the Syrian Defence Minister Mustafa Tlas to Moscow in May 2001, who

discussed new stages of bilateral and military cooperation between the two countries (Kreutz 2007). Close relations with Syria was significant for Russia's Chechen cause, especially in Moscow's attempts to change the Russian anti-Muslim image in the Islamic World. Syria, an Arab state, for a few decades has been acting actively for the cause of the Arab people, particularly for the Palestinians. Moreover, the new Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad cast himself as reformist figure who would bring democracy to the heart of the Arab east, which was unsurprisingly welcomed by the West as well as by many regional states (Hinnebusch 2009). Efforts in normalization of relations with Syria began to bear some fruits for Russia. Soon, following Iran, the Syrian government began to regard the Chechen conflict as a Russian domestic affair (Kreutz 2007). This was most apparent in September 2001, when Damascus welcomed the pro-government Chechen leader Akhmad Kadyrov in Syria. During the Kadyrov's visit the Mufti of the Syrian Arab Republic, Sheikh Ahmad Kufaro condemned terrorism in 'all its forms and manifestations' and supported the Russia's position in Chechnya (Kreutz 2007: 28).

The upmost critics of Russia's Chechen policy, the United States and Saudi Arabia, soon became softer in their condemnations, especially due to the events of 9/11 and the experience of both in becoming targets of militants

(Dannreuther 2012). Indeed, after the 9/11, the US criticism of Russia was muted, and relations between the two improved when Russia supported the US-led war on terror. Bobo Lo (2014), marked this improved relations as the second of three 'brief periods of relative smooth engagement between Russia and the West' (2014: 165). While Russia's "strategic choice" in supporting the American cause was partly due to Russia's desire to reduce Western pressure on its own Chechen policy, but also due to acceptance of unilateral counterterrorism actions within NCSS. To be certain, American actions in Afghanistan were portrayed as against "evil", "brutality" "injustice", and in the name of protecting "civilization", "morality" and international "norms" and most importantly it was not directed against the legitimate regime or a state but internationally accepted illegitimate terrorist group Al-Qaeda (Council on Foreign Relations). In other words, the American decision on Afghanistan did not contradict the main principles of the NCSS, rather it has mostly corresponded to Russia's special regional and global responsibilities, which articulated by NCSS, while also punishing a neighbouring nemesis.

However, the corresponding principles were tested when the US abrogated the 1972 US-Soviet ABM treaty<sup>24</sup> and threatened to apply force against the legitimate Iraqi regime in 2002. On the first day of the Anglo-American military operation against Iraq the following year, Putin convened an emergency meeting of the Russian Security Council and condemned the US-UK decision to apply force against the weak and non-threatening Middle Eastern state and called this decision as a 'big political mistake' (Putin 2003d in Anna News 2014, translated from Russian). As Putin stated on the first day of the operations:

'Today, the United States started a military action against Iraq. Consequently, the entire region became under the threat of a large-scale humanitarian and ecological catastrophe. Military actions have been undertaken against the opinion of the international community, contrary to the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. This military action cannot be justified under any circumstances, neither with accusations of Iraqi leadership's association with terrorist groups nor with the desire to change the political regime in this country, which is direct breach of international norms.

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<sup>24</sup> The ABM Treaty was signed at Moscow May 26, 1972, and ratified by the US Senate August 3, 1972. It entered into force October 3, 1972. The US and the USSR signed a Protocol to the treaty which entered into force in 1976 which reduced the number of ABM deployment areas from two to one, deployed either around each party's national capital area or, alternatively, at a single ICBM deployment area. The Treaty was further modified by amendments, various common understandings, and protocols. Five-year review meetings are held in Geneva. On 13 December 2001 President Bush submitted to the Russian Federation formal notification of intent to abrogate the Treaty. On 13 June 2002 the unilateral withdrawal of the United States of America from the ABM Treaty came into effect. Source: <https://fas.org/nuke/control/abmt/>



Only citizens of Iraq have a legitimate right to make such decision. As the permanent member of the UN Security Council, Russia insists on immediate cessation of the military actions against Iraq' (Putin 2003e in Anna News 2014, translated from Russian translated form Russian).

Among the factors, which led Moscow to object the Western decision to intervene in Iraq was seen Russia's economic interests (Freedman 2010). Along with securing Iraq's repayment of debt amounting to about \$8 billion, Russia sought to maintain Russia's accesses to Iraqi oil and prior to the Western military operations, Russia and Iraq had indeed concluded a number of agreements (Freedman 2010). However, before the intervention in 2002, Saddam Hussein cancelled the lucrative contract, which Russian "Lukoil" had received to develop the West Qurna oil field (Freedman 2010). During the diplomatic opposition before the intervention, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs often emphasized that Russia's economic interests in Iraq were not guiding and dictating Russia's principled stand on the Iraqi question (Melkumyan 2003).

The Russian oppositional stance on the Iraqi question built a perception in the Middle East and in the Muslim world that 'Russia was again providing some balance against US hegemony that assured a more favourable perception of Russia's international role' (Dannrether 2012: 548). This perception was boosted

by Russian political support on Syria, when the latter's relations with the United States began to deteriorate during the invasion of Iraq.

In late March 2003, the Bush administration accused the Syrian government of actively supporting anti-US insurgents in Iraq and allowing Sunni extremist fighters around the Muslim world to 'cross into the country to join the fighting' (Nizameddin 2013: 182). Even more, Washington did not abstain from accusing Syria and to some extent Russia for engineering Iraqi clean-up operations of the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), which despite the strong Western accusations had not been found in the Iraqi territory. The Bush administration claimed that Baghdad cooperated with Damascus in ensuring a safe route out of the WMD from Iraq (Nizameddin 2013).

While the Western pressure began to mount on Damascus, Moscow stepped up in repudiating the Anglo-American accusations directed against the Syrian leadership. Putin also remarked that a situation similar to the Iraqi regime change could be implemented in Syria (Kreutz 2010). By supporting Syria, Putin stated, that 'even if there are people who do not like the regime in this country [Syria], it should not be changed under pressure from outside' (Kreutz 2007: 28). In July 2003, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov invited President

Bashar al-Assad to visit Moscow (Andreev 2003). This invitation has been seen as 'a Russian declaration of its support for Damascus and the challenge to US Middle Eastern and global hegemony' as at that time the Syrian Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act (SALSRA), proposing sanctions against Syria, was going to be discussed by the US Congress (Kreutz 2007: 29). Moreover, Russia has not abstained to condemn the Israeli air strikes against alleged "terrorist bases" in Syria in October 2003 and criticized the US in December 2003 for unilateral sanctions against Syria, reiterating once again its support for Damascus by noting that 'Syria is one of Russia's important partners in the Middle East and is regarded as one of the key participants in the Middle East Peace Process' (Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Saltanov quoted in Kreutz 2007: 29).

Unlike Syria, the Libyan image as a "rogue state" in the West has been started gradually changing, along with Qaddafi's image, who was once regarded as posing a great risk to the Western community (Black 2004). As the result of these developments, Libya was not deemed part of the 'Axis of Evil' and American sanctions against Libya were lifted, and overall Tripoli experienced a dramatic improvement in a bilateral relations with the United States and Britain (Katz 2008). By 2005, the Libyan foreign trade was estimated to be worth \$41.6

billion (Katz 2008). The share of the Russian firms in the Libyan foreign trade was little comparing to the Western, reaching only about \$130 million in 2006 (Katz 2008).

Russia's foreign policy strategy strengthened Russia's position in the region, which had been weakened since the mid-1980s. Consequently, it led to a modification of its earlier anti-Muslim image in the Muslim world and among the Muslim population within Russia. This was most apparent when Russia was recognized as an observer member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in 2005, which was a highly symbolic shift for Russia, for previously this organization 'had been the forum for extremely strong criticisms of Russian policies in Chechnya' (Dannreuther 2012: 549). In January 2003, the OIC Secretary General, Abdel-Wahid Belkaziz arrived in Moscow on a three-day working visit at the invitation of Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov. It was at this moment that the first unofficial information about Russia's possible accession to the OIC began to leak into the press for the first time (Lyubarskaya 2003). By this time, a special department for improving relations with the Islamic world had been formed at the Foreign Ministry and the post of ambassador to the OIC had been created, which was occupied by Veniamin Popov (Lyubarskaya 2003).

Soon after, Russia denounced the Danish cartoons published by *Jyllands-Posten* as insulting Islam. All these developments led to more improved relations with other Arab states in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, which even offered its support for the future reconstruction of Chechnya and which significantly declined the earlier criticisms of Russia's actions in the Northern Caucasus (Freedman 2010).

Russia's growing influence in the Middle East had been indirectly aided by the declining image of the US due to the growing insurgency in Iraq. Indeed, the US policy in Iraq not only frustrated the radical anti-Western states but led to dissatisfaction among the most moderate pro-Western states in the region. As a consequence, Russia had been welcomed in the region and its regional policy, seen as the counterweight to the American, had been mostly embraced. This was apparent when in later Russia was able to strengthen its influence in the region by close relations with the radical, anti-Western actors like Syria, Libya, Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah as well as with moderate, pro-Western Middle Eastern states like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Israel.

An implementation of Russia's comprehensive regional policy had been started by Putin's 2004 visit to Turkey. As Putin's visit to Ankara had been the first ever made by a Russian leader, it was marked as a significant and historical one (China Daily 2004). Like Saudi Arabia, the Turkish government also condemned the US actions in Iraq calling them "state terror" and while Turkish-American relations has been deteriorating, Ankara came closer to Russia (Freedman 2010: 26). Russia had much to gain by improved relations with Turkey. Alongside being a growing market for Russia's natural gas, Ankara was a Secretary General of the OIC and its support for Moscow's observer member status was critical.

In February 2007, Vladimir Putin, coming from the Munich Security Conference, at which Putin delivered his famous speech detailing Russia's deep dissatisfaction with the US dominated world order, visited other moderate Middle Eastern states of Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Qatar. During his visit, Putin discussed with Gulf States investments in Russia's banking and space industries, weapons sales, and joint investment projects in oil and natural (Freedman 2010).

In late-February 2005, Russia signed a long-demanded agreement for supply of the nuclear fuel to Iran for the Bushehr reactor under condition to return all spent fuel to Russia, which in theory prevented its diversion into atomic weapon (Freedman 2010). Moreover, in November 2005 Russia agreed to sell Iran sophisticated short-range Tor surface-to-air missile system, with the quality to protect Iran's nuclear installations in the case of an American or Israeli attack. This move by the Russian government has been seen as a direct sign that Moscow would stand by Tehran despite its nuclear polices (Freedman 2010).

Another move by Russia towards improving relations with regional revisionist actors, occurred following the Hamas victory in the Palestinian Legislative Council elections in January 2006. By calling this event 'a very serious blow to the American Middle Eastern policy', Putin invited Hamas leaders to Moscow asserting that the movement was not on Russia's terrorist list (Freedman 2010: 31). Russia was widely praised in the Muslim world for its invitation which 'bestowed a modicum of legitimacy on Hamas' (Freedman 2010: 31).

Syria, another radical actor in the region, was under heavy pressure on two fronts in 2005. Along with the US criticisms that Syria had become a channel for

foreign jihadists to fight in Iraq, the UN Security Council has condemned the Syrian activities in Lebanon (Freedman 2010) and approved Resolution 1559 calling for Syrian forces to withdraw from Lebanon. As Russian daily newspaper *Kommersant* observed:

‘Relations between Moscow and Damascus became stronger as the position of Syria on the world stage has become increasingly shaky. Being accused of supporting the pro-Saddam insurgents, Syria seemingly became the main candidate for the next US invasion in the region. In order to somehow protect themselves from possible attacks from Washington, the leadership in Damascus began the hasty search for a strategic partner and selected Russia. In late 2004, Syria begun negotiating the purchases of a new series of Russian arms amounting of \$2 billion, and the Syrians allegedly promised this time to pay in cash’. (Zygar and Yaremenko 2005).

In January 2005, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad made his first visit to Moscow. Lengthy talks between Syrian President and the Russian leadership has were seen as ‘friendly and moderately successful’ (Kreutz 2007: 29). During the meeting with Bashar al-Assad the Russian leadership declared their readiness to cooperate with Syria in ‘every direction, also coping with new challenges and threats in regional issues and in the economy’ (Kreutz 2007: 29). In the economic sphere Russia agreed to explore and develop Syrian gas and oil deposits, and the Russian Tatneft and Stroytrangaz signed an agreement with



Syrian government in this respect (Katz 2006). As a consequence of Assad's visit, Moscow announced that it would write off 75 percent of Syria's debt to the Russian Federation, amounting to \$13.4 billion and agreed to more flexible terms of repaying the remaining \$3.618 billion (Nizameddin 2013). This was clear indication of Moscow's readiness to support an increasingly isolated Syria. Since the longstanding debt issue had been resolved, in April 2005 Kremlin over the American and Israeli objections agreed to sell Syria the Strelts air defence missile system, consisting of vehicle-mounted short-range surface-to-air missiles, (Katz 2006) which was further sign of support for Syria, which at that time was under heavy pressure due to the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri.

Indeed, under heavy pressure from France and the United States, Syria by end of April 2005 was forced to withdraw its troops from Lebanon. Then, a special commission investigating Hariri's assassination issued an interim report in October 2005, noting that the 'Syrian government obstructed the cooperation with the commission' (Freedman 2010: 29). Soon after, another report was issued to the UN by the committee under Terje Larsen (UN Special Coordinator for peace negotiations in the Middle East), stating that 'although Syrian government pulled out its forces from Lebanon, it had continued to supply

Lebanese and Palestinian militias in Lebanon with weaponry' (Freedman 2010: 29). As a consequence, the released reports led the US, Britain and France to act jointly calling for the UN sanctions against Syria. Moscow staunchly sought to prevent discussion of imposing sanctions on Syria. On 1 November 2005, 'Russian concerns were satisfied by some cosmetic changes to the proposed document, the statement regarding the "threat of sanctions" was replaced by a neutral reference to "other measures" (Kreutz 2007: 32) and Russia adopted Resolution 1636 on Syria jointly with other nations calling Damascus to expand its cooperation with the investigation. Kremlin welcomed Syria's steps towards cooperation with the commission in investigating of Hariri assassination, and assured the Syrian regime that 'Moscow will not spare its efforts to prevent a violent showdown from occurring' (Kreutz 2007: 32).

In 2007, it was revealed that Kremlin agreed to forgive Syria's remaining debts, (whatever left after Moscow has written off 75 percent in 2005) as part of the agreement to permit a permanent presence of the Russian navy in Syrian port of Tartus (Nizameddin 2013). In 2008, the British *Guardian* observed that, 'Tartous is being dredged and renovated to provide a permanent facility for the Russian navy, giving Moscow a key military foothold in the Mediterranean' (Macleod 2008). In January 2009, Colonel-General Anatoly Nogovitsyn, deputy

head of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, announced that Russia was negotiating the creation of several other naval bases with the governments of several states...it was reported that, in addition to Tartus, Russia in several years could establish bases for Russian Navy on the Yemeni island of Socotra and in Libyan Tripoli (*Lenta.ru* 2010). Already in 2010, the world's largest non-air carrier warship, the Russian "Peter the Great" made a call at Tartus (*RIA Novosti* 2010)

Developing Russian-Syrian military cooperation however, left the Israeli government in a sense of insecurity. Security commentators in Israel noted that Russian bases in the Mediterranean 'would upgrade radar and satellite monitoring capabilities and advance Syria's capacity to gather intelligence on Israeli military activities' (Nizameddin 2013: 184). Moreover, Tel Aviv had been persistently complaining to Russia that missile systems that had been sold to Syria could end up in the hands of Hezbollah. Despite, Putin's assurances while he was in an official trip to Israel in April 2005, (Gutterman 2005) Israeli suspicions were confirmed during the Israeli-Hezbollah war in summer 2006. Although the Israeli government had expressed its genuine unhappiness towards Russian rapprochement with Syria and to some extent with Iran, the relationship between Moscow and Tel-Aviv did not suffer unduly, which was

marked by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's visit to Moscow in October 2006 when Russia and Israel agreed to improve trade between two countries (Freedman 2010).

The Russia-Libyan relations saw a breakthrough as well. In December 2007, Qaddafi telephoned Putin to congratulate him on the victory of the pro-Putin party "United Russia" in the Duma elections (2008). Soon after, it was reported that Putin would visit Libya (ITAR-TASS-2007). In the same month, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov visited Libya to discuss the Russian-Libyan military and economic cooperation, including Russia's possible assistance to Libya's atomic energy programme, and the settlement of the Libyan Soviet-era debts (Shestakov 2007).

Putin's visit to Tripoli followed a few months later in April 2008. During his visit, Putin agreed to write off the Libyan debt amounting to \$4.5 billion 'in exchange for the signing of important contracts-not only in the area of military-technical cooperation, but also in the civilian realm' (Katz 2008). As a consequence, Tripoli signed a Euro 2.2\$ billion worth contract with Russian Railroads to build a 554 km rail line between Benghazi and Sirte (Katz 2008). Moreover, Russian Gazprom signed a memorandum of understanding on

cooperation in gas production with the Libyan National Oil Company and another memorandum of understanding was signed with the Libyan Arab African Investment Group about the possibility of setting up a joint venture for working in third countries in Africa (Katz 2008). Furthermore, Moscow and Tripoli signed an agreement on developing friendship and cooperation (Katz 2008).

After Putin's visit to Libya there were reports on the possibility of new contracts, especially with Russia's Technopromexport to build a \$6 billion worth power generating facilities in Libya, and the arms deal agreement estimated to be worth \$11 billion with Russian Rosoboronexport (Katz 2008).

Kremlin's decision to write off the Libyan debt was not received in Russia without criticism, however. Journalists, Mikhail Subbotin and Nikolay Pakhomov questioned the wisdom behind Moscow's decision to forgive the debt in exchange for new contracts. According to them, government would benefit more if it paid the outstanding debts by the Libyan government in full, comparing to the amount it would gain from the new contracts through the Russian firms (2008).

In the meantime, due to the instability in Iraq, the Bush administration had faced heavy international and domestic pressure that led it to downgrade their policy demands towards radical actors in the region, which was most apparent in the Syrian case, when the Bush administration began 'merely seeking a modification in behaviour from Damascus rather than regime change' (Nizameddin 2013: 185). Even more, the United States invited Syria to attend the Middle East peace conference held in Annapolis, USA, in November 2007 (Kreutz 2010: 16). The decline of the power of the Bush administration, however, was best characterised by success of Barack Obama in the presidential elections "on a foreign policy platform", which promoted dialogue with Syria and Iran and fundamentally excluded "unilateralism and universalism" (Nizameddin 2013). Bashar al-Assad welcomed Obama's victory and expressed appreciation for his approach to reset relations. Consequently, Syria's political situation started to improve, which was marked by Assad's 2008 visit to Paris at the invitation of the French President Nicolas Sarkozy and by Sarkozy's visit to Damascus in September 2008, which was followed by many leaders and politicians from the US, Europe and the Middle East (Kreutz 2010).

## **6.2 Institutional Modernist Strategic Subculture in operation**

Institutional Modernist strategic subculture (IMSS) became influential in Russia's strategic culture during the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev, who is associated with this stream of strategic thinking. Being attracted by the Western model of development, IMSS articulated the need for modernizing the Russian economy, its political system, social dimensions and bringing the technological changes to the country (FPC 2008). 'The modernisation of Russian democracy and establishment of a new economy will only be possible if we use the intellectual resources of post-industrial societies' (Medvedev 2009a in Kremlin 2009, translated from Russian). Unlike NCSS, IMSS does not rely on a strong conspiracy thinking, and therefore it is against pursuing an antagonistic policy towards the West. As Medvedev reminded, 'resentment, arrogance, various complexes, mistrust and especially hostility should be excluded from the relations between Russia and the leading democratic countries' (2009b in Kremlin 2009). Rather, IMSS articulates a more nuanced approach in finding consensus with the US and EU (Medvedev 2009 in Kremlin 2009). Moreover, IMSS formulates Russia's self-imagery as Euro-Atlantic. 'Russia, the European Union and North America are the three branches of European civilisation' ...therefore... 'we need to talk today about unity between the whole

Euro-Atlantic area from Vancouver to Vladivostok' (Medvedev 2008a in Kremlin 2008). This idea was integrated into the Russian formal strategic culture, and turned into operational strategic culture and was actively practised in the foreign and security policy discourse of the Russian officials, emphasising the creation of a pan-European 'collective security and cooperation structure that will ensure the unity of the Euro-Atlantic region' (FPC 2008). Moreover, it was in this context, that President Medvedev, along with key western leaders, delivered a speech in Berlin in November 2009, at the celebration event of the fall of the Berlin Wall (*Rossiyskaya Gazeta* 2009). As Medvedev stated:

'The Berlin wall did not only symbolize a division of one country but it has symbolized a confrontation and a division of whole Europe...and with its fall, the "iron curtain" was eliminated, which has assisted the unification of Germany and the whole Europe...and was marked as a significant historical day in overcoming contradictions and responding to the mutual challenges' (Medvedev 2009c in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* 2009, translated from Russian).

Medvedev's participation in the ceremony emphasized the IMSS's idea of the unity of the Euro-Atlantic region through 'eliminating other walls that have arisen in Europe in recent years' (*Rossiyskaya Gazeta* 2009). In other words, IMSS articulated 'modernization imperatives' through the 'special modernization



alliances' in order to confront the challenges of the modern world (FPC 2008), as IMSS by Russia's self-imagery represents Russia's national interests as identical with the leading world states such as G7, and the Russia's geographical imagery is constructed accordingly.



**Cartoon 1.** The Americanisation of Russia initiated by President Dmitry Medvedev.

To the question of Prime Minister Putin: Have we not fulfilled all of the assigned tasks for Americanisation of Russia? President Medvedev, who is wearing American flag tie, answers: One task remaining, to rename *Ded Moroz* to Santa Claus and Russia will be the 51st state of America (Translated from Russian). Source: *Political cartoons, Oleg Khromov*.

A few months after his inauguration, Dmitry Medvedev has faced with instability in the Transcaucasia region. In August 2008, a brief war occurred

between Georgian troops and those of the Russian Federation (Friedman 2008). The conflict was over South Ossetia and Abkhazia, both unrecognized quasi-states that previously were part of the Georgian state. After the Georgian attack on South Ossetia, Russian forces pushed back the Georgian troops and inflicted significant infrastructural damage across Georgia. On August 26, the Russian government recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states (Toal 2008).

In the NCSS's view the crisis signified another Western attempt to destabilize the region using a long-brewing ethnic conflict (Putin 2008; Starikov 2014). Vladimir Putin, then a prime minister recounted that,

'when the war broke I was in Beijing for the opening ceremony of the Summer Olympics, where I had a chance for a short meeting with President George Bush who promised to pressure the Georgian government for a ceasefire. However, this has not happened and more interestingly none of the Western media outlets published or mentioned the ongoing military clashes in Caucasus, as they were commanded to be silent. Only on 9 August on the third day of the conflict, the Russian armed forces were involved in the combat. Of course, we had to act, how could it be otherwise? Or did we have to, also in this case, wipe our bloodied noses and bow our heads? Did we have to allow complete instability in the Russian North Caucasus? (Putin 2008a in Videohroniki 2010, translated from Russian).

Putin's words were directed to the West and by using the metaphor of "wiping our bloodied noses" and "bowing heads" he asserted that Russia's appeasement period was over and it would not allow the destabilization of the Russian periphery and Russia itself. Moreover, Putin directly blamed the United States for a build-up of the Georgian army, for sending American military advisers to Georgia and supporting Tbilisi financially and for military modernization (2008 in Videohroniki 2010). Therefore, well before the war, Moscow had reservations against American activities in Georgia, and as it was revealed after the crisis, Russia had a military operation plan ready in hand in 2006, in case the Georgian side would be "pushed" towards an aggression (Putin 2008b in Videohroniki 2010, translated from Russian).

Putin also blamed the United States for an attempt to destabilize the Russian North Caucasus through NGOs. As Putin articulated this fear, 'we have traced the creation of some NGOs in Caucasus, which in the case of Russian unwillingness during the crisis to protect South Ossetia and Abkhazia, were supposed to start a propaganda campaign for separation of these Republics from Russia' (Putin 2008c in Videohroniki 2010, translated form Russian).

President Medvedev's statement about the crisis was different, however. Unlike the NCSS articulation, Medvedev viewed the Georgian violent actions as deriving directly from Georgian geopolitical ambitions and the nationalistic feelings in the country, rather than being externally orchestrated. As Medvedev formulated:

'The Georgian leadership, in violation of the UN Charter and their obligations under international agreements and contrary to the voice of reason, unleashed an armed conflict victimizing innocent civilians. The same fate lay in store for Abkhazia. Obviously, they in Tbilisi hoped for a *Blitzkrieg* that would have confronted the world community with a *fait accompli*. The most inhuman way was chosen to achieve the objective of annexing South Ossetia through the annihilation of a whole people... That was not the first attempt to do this. In 1991, President Gamsahourdia of Georgia, having proclaimed the motto "Georgia for Georgians" ordered attacks on the cities of Sukhumi and Tskhinvali. The result then was thousands of killed people, dozens of thousands of refugees and devastated villages' (Medvedev 2008 in Kremlin 2008).

Georgian crisis being a significant security issue for Moscow, however, directly affected Russia's Middle Eastern policy as well.

Russia's most prominent Middle Eastern economic partners, Israel and Turkey provided military equipment and training for the Georgian army (Freedman 2010). As a consequence, Russia demonstrated its displeasure with Turkish and

Israeli policy during the crisis, especially with the Turkish one, which allowed the US warships through the Straits with humanitarian aid to Georgia (Freedman 2010). In the case of Israel, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov demanded from Israel to stop arms sales to Tbilisi. (Freedman 2010). Although Georgian issue had some negative repercussions on Russian-Israeli and Russian-Turkish relations, they did not lead to a significant deterioration of relations (Freedman 2010).

In the meantime, while, Israel and Turkey provided some support for Tbilisi, Syria after Belarus was the second country to express public support for Moscow for its military campaign and acute political conflict with Georgia (Kreutz 2007). Even more, during his visit to Moscow on 20-21 August 2008, Bashar al-Assad offered Moscow to install Iskander missiles on Syrian soil as a 'strategic response to the events in Georgia and to the prospective installation of US missile defences in Eastern Europe' (Dannreuther 2012: 555). Although Russia turned down the Syrian offer, Russian media gave much prominence to the Assad's overture (Dannreuther 2012: 555). By backing the Russian campaign in Georgia as Robert Freedman noted, Bashar al-Assad was repeating a policy of his father whose regime had been one of the very few to support the Soviet military campaign in Afghanistan (Freedman, 2010: 35). Indeed, Syria's

loyalty again was measured by its desire to gain long wanted Russian weaponry, especially 'the short range, solid fuel Iskander-E ground-to-ground missile that could reach virtually every target in Israel; Mig-31 combat aircraft, and the SAM 300 anti-aircraft missile system' (Freedman 2010: 35). While the Russian leadership promised Assad to consider Syria's appeal for new arms sale, Moscow had been determined not to sell any weapons that would affect the regional strategic balance or to seriously damage Russian relations with other Middle Eastern states, in this case with Israel. According to Mark Katz (2010), this was a most prominent factor on the agenda of Medvedev's visit to Syria in May 2010. Israeli allegations that Syria is transferring Russian missiles and other weaponry to Hezbollah was worrisome for Moscow, therefore, Medvedev sought reassurances that it would not continue (Katz 2010).

Although Syrian government rejected the charges as groundless calling them 'as paving way for future Israeli aggression' 'the US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton took the Israeli side and spoke harshly about Syria's arm supply to Hezbollah, which would pose a serious threat for Israeli security' (Kreutz 2010: 17). Further, on 3 May 2010, 'the American sanctions against Syria which had been imposed in 2004 and reinforced in 2007 were renewed by President Barak Obama' (Kreutz 2010: 17). In this context, in June 2010, Kremlin supported

sanctions against Iran under UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1929, and cancelled the sale of S-300 air defence system to Tehran, the \$800 million worth deal, which was agreed two years earlier (Nizameddin 2014). Iranian president Ahmadinejad condemned Medvedev's decision, 'whose country is a strategic partner of the Islamic state, to have "sold-out" Iran to the United States' (Haaretz 2010).

Generally, Russia's MENA policy during Medvedev's period has not been as intensive as in Putin's presidential years (Kozhanov 2016). As Nikolay Kozhanov stated, 'Dmitry Medvedev demonstrated interest in developing good relations with the US and EU, which negatively affected Russia's Middle Eastern policy' (2016: 23). Indeed, with IMSS's Russian Euro-Atlantic self-imagery, Russia mostly concentrated and prioritized the western orientation of its foreign policy. During the influential years of IMSS, Russia improved its relations with the West, especially with the US. This period was the third of three 'brief of relative smooth engagement between Russia and the West', according to Bobo Lo (2014: 165). Russia reached the "reset" policy with the US, joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) and signed the New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) with the United States.

However, the most remarkable Russian move in its newfound alliance with the West was Medvedev's decision to approve the UN resolution, which imposed an arms embargo against the Libyan government, and later to abstain from voting at the UNSC, which allowed "no-fly" zone over the Libyan airspace, and which ultimately ended with the removal of the Gaddafi regime. As this particular decision was directly contradicting the NCSS's main strategic preferences, it has led to the open clash between IMSS and NCSS.



## **CHAPTER 7: RUSSIAN SYRIA POLICY 2011-2016**

This Chapter discusses the competing views in Russian strategic culture during the Arab Spring and the Russian dual approach in regards to the Libyan and Syrian crises resolution, which resulted due to the shift in Russian strategic culture. Further Chapter discusses how the new strategic thinking informed Russian military involvement in Syria and renewed Russian interest in engaging with the post-Qaddafi Libya.

### **7.1 The Arab Spring: the Competing Views**

The Arab Spring, which started in December 2010 in North Africa and the Middle East surprised both academics and policy makers around the globe (Pace and Cavatorta 2012). The uprisings in the Arab world starting in Sidi Bouzid and speedily spread across the region leading to either the overthrow of long-ruling authoritarian regimes or to serious internal instabilities and crisis that brought disorder and lack of governance.

To Institutional Modernist strategic subculture (IMSS), the Arab Spring was an assemble of peaceful and popular demonstrations demanding democratic changes in these countries. As Medvedev formulated:

‘What happened in Tunisia was a big lesson for governments all around the world. Governments should not sit on their laurels and settle back in comfy chairs, but need to grow and develop together with society, regardless of where they are: in Europe, Africa, or Latin America’ (Medvedev 2011a in Kremlin 2011).

However, to Neo-Conservative strategic subculture, the Arab Spring was nothing but orchestrated demonstrations in the Muslim World, in order to destabilise the region and spread the crisis well beyond the boundaries of the Middle East, particularly to the peripheries of Russia and ultimately into Russia itself. Between December 2011 and May 2012, Kremlin faced an open opposition (the biggest after the fall of the Soviet Union) in the form of massive protests. Demonstrations began after the results of the Russian State Duma elections in which the United Russia (the ruling party) won the majority of the seats (Robertson 2013). Crowds demanded an end to Vladimir Putin’s rule and to rerun parliamentary elections, which was seen as a fraud by many demonstrators (Gutterman and Rotman 2011).

According to Nikolai Starikov, a co-chairman of the Russian Great Fatherland Party, the *Bolotnaya and Sakharov* demonstrations in Moscow were organized in close coordination with the West, in order not to allow Putin’s candidacy in the 2012 Russian Presidential elections (2014). As Starikov noted, well before the start of demonstrations some liberals started a wide political campaign and a

petition to urge President Medvedev to remove Vladimir Putin from the position of the Prime Minister (Starikov 2014). Similarly, *Ura Novisti* stated that:

‘Their main task was to defeat the "United Russia" and install Medvedev for a second term. The point was that Medvedev was planned as the main character of *Bolotnaya* and *Sakharov*, as a de-Stalinizer, de-Sovietizator, and leader of the liberal wing in contrast to Putin, who heads the pro-Soviet, conservative wing...the main TV channel of *Bolotnaya* was *Dozhd'*, which existed purely on funding of Natalya Timakova, a press secretary for President Dmitry Medvedev and Arkady Dvorkovich, an assistant to President Medvedev’ (*Ura Novisti* 2011, translated from Russian).

Speaking in public, Vladimir Putin accused Secretary of State Hillary Clinton of inciting unrest in Russia (Putin in Osborn 2011). The accusation came after the comment of Hillary Clinton on the Russian parliamentary election, calling them “dishonest and unfair” (Clinton in Osborn 2011). Putin added that hundreds of millions of dollars in “foreign money” was used to influence the Russian political system and that Mrs Clinton had personally spurred demonstrators to act (Putin 2011). Kremlin accused the United States of using its “soft power” thorough the Western-oriented NGOs, to foment domestic opposition, and to already having engineered the “coloured revolutions” in the former Soviet States in early 2000s (Dannreuther 2014). Kremlin, shortly after the 2012 presidential elections, introduced a new law requiring non-profit political

organizations that operate within Russia, which receive foreign financial support to register and declare themselves as “foreign agents” (Russian Duma 2012). This law eventually followed up with the ban of “undesired NGO’s” operating in Russia when Vladimir Putin signed the bill on national security grounds in May 2015 (Russian Duma 2015).

Speaking in public in Manejnaya square after the Presidential election in 2012, Putin stressed that ‘it was not only the presidential elections but was also a significant test of Russian political independence in which we [the Russian nation] won and proved that no one can dictate Russia what to do’ (Putin 2012 in RT 2012, translated from Russian).

This unrest against the government in the Russian (2011-2012) and the Ukrainian crises (2014) are seen by the NCSS as a continuation of the Arab Spring as examples of the Western strategy to destabilize nations in Russia’s peripheries and Russia itself (Patrushev 2015 in Kommersant 2015).

As the Press Secretary for Putin, Dmitry Peskov, formulates it, ‘in the beginning of the 2000s, the term “Greater Middle East” emerged in the Western media, which has been started frequently used by politicians and academics...now in retrospect, it could be assumed that the term meant a series of controlled

upheavals in the Muslim World occurring in the same countries they were referred as the “Greater Middle East”... A similar classification of a number of countries under a single name emerges nowadays in the statements of the Western officials, now as the “Greater Central Asia” (Rossiya 24 2018, translated from Russian).

### **7.1.1 The Arab Spring: Libya between Clashing Views**

During the upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt and during the protests in Bahrain and Yemen, Russian remained largely as a passive observer, contend only to issue official statements on the need for democratic changes in these countries in the context of the strategic understandings of IMSS (Medvedev 2011 in Kremlin 2011).

Russia’s activity during the uprisings in Libya was much more visible, however. Unlike in Tunisia and Egypt, the Libyan regime rejected withdrawing from power peacefully and resisted their opponents by force (Katz 2012). This triggered Western discussions on the need for international intervention against the Libyan regime on humanitarian grounds (Katz 2012).

As was argued earlier, Russia had tangible economic interests in Libya (Kozhanov 2016). During the Putin’s brief visit to Libya in April 2008, Tripoli’s

Soviet era debt amounting of \$4.5 billion was cancelled in return for lucrative contracts for the Russian companies (Katz 2008). According to some experts, prior to the outset of the Libyan crisis, the value of these contracts was approximately \$10 billion (Klein 2012). Indeed, Russian companies were active in the oil sector, in the construction of the Libyan high-speed rail lines and of course in the armaments sector (Klein 2012). According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Libyan arm imports from Russia had grown in the period 2008-2010.

However, despite its economic interests in Libya, Kremlin was prepared to sacrifice the relationship with the regime. On 26 February 2011, Moscow approved the UN resolution, which imposed an arms embargo against the Libyan government (UNSC Resolution 1970, 26 Feb 2011). The state's monopolist for the export of the Russian weaponry Rosoboronexport's financial loss due to Kremlin's decision was estimated to be around \$4 billion (Chemezov 2017 in Denisenstev 2017). Furthermore, on 17 March 2011, when the UNSC held a vote on Resolution 1973, which imposed a no-fly zone over Libya and allowed allied states to use all necessary means to protect the Libyan civil population, Kremlin simply decided to abstain from vetoing. By abstaining Moscow enabled the Western military operation in Libya, which began already

in late March 2011. This particular decision to abstain from vetoing the UNSC's 1973 Resolution has opened a direct clash between IMSS and NCSS.

According to press reports, discussed by Klein (2011), 'the Ministry of Foreign Affairs considered vetoing the resolution because it feared setting a precedent for violent regime change as well as an increase in Western power, and it has concerns in regards to the lucrative Russian business dealings in Libya' (2011: 2). However, as it was revealed later, the decision to abstain was a direct instruction of Dmitry Medvedev, then the President of Russia, to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was fulfilled (Medvedev 2011 in RIA Novosti 2011). Medvedev noted that 'everything that is happening in Libya is a result of the Libyan leadership's absolutely intolerable behaviour and the crimes that they have committed against their own people' (Medvedev 2011b in RIA Novosti 2011, translated from Russian).

Medvedev stated that the Resolution was 'reflecting Russia's understanding of the Libyan crisis and furthermore was "accurate" and "necessary" (Medvedev 2011c in RIA Novosti 2011, translated from Russian).

The phrase, which was used, namely the "reflection of Russia's understanding", demonstrated the understanding or the worldview of IMSS

that positioned Russia in a Euro-Atlantic self-imagery, showed appreciation for the Western political and social values, and supported the idea of international norms policed by Western-led international organisations.

In May 2011, along with the Western leaders at the G8 Summit in Deauville, President Medvedev stated that 'Qaddafi's regime has lost its legitimacy, he must go...this decision is taken unanimously by the G8 leaders' (Medvedev 2011d in Kremlin 2011).

Within the IMSS strategic preferences, Dmitry Medvedev described the UNSC's 1973 Resolution as "accurate" and "necessary", while Vladimir Putin then the Russia's Prime Minister, called the same Resolution as "deficient" and "flawed" (Putin 2011 in RIA Novosti 2011). The contradicting statements demonstrate the distinct worldviews in Russia's strategic thinking and flowed rationally from the perceptual lens of each strategic subculture.

Shortly after Russia's abstention, Prime Minister Putin criticized the resolution, comparing it to the "medieval calls for crusades", likening it to the medieval military expeditions made by Europeans against Muslim rule in the Middle East. This parallel was not chosen by Putin as a comparison at random, but was the reflection of the NCSS's understandings of the ongoing events. According



to this, NCSS, believed in the imperial instrumentality of the Arab Spring, namely that under the pretext of liberal democratic changes in this region lay the geopolitical desires of the West (Putin 2014 in Kremlin 2014a). Secondly, this comparison highlighted the idea that the international system mostly operates on “beliefs and solidarity” rather than on international law. In other words, the inefficiency and counterproductivity of some international decisions, such as the UNSC’s 1973 Resolution, is less significant than the motive behind the resolution.

Moreover, Putin noted that ‘in the policies of the United States, the military intervention is becoming a stable tendency and trend, e.g. Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq and Libya is next in line, with the excuse of defending the civilian populations. But when they bomb a territory, it is the civilians who die. Where is the logic and the conscience in this? There's neither one nor the other...Events in Libya prove that we are doing everything right to strengthen the military capability of Russia’ (Putin 2011a in RIA Novosti 2011).

Immediately, speaking in public, President Medvedev, dressed in a black leather jacket embroidered with the words “The Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation” criticized the Putin’s comparison of

“medieval calls for crusades”, calling it “absolutely unacceptable” (March 2011e in RIA Novosti 2011).



Cartoon 2. “The Split of Tandem”.

In the cartoon, Dmitry Medvedev who dressed in a jacked of the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, is also characterised as a bear, which symbolizes the *khozyain Taygi* in Russia (Master of the Taiga). Therefore, Medvedev as the Master or executive power in Russia reprimanded Prime Minister Putin, who

compared the NATO military operation in Libya with the “Medieval calls for Crusades”. Source *Political cartoons, Oleg Khromov*.

Until the Libyan crisis, President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin have made the impression of a well-coordinated team on many issues, and there was a general inclination to see Putin as the key decision maker behind Medvedev. However, the Libyan case demonstrated the distinction between the two. Medvedev not only publically challenged the words of Putin, but Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov and Foreign Minister Segei Lavrov, pundits and the state-run media also supported the president Medvedev (Shuster 2011; Starikov 2014).

In the Russian Constitution, foreign affairs fall under the remit of the President of the Russian Federation. On the day following Putin’s criticism of the UNSC Resolution, the press secretary to Putin, Dmitry Peskov stated that ‘the assessment of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin of the situation around Libya is his personal point of view, and the assessment announced by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev is the only official position of the Russian Federation’ (Vesti.ru 2011).

The UN Security Council’s Resolution on Libya and the subsequent Western actions against the Libyan regime was indeed contradictory of the strategic

preferences of the NCSS, its view of international norms and the resolution of such crisis. Moreover, through the perceptual lens of the NCSS, the Libyan case was another demonstration of how the West under the pretext of “humanitarian interventions” seeks to achieve its own geopolitical ambitions. This in the eyes of the NCSS adherents has verified ones more the need to strength Russia’s military power within an international system, where international law was disregarded and norms were imposed arbitrarily and used cynically (Putin 2011 in RIA Novosti).

In the same statement in which Putin compared the UNSC Resolution 1973 to the “Medieval calls for Crusades”, he also stated that ‘if you look at what is written there [in Resolution 1973], it will immediately become clear that it allows everyone to do everything, to take any actions against a sovereign state’ (Putin 2011c in RIA Novosti, translated from Russian). Whereas, according to IMSS’s reading, the context of the Resolution 1973 was “accurate and necessary” (Medvedev 2011 in RIA Novosti).

### **7.1.2 The Arab Spring: Institutional Modernist Strategic Subculture and the Syrian Crisis**

Dimitri Medvedev had about a year left to serve as a Russian President when the Syrian crisis began. Although Medvedev has been seen as cautious in the Syrian case, since he was heavily criticized at home for inaction during the Libyan crisis, Medvedev's response to the Syrian uprisings, however, was generally aligned with the American idea of the need for immediate end of the regime's violent crackdown, and for the reforms demanded by the Syrian people. In August 2011, after blocking Britain and France's draft UNSC resolution condemning use of force in Syria, Moscow supported a joint statement at the UNSC condemning the Syrian regime's human rights violations (UN 2011). Moreover, in the same month, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Mikhail Bogdanov appeared in Damascus (MFA 2011). During his conversations with the Syrian leadership, Bogdanov reassured Assad of 'the principled stand of Russia on the inadmissibility of outside interference in Syrian affairs' (MFA 2011, translated from Russian). However, at that period, seemingly there was not any Western discussion of the possible military intervention against the Assad's regime, rather as Philips (2016) noted, the West at the early stages of the Syrian crisis was disinterested

and had not demonstrated any intention of such action. But the West demanded immediate ceasefire and to undertake necessary reforms (Obama 2011). This was identical to what Bogdanov underlined during the meeting with the Syrian leadership: ‘the need for complete cessation of all violence...immediate action to implement the announced extensive program of political, economic and social reforms to meet the Syrians’ aspirations’ (MFA 2011). While staying close to the regime, Kremlin also kept contacts with the Syrian opposition. In October 2011, Moscow hosted a meeting between Deputy Foreign Minister Bogdanov, and a delegation of the Syrian internal opposition (MFA 2011). Furthermore, in October 2011, after the Western leaders’ joint statement viz. Barack Obama, Angela Merkel, Nicolas Sarkozy and David Cameron, demanding an immediate resignation of Assad (McGreal and Chulov 2011), Medvedev publicly aligned with the idea and called Assad to “step down” if he [Assad] ‘is unable to undertake’ demanded reforms (*Lenta.ru* 2011, translated from Russian). To remove Assad from the power was also proposed by Russia in February 2012 during the closed discussion of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (Borger and Inzaurrealde 2015).

While, Medvedev’s Syria approach in the context of IMSS’ strategic understandings characterised as “Assad reforms or goes”, the departure of

Assad, however, was fiercely opposed after the return of Neo-Conservative strategic thinking to dominate Russian strategic culture with Putin's election to the new presidential term in May 2012. Putin's election as the President of the Russian Federation not only disappointed Medvedev's supporters such as Arkady Dvorkovich and Natalya Timakova, who were key members of the IMSS, but also leading Western leaders such as Angela Merkel who preferred Medvedev as a candidate for the Russian presidency in 2012 (Shevtsova 2015), and Barak Obama, who chided Vladimir Putin, for the "cold war approaches" to relations with the US, while Medvedev, as he described was beyond the "cold war mentalities" and during President Medvedev's years, Russia-US relations experienced a lot of progress (Obama 2013).

**Cartoon 3.** Medvedev goes to history. Source: *caricature.ru*



## 7.2 Uprisings begin in Syria

In early March 2011, influenced by the uprisings in the neighbouring Arab states a group of teenagers from Syrian city Deraa drew an anti-regime graffiti on the school wall, for which had been arrested and taken to Damascus for torturing (Nizameddin 2013; Phillips 2016). Since the appeals of their families to set them free had been ignored, they alongside with hundreds of other unhappy citizens started to protest outside the central Omari mosque in Deraa



(Sterling 2012). In order to repress them, the Syrian security forces opened fire and killed four (Sterling 2012). This added fuel to the fire and the next day thousands more appeared on the streets with anti-regime slogans and smashing symbols of the regime (Philips 2016). Moreover, protestors shared outrage through social media and as the news about the murders in Deraa spread, so did uprisings across the country, including; Homs, Baniyas and parts of Damascus already in mid-March and Latakia, Tartous, Idlib, Qamishli, Deir-ez-Zor, Raqqa and Hama in early April 2011 (Philips 2016).

In his first public statement on the crisis, on March 30, 2011, Bashar al-Assad blamed demonstrations on a “foreign plot”, and claimed that protestors were “armed gangs” (Macleod 2011; Philips 2016). As protests spread, the regime began to use force. Syrian security forces were deployed often supported by tanks and supplemented by *Shabiha* (pro-Assad militia) and *Mukhabarat* (intelligence services) to suppress the demonstrations (Philips 2016). Casualties mounted with a fall of 109 deaths in one day on 22 April, which initiated larger demonstrations the following day (Philips 2016). As demonstrations continued to increase, so did the regime increase its violent crackdown. According to the report of the Violation Documentation Centre in Syria, about 2000 protestors had been killed by mid-July 2011 and about 8000 were detained (VDCS).

### **7.2.1 A shift from the internal affairs to global crisis: Syrian uprisings on the global agenda**

Despite Assad's promises to make reforms and in spite of his concessions to investigate the Deraa events, to release several political leaders, dissolving the long-serving government of Prime Minister Naji al-Otari and forming the new cabinet, crowds did not dissipate and demonstrations continued in a major part of the country (Philips 2016). The regime blamed ongoing unrest on 'foreign conspiracy, led by satellite TV stations, the United States and Israel' and continued to repress demonstrations by force (Philips 2016: 55). The outrage of the regime during the demonstrations, shared in the social media by protestors, frequently hit the mass media and soon the Syrian uprisings took on global characteristics, involving major regional and world powers in the crisis. The United States as the world's most powerful country, which 'stands up for democracy and the universal rights that all human beings deserve' (Obama 2011), was driven by an expectation to act in order to stop the violence of the Assad regime against the demonstrations. This was especially true after the US-led NATO military operations to stop Muammar Qaddafi from a similar violent crackdown in Libya.

In his statement on the Syrian unrest, on 22 April 2011, President Obama called Assad to cease violence against protestors, to change his course immediately, and to 'heed the calls of his own people' (Obama 2011a). Similarly, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and even Iran under President Ahmadinejad condemned Assad's violent actions to quell the protests. Riyadh sent a Special Envoy to Damascus, headed by Saudi Prince Abdul-Aziz bin Abdullah, to persuade Assad to end his crackdown (Philips 2016). Likewise, Ankara sent envoys to Damascus numerous times, while Erdogan personally on his frequent telephone conversations with Assad urged him to restrain from using force against demonstrators (Philips 2016). Iran, Syria's closest ally in the region, also urged Damascus to halt violence and 'to heed the legitimate demands of the protestors' (Ali 2011).

### *The Syrian Opposition*

The Syrian opposition has been one of the contentious issues between the regional and the international actors on the resolution of the crisis. Russia, during the Medvedev's presidency had advocated a dialogue with the opposition. However, later under the Putin's leadership began to stress that there was scarcely a moderate one but numerous militia groups mostly

associated with the extremist organizations (Putin 2015; Lavrov 2015). The United States, contrarily viewed most of the militia groups as an armed Syrians united to withstand the regime's repression, commonly referred to as the Free Syrian Army (FSA) (Kerry 2015). Russian and the US interpretations on the Syrian opposition were not the only ones, but also differentiated between the main regional players e.g. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and Iran.

The armed Syrian opposition, which was usually associated with the FSA was seen mostly by West as Syrians, united to fight the regime and defeat it in order to achieve freedom and reforms in the country (Philips 2016).

In July 2011, a group of officers who had recently defected from the Syrian army released a video announcing 'the formation of the FSA to work hand in hand with the people to achieve freedom and dignity to bring this regime down' (Asharq al-Awsat 2011). They 'called on all officers...and men of the army to defect immediately... abandon their military units, and join the Free Syrian Army' (Asharq al-Awsat 2011). The main objectives of the FSA, as observers argue, was to entice more defections, ensuring foreign support and build a central command for insurgent organizations (Philips 2016). Soon different militia groups declared that they are part of the FSA and more

soldiers began to defect (Philips 2016). Despite their attempts to bring the various militia groups within Syria under the FSA command, the decentralized origin of the militias proved to be difficult to overcome (Philips 2016). As Philips explained:

‘Most *katibas* [militias] formed spontaneously to defend protesters in their area and, like the uprisings itself, were highly localised. *Katibas* varied greatly. Some were highly idealistic, while others were based around former smuggling gangs and criminal elements. Some were centred on powerful individuals, local strongmen or new figures who proven themselves as good leaders. Some merged into larger brigades with wider reach, mobility and better (often foreign) funding, while others remained highly concentrated companies, rarely straying beyond their locality’ (2016: 127).

However, it was not only the military opposition which varied, but the Syrian political opposition too. In the summer of 2011, after a series of conferences in Turkey, the Syrian National Council (SNC) was announced (Carnegie 2015). The council brought together the Muslim Brotherhood, the recently formed Local Coordination Committee, and the signatories of the 2005 Damascus Declaration, and was chaired by a secular Syrian academic in exile Burhan Ghalioum. On 24 February 2012 at the “Friends of Syria” meeting in Tunis, SNC was recognized as a legitimate representative of Syrians seeking peaceful democratic change’ (Foreign and Commonwealth Office).

Although having international support, SNC had multiple flaws (Philips 2016). The foremost was the poor connection between the exile-led council and the opposition on the ground (Philips 2016). Moreover, due to ideological divisions, SNC 'proved unable or unwilling to work with other internal opposition groups' (Philips 2016: 107). Another reason for this, as Philips (2016) argues, was the often conflicting policies of the regional actors in relation to the SNC and later the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (SOC), which in return, greatly contributed to factionalism within the SNC, SOC and the wider Syrian opposition (Philips 2016). Additionally, this led to the changes to the initial dovish position of the SNC. As the violence increased and the conflict became militarised, regional actors, namely Qatar, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, directly worked with the armed groups, including extremists, bypassing the SNC and undermining its efforts to provide logistical hub for the rebels (Hokayem 2013).

#### *The Arab League's Peace Plan*

The Arab League's voice in the early days of the crisis in Syria was not so nuanced. However, as the violence increased, so did the involvement of the Arab League. In August 2011, the League counselled restraint and in early

September 2011 Secretary General Nabil Al-Araby visited Damascus to urge the regime to cease violence and to undertake the reforms demanded (Philips 2016). Although, the League announced that “the deal has been agreed,” it was not so until early November 2011 (Philips 2016). On 2 November the Syrian regime accepted the plan, which required an end to the violence, withdrawal of tanks from the streets, and the release of opposition leaders and to start a dialogue with the opposition (RIA News 2011). Moscow welcomed the Arab League initiative to reach peace in Syria and urged both the regime and the opposition to act “responsibly” (MFA 2011). Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov asked in his brief telegram to foreign ministers of selected countries and to the international institutions involved in the Syrian crisis to support the Arab League’s plan and to use any available tools to influence the sides in order to reach a constructive outcome and a peaceful resolution of the Syrian situation (MFA 2011). Days later the agreement, the League claimed that Damascus had breached the terms and threatened to suspend Syria’s membership from the League (Philips 2016). Eventually, the League acted on its threat. At the emergency session of its 22-member states in Cairo in mid-November 2011, the League decided to exclude Syria from the organization until it implements the terms of the earlier agreement (Batty and Shenker 2011). Moreover, the League

drafted economic sanctions on the Syrian regime, which eventually was imposed in late November 2011 (Smith 2011).

On 12 December 2011, under the pressure from Russia, the Syrian government agreed to a revised Arab League Peace Plan (MFA 2011). The League plan included deploying a team of monitors to ensure regime compliance (Philips 2016). By the end of December 2011, over one hundred monitors were in Syria headed by Sudanese General Mohammed Ahmet Mustafa al-Dalbi (Philips 2016). However, the mission broke down soon, as there were recorded breaches of terms from both sides. As a result, Saudi Arabia publicly announced that the mission had failed and withdrew its funding and observers from Syria (Philips 2016). Shortly after, the new Arab League plan was revealed by Qatari Prime Minister Hamad Bin Jassim that required Assad to stand down in favour of his Vice President, Farouk al-Sharaa, 'who would form a national unity government after dialogue with the opposition' (Philips 2016: 90). The Syrian regime firmly rejected the new plan, and as a response on 24 January the remaining Gulf States withdrew their support for the monitor mission and on the same day the Qatari-led Arab League referred the matter to the UNSC (Philips 2016).



On 4 February 2012, Western and leading Arab states drafted a resolution within the auspices of the UNSC condemning the regime's violence and calling Assad to step down by transferring power to his deputy (UN 2012). Russia again alongside with China used its veto power to block the resolution (UN 2012). Days after, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov visited Damascus where he urged the Syrian leader to move ahead with the reforms (Applebaum 2012).

*Kofi Annan's Peace Plan and the Geneva Communiqué*

On 24 February 2012 the Arab League held an international "Friends of Syria" conference with the UN in Tunis to find a solution to the Syrian crisis after the deadlock at the Security Council after Russia and China had used their veto power to block the UN resolution. Around 70 nations were present at the conference, excluding Russia and China for their supposed support to the Syrian regime (Marcus 2012). The Syrian regime called those attending nations "historic enemies of the Arabs" (Marcus 2012). The evening before the conference, the UN together with the League of Arab States appointed the former UN Secretary Kofi Annan as their envoy to Syria (Marcus 2012).

On 16 March, Kofi Annan submitted a “six-point plan” which was backed both by Russia and China in a UNSC Presidential Statement on 21 March (UN 2012).

The plan called for a commitment:

‘to work with the Envoy in an inclusive Syrian-led political process to address the legitimate aspirations and concerns of the Syrian people, supervised cessation of armed violence in all its forms by all parties to protect civilians and stabilize the country, ensure timely provision of humanitarian assistance to all areas affected by the fighting, intensify the pace and scale of release of arbitrarily detained persons, ensure freedom of movement throughout the country for journalists, and the right to demonstrate peacefully as legally guaranteed’ (UN 2012).

More importantly Annan’s six-point peace plan ‘steered well away from Russia’s red lines of demanding Assad’s departure or threatening military intervention’ (Philips 2016: 99).

On 25 March Kofi Annan visited Moscow to meet President Dimitri Medvedev and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, in order to get Russia’s backing in his peace initiative (Kremlin 2012). During the meeting, President Medvedev voiced a strong support for Annan’s mission in Syria and promised Russian support at any level, calling Annan’s initiative the last chance for Syria to avoid a long-lasting and bloody civil war (Kremlin 2012).

With the mediation of Kofi Annan, on 21 April a ceasefire was agreed by the regime and opposition. Days later, an advanced team of United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) consisting of 300 monitors was dispatched. Unarmed UN monitors were deployed to cities where escalation was higher, to monitor and report on the plans of implementation (Philips 2016). However, from the beginning the mission representatives on the ground reported series of difficulties. Access to key locations was sometimes restricted by both sides and the frequent violation of the agreement by the regime as well as by the opposition has been recorded (Philips 2016). Moreover, the UNSMIS team was facing danger, being frequently attacked by a crowd and under fire by unknown assailants (Philips 2016). Therefore, the UN suspended its normal operations remaining mostly at the bases, and eventually had to end its mandate altogether on 16 August 2012.

After the failure of his six-point plan, Annan identified that the crisis could not be solved without consensus among the “Syrian factions’ external backers” (Philips 2016). Therefore, Annan proposed establishing a Syria contact group, which eventually was gathered in Geneva on 30 June 2012 New Action Group for Syria that ‘composed of the secretaries general of the UN and Arab League, the EU’s High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy and the foreign

ministers of the US, UK, France, China, Russia, Turkey, Kuwait, Iraq and Qatar (Iran's inclusion was rejected by Britain and the US, and the Syrians were not invited) (Philips 2016: 101). All attendees agreed on a set of "Principles and Guidelines for a Syrian-led transition" and signed for a new communiqué that revised support for the six-point plan (UN 2012). The new consensual document called for the 'establishment of a transitional governing body which...could include members of the present government and the opposition and other groups and shall be formed on the basis of mutual consent' and assured the 'continuity of governmental institutions and qualified staff' after the transition (UN 2012).

A new document as the previous one also avoided mentioning Assad's departure in order to gain full Russian support (UN 2012). However, as it was revealed later, different sides had a different interpretation of the document. Hillary Clinton saw the communiqué as 'a blueprint for Assad's departure' (Clinton 2014, quoted in Philips 2016: 101). Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov and the US Secretary State Hillary Clinton 'clashed at Geneva on this issue' (Philips 2016: 101). As Philips noted, 'the western diplomats led by Britain, France and the US, in order to press their view, immediately prepared a Chapter VII UN Resolution that would enforce Article 41 (non-violent)

sanctions on Syria if it did not fully implement the Annan plan' (Philips 2016: 101). Russia alongside with China on 19 July vetoed the Resolution (UN 2012), which was the breaking point of the international consensus on Syria seemingly achieved in Geneva.

### **7.2.2 The West draws Red Lines: Syria's Chemical Weapons**

The first two years of Putin's third presidential term were probably the most intense period of the Syrian crisis. Since the summer 2012, Obama had been repeatedly stating that any regime deployment of its extensive chemical weapon stockpile would constitute breach of a "red line" (Obama 2012). As the Syrian government viewed chemical weapons as a deterrent to Israel's nuclear capabilities, it developed its chemical weapon programme with the help of the Soviet Union and Egypt in the 1970s and 1980s (Beth and Nikitin 2013). By the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, the US intelligence estimated that Assad retained one of the world's largest chemical stockpiles (Beth and Nikitin 2013).

As the 2011 protests turned into civil war and the regime lost territories near Aleppo and Homs (where the chemical weapon storage facilities were likely located), the Syrian chemical stockpile increasingly became a cause of international concern (Philips 2016). It was feared that the regime's chemical

weapons could end up in the hands of radical groups, who might use them within Syria or in international terror attacks (Philips 2016). In July 2012, as the rebel forces advanced, the regime for the first time publicly admitted to the possession of a chemical weapons arsenal, insisting that it would only be used against external attacks not on its own people (Black 2012). This in return provoked a response from the White House. President Obama stated on 20 August 2012:

‘We have been very clear to the Assad regime, but also to other players on the ground, that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus. That would change my equation’.

Obama’s declaration implied a willingness of the US to intervene in Syria if the regime crosses the red line. As Philips notes, ‘for Assad’s local and international enemies, the prospect of the long-hoped-for US intervention prompted a determination to prove that the regime was using chemical arms’ (2016: 176). Since late 2012, the opposition and allies started claiming that the regime was using chemical weapons (Philips 2016). The Qatari-sponsored Al-Jazeera news agency reported in December that several people in Homs had died as the result of the gas attack by the regime (2012). The regime denied the allegations and on 20 March the Syrian government requested that the UN Secretary-

General establish 'a specialized, impartial independent mission to investigate the alleged' chemical attack by rebels on the regime positions, which had killed twenty-five soldiers in the Khan Al Asal area (UN 2013). The UN Secretary-General agreed and created the United Nations 'Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic' on 21 March (UN 2013). However, the UN representatives of Britain and France insisted the United Nations Mission team also investigate alleged chemical attacks by the regime (UN 2013). As Philips notes, 'this complicated matters, promoting the regime to postpone the UN mission's arrival for several months, as it debated modalities and on-site access' (2016:177). Another factor delaying the United Nations Mission's arrival was the new allegations of the regime's use of chemical attacks described in the letters from the UN representatives of US, Britain, France and Qatar (UN 2013). Finally, on 18 August 2013, after agreeing the terms of its operation with the regime the Mission arrived in Syria with a two-week timeframe to investigate both alleged attacks of the rebels and the regime (UN 2013).

However, on 21 August, after few days of its arrival, about twelve miles away from its headquarters, the United Nations Mission witnessed a large chemical attack near the Ghouta area of Damascus, which killed up to 1,400 people (UN

2013). The UN report, which was published a month later after the incident described the attack 'impacting from the surface-to-surface rocket' containing the nerve agent sarin (UN 2013). The regime and opposition blamed the attack on each other (Philips 2016). 'The fact that Ghouta was a rebel-held area and it was sophisticated rocket attack, using equipment not known to be in the rebels' arsenal, immediately put the regime under suspicion' (Philips 2016: 177; Cameron et.al 2013; Kerry 2013), although it was odd that the regime launched a huge chemical attack days after the Mission's arrival.

The scale of the attack and the media storm around it persuaded the Western and some regional states of the need for the immediate action against the Assad regime. French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius called for an international reaction, "reaction of force". Similarly, Britain, Germany, Turkey and Israel expressed a willingness to use of force as an alternative. This was also true for the United States which had been warning the Syrian regime that the use of chemical weapons would constitute a "red line" (Obama 2012). 'Protecting the international norm on not using chemical weapons was important, but even more important was to show that the US backed its threats, especially with negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme coming up' (Philips 2016: 179).



On 26 August Secretary of State John Kerry on his remarks on Syria announced that 'the chemical weapons were used in Syria' (Kerry 2013). Moreover, he indirectly blamed the regime on the attack:

'We know that the Syrian regime maintains custody of these chemical weapons. We know that the Syrian regime has the capacity to do this with rockets. We know that the regime has been determined to clear the opposition from those very places where the attacks took place. And with our own eyes, we have all of us become witnesses' (Kerry 2013).

On the same day four American and two British warships were deployed to the eastern Mediterranean (Ross and Farmer 2013). Although on 29 August David Cameron's proposal for the British military involvement in the Syrian operation had been rejected by the parliament, there was seemingly a consensus within the US political establishment to start a military campaign (Philips 2016). According to Philips, 'the main debate [in Washington] was over whether to strike immediately or wait for the UN mission's report' (2016: 179). Even the military plans were examined, starting on 2 September with the cruise missile strikes on the positions of the regime (Goldberg 2016; Philips 2016).

### **7.2.3 Russia's reaction: Neo-Conservative Strategic Subculture in operation**

The Ghouta chemical incident has not changed the principled position of the NCSS on the resolution of the Syrian crisis, but instead stimulated Moscow to take more active moves in defence of its client. The chemical attack that nearly brought a Western military intervention into Syria, which could have toppled the Assad's regime, and which might have changed the course of the events in the region, ultimately finished with "a diplomatic victory" of Russia over the West.

From the day of the incident, Russia strongly opposed all the allegations against the Syrian regime. Although Moscow accepted that chemical weapons had been used in Ghouta, it has completely ruled out the possibility of its deployment by the Assad forces. Alexei Pushkov, the Head of the State Duma Committee on Foreign Affairs stated that

'the information about Assad's use of chemical weapons has been fabricated in the same place as the lies about Hussein's weapons of mass destruction in Iraq: 'Information about Assad's use of chemical weapons has been fabricated in the same place as the lies about Hussein's weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Obama follows the path of George W. Bush' (Pushkov 2013).

Similarly, the Russian Foreign Ministry reported that ‘a homemade rocket with a poisonous substance that has not been identified yet – one similar to the rocket used by terrorists on 19 March in Khan al-Assal - was fired early on August 21 [at Damascus suburbs] from a position occupied by the insurgents’ (Lukashevich 2013). An official spokesman of Russian Foreign Ministry Alexander Lukashevich called the attack as “a criminal action” with a provocative nature (MFA 2013). As Lukashevich noted in his remarks ‘in the internet...messages were circulating with accusations made about government troops, published several hours before the so-called attack...thus, it is about a pre-planned action’ (MFA 2013, translated form Russian).

On 26 August Russian Foreign Ministry organized an extraordinary press conference in Moscow, which was dedicated to the Ghouta chemical attack and the situation around the Syrian Arab Republic. During the conference Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that:

‘Hysteria is growing; the confrontation is heated up in connection with the statements that the authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic used chemical weapons on the 21 August in Ghouta. Under this pretext, we observe a massive build-up of armaments in the region; we hear appeals and even threats of using military force against the regime of Bashar al-Assad’ (Lavrov 2013 in Voltaire Network 2013).

Lavrov called all the allegations groundless. 'Washington, London, Paris announced at the official level that they have conclusive information and evidence of the culpability of the Syrian authorities...they cannot present them now, but talk even more loudly that the "red line" has been crossed and they cannot hold back any more' (Lavrov 2013 in Voltaire Network 2013). Lavrov stressed the chosen time of the chemical attack: When the UN investigation team had already arrived in Syria and was coordinating plans and modalities of their work with the Syrian government, what was the benefit of the Syrian regime to use chemical weapons in such conditions? (Lavrov 2013 in Voltaire Network 2013). Moreover, Lavrov stated that,

'as soon as there is a small chance to initiate a political process, the attempts of replacing the regime are being undertaken to disrupt these chances... The information about a chemical attack in the region of Ghouta was planted the very moment, when Russian and American experts were preparing for another meeting to prepare for the Geneva conference...There is no doubt that this hysteria will work against the convening of this conference. Probably this was one of the goals pursued by the authors of these news' (Lavrov 2013 in Voltaire Network 2013).

Similarly, President Putin rejected all the allegations that the Syrian regime had used chemical weapons. As he noted, 'it would be "utter nonsense" for government forces to use such a weapon in a war it was already advancing and

especially, while the UN Mission's team was in Syria' (Putin 2013a in Rossiya 24 2013). Putin demanded the US to present their evidence, if they have any, to the UN Security Council, as Washington's threats so far were made in the absence of any proof (Putin 2013 in Rossiya 24 2013; Lukashevich 2013 in MFA 2013). The chemical attack, in Putin's account therefore, was nothing more than 'a provocation by those who want to drag other countries into the Syrian conflict and who want to win the support of powerful members of the international order, especially the United States' (Putin 2013b). Therefore, while the West, especially, the US, Britain and France was supporting strikes on Assad, Russia was opposing and warning that any unilateral use of force without the authorization of the UN Security Council would be a 'clear violation of the international law' (Lukashevich 2013 in MFA 2013).

The significance of international law was also one of the key points of Putin's article, published in *The New York Times*, 'A Plea for Caution from Russia', which was dedicated to the Syrian chemical incident and the US military threats against Bashar al-Assad's regime. The article detailed the NCSS strategic preferences, its view of the international order and the resolution of the unfolding crisis. In his article, Putin invited the "influential countries," especially the United States, not to violate international law by bypassing the

United Nations and take military action without Security Council authorization (2013d). He noted that 'it is alarming that military intervention in internal conflicts in foreign countries has become commonplace for the United States' (Putin 2013e). This, in Putin's account, was counterproductive because 'if you cannot count on international law, then you must find other ways to ensure your security...thus a growing number of countries seek to acquire weapons of mass destruction...this is logical: if you have the bomb, no one will touch you' (Putin 2013f).

Several days after the attack, Putin suggested that the world powers should discuss the Syrian crisis at a meeting of the leaders of the G20 countries in St Petersburg (Putin 2013). In the meantime, President Obama sought a Congressional approval for a military strike against the Syrian regime (Goldberg 2016). On 6 September, at the G20 summit in St Petersburg, 'in between drumming up international support for a strike on Assad' President Obama had an unscheduled lunch with Vladimir Putin (Philips 2016: 181). Few days later, speaking in London, John Kerry 'quipped' that if Assad wants to avoid the strikes, 'he could turn over every single bit of his chemical weapons to the international community in the next week...without delay...but he isn't about to do it and it can't be done' (Mohammed and Osborn 2013; Philips 2016:

181). On the same day, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov announced that 'if the establishment of international control over chemical weapons in that country would allow avoiding strikes, we will immediately start working with Damascus' (MFA 2013). The Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem, who was in Moscow at that time, immediately welcomed the suggestion. A day later, during the interview President Putin stated that he was 'strongly convinced that the Syrian government will not only put its chemical arsenal under international control but will also accept its subsequent destruction and will join the international convention on the prohibition of chemical weapons' (Putin 2013g in Rossiya 24). However, as Putin noted, 'this will only materialize if the United States and others who support Washington, will announce that they will not use force against the Syrian government...as it is difficult to make any state in the world, including Syria, disarm by threatening to use force the same time' (Putin 2013h in Rossiya 24). With these developments the US Senate decided to delay a proposed vote for military action against the Syrian regime, 'making Russia's negotiated route out of the crisis look increasingly appealing' (Philips 2016: 181).

Both Obama and Putin later revealed that the idea of a peaceful Syrian chemical disarmament was discussed in St Petersburg, but Lavrov's immediate response to Kerry's remarks from London gave it momentum (Philips 2016).

On 14 September, after a few days of negotiations in Geneva, Russia and the United States reached an agreement that called for Syria's arsenal of chemical weapons to be removed or destroyed by the middle of 2014 (Strobel and Karouny 2013).

Simultaneously, the Syrian government announced that it was joining the Chemical Weapons Convention (Philips 2016). Ultimately, on 6 October, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) began the destruction process of the Syrian chemical arsenal, for scheduled completion by mid-2014 (Philips 2016). The western military threat, which was perceived as inevitable, was suddenly over with the political engagement of Russia, which materialized in the context of Russia's NCSS.

### **7.3 Enter Russia: the Neo-Conservative Strategic Subculture into Action**

The agreement on the destruction of the Syrian chemical stockpile has not ended the crisis, however. With the emergence and strengthening of militia



groups, including extremist organizations in Syria, the violence increased and the conflict became militarised. In October 2014, Russia openly accused the United States of supporting 'Neo-Fascists and Islamic radicals' around the globe in order to use 'them as instruments along the way in achieving their goals' (Putin 2014a in Kremlin 2014a, translated from Russian). In this context, Putin exemplified American support of 'Islamic extremist movements to fight the Soviet Union...those groups got their battle experience in Afghanistan and later gave birth to the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. The West...gave information, political and financial support to international terrorists' invasion of Russia [Chechnya]...we have not forgotten this (Putin 2014b in Kremlin 2014a, translated from Russian). Similarly, 'in Syria, as in the past, the United States and its allies started directly financing and arming rebels and allowing them to fill their ranks with mercenaries from various countries (Putin 2014c in Kremlin 2014a, translated from Russian).

Likewise, speaking at the UN General Assembly in September 2015, Putin harshly criticized the West on its actions in the MENA:

'Just look at the situation in the Middle East and North Africa... Instead of bringing about reforms, aggressive intervention rashly destroyed government institutions and the local way of life. Instead of democracy and progress, there is

now violence, poverty, social disasters and total disregard for human rights, including even the right to life... I'm urged to ask those who created this situation: do you at least realize now what you've done?' (Putin 2015a in Kremlin 2015).

In his speech, Putin has also associated the situation in the region to the pursued US policy during the Bush administration, specifically the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, to which Russia opposed and called it as a "political mistake".

In Putin's words:

'Power vacuum in some countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa obviously resulted in the emergence of areas of anarchy, which were quickly filled with extremists and terrorists. The so-called Islamic State has tens of thousands of militants fighting for it, including former Iraqi soldiers who were left on the street after the 2003 invasion. Many recruits come from Libya whose statehood was destroyed as a result of a gross violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1973. And now radical groups are joined by members of the so-called "moderate" Syrian opposition backed by the West' (Putin 2015b in Kremlin 2015).

While Putin's this speech that was delivered on 28 September 2015, at the UN General Assembly, has demonstrated the consistency of the ideas, views and strategic preferences of the NCSS, which have been enduring since the early 2000s, more importantly, it was a signal or announcement of Russia's

forthcoming military engagement against NCSS interpreted the US grand strategy, which has begun in Syria only two days after the Putin's speech.

### 7.3.1 The Poked Bear in Syria



**Cartoon 4.** Russian bear walks in Syria. Source: *latuffcartoons*

In summer 2015, the Russian cargo planes started filling the Syrian Khmeimim airbase with military equipment and building supplies. In a short time, a new runway was re-laid and a new aircraft control tower was built, turning

neglected Khmeimim into a new Russian forward air operation base. Despite insurances of the Russian officials that this signified nothing additional to Russia's pre-existing commitments to the Syrian regime it soon appeared that in fact it had been an extraordinary move, deploying the Russian military outside the former Soviet Union for the first time after the collapse of the USSR.

This Russian unforeseen move, as observer noted, is directly associated with the rebel resurgence in 2014 and 2015 (Philips 2016). In early 2015, as rebels regrouped and counter-attacked the regime's offensives in Aleppo. Soon, after the regime reduced its presence in the city, rebels captured Idlib (Al-Khalidi 2015). Taking advantage of the redeployment of the regime forces to Idlib, ISIS launched an attack from the east and captured the desert city of Palmyra.

The rebels also advanced in the south, where Assad's forces 'ran out of steam' (Philips 2016: 214). In late March 2015, the regime lost its last southern border post Nassib and the ancient city of Bosra (Philips 2016).

On 26 July, after series of territorial losses, Assad in his first public address in a year, admitted that the regime's military were experiencing setbacks, and facing a manpower shortage and had to 'give up' some areas in order to

'defend key territories (Assad in Neuman 2015). Nevertheless, in his address Assad confidently promised to win against insurgents (Assad in Neuman 2015).

Philips (2016) noted that behind this admission was both a plea for a help from his allies and the way of assuring pro-regime Syrians about that upcoming help. While this account is viable it is not complete, however. Assad's address was directed to the international community in particular, announcing that his allies had help under way and more importantly making a pretext under which Russia could engage military.

NCSS has been condemning any sort of unilateral military intervention or military operations, especially by the US, mostly labelling them as a breach of international law. Therefore, Russia required formal grounds to intervene militarily in Syria, under the pretext that they would be distinct from the US military interventions in the region.

As Reuters reported a joint military intervention was agreed between Moscow and Tehran well before the Assad's July address (2015). Soon after, on 26 August, Russia and Syria signed an agreement that granted Russia to use Khmeimim air base for an indefinite time, which was also ratified by the Russian president in October 2015 (Putin 2015 in Winning 2016).

### 7.3.2 A 'Legitimate' War

Days before of the Russian airstrikes began, speaking at the UN assembly in New York, Vladimir Putin described actions of the coalition headed by the US in Syria as "illegal", as 'there is neither a Security Council resolution on the issue, nor a corresponding request from the official authorities in Damascus' (Putin 2015c). 'As for our involvement,' he added, 'we are considering it...but...if we act, this will be in strict compliance with the norms of international law' (Putin 2015d in Kremlin 2015b).

Earlier, in the same month, Syrian President wrote a formal letter to his Russian counterpart with the request of military support (Assad in Perry 2015). On 30 September the request was submitted by Vladimir Putin to the Russian Federation Council asking 'to authorise the use of the Russian Armed Forces' contingent outside the country, based on the generally recognised principles and norms of international law' (Kremlin 2015). On the same day, after the authorization was granted, Russia launched its first airstrikes, from Khmeimim airbase targeting Hama, Homs and Quneitra provinces (Walker et.al 2015). With the airstrikes, Russian Defence Ministry launched a dedicated media outlet, reporting operations and results of the Russian military in Syria.

According to reports, in the first 48 days of the operations, Russian jets undertook 2,289 flights, dropped 4,111 bombs, destroyed 562 insurgent operation bases, 64 training camps and 54 bomb factories and helped to advance offensive of the regime's forces on the ground in Homs, Idlib, Aleppo, Damascus and Latakia provinces (Russian Defence Ministry 2015). With its air forces, Moscow also deployed the latest Russian anti-aircraft systems S-400 to Syria, involved long range TU-22M3 strategic bombers from the Russian territories, launched cruise-missiles targeting militia groups in Syria from the Caspian Sea over the Iran and Iraqi airspaces, and deployed nuclear capable submarines and aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov to the Mediterranean Sea (Russian Defence Ministry 2015).

Russia's direct military involvement in such scale was indeed extraordinary and was for Assad indispensable, as it tipped the balance in the Syrian war. At the same time, Russia became the largest foreign player in the Syrian theatre.

After the Libyan crisis, Russia appeared strongly determined to prevent another "illegitimate Western action", and used all the means available to avert the Western model of regime change to be implemented in Syria. As early as in 2012, the principled position of the NCSS has been explicit in the foreign policy

discourses of Russian officials. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that 'we will not allow the Libyan experience to be reproduced in Syria' (Sputnik 2012). Similarly, Vladimir Putin strongly defended the Russian opposition to military intervention in Syria and sharply chastised the United States for its role in toppling Muammar Qaddafi of Libya (Herszenhorn and Cumming 2012). Moreover, Putin criticized the US for abusing international law and norms. 'International law has been forced to retreat over and over by the onslaught of legal nihilism... Objectivity and justice have been sacrificed on the altar of political expediency... Arbitrary interpretations and biased assessments have replaced legal norms' (Putin 2014c in Kremlin 2014a). Within this abused international system, as Putin argued,

'the very notion of "national sovereignty" became a relative value for most countries...In essence, what was being proposed was the formula: the greater the loyalty towards the world's sole power centre, the greater the legitimacy if this or that ruling regime ...The measures taken against those who refuse to submit are well-known and have been tried and tested many times. They include use of force, economic and propaganda pressure, meddling in domestic affairs, and appeals to a kind of "supra-legal" legitimacy when they need to justify illegal intervention in this or that conflict or toppling inconvenient regimes' (Putin 2014d in Kremlin 2014a).



Therefore, Russia's uncompromised position in the Syrian crisis was a consequence of the NCSS's fight against unfairness in international system and the attempt to reach and maintain stability in Eurasia, in which the NCSS accorded a special role to Russia. In this context, the Syrian case carries an utmost importance to the NCSS, as it is the only example of the NCSS's notions in practice. For adherents to the NCSS, Syria was indeed a self-declared test case, as Lavrov declared 'how the Syrian crisis is resolved will largely determine the future model of the international community's response to internal conflicts' (Lavrov 2012 in Sputnik 2012).

Until Russian's direct military involvement, Moscow had been actively using its UNSC veto power to block any moves against the Syrian regime. Furthermore, despite the Western and regional condemnations, Moscow from the outset of the crisis maintained its arms supply to the Syrian government (Kozhanov 2016; Philips 2016). When the anti-regime forces strengthened, or were strengthened, the violence increased and conflict became militarized (Philips 2016) and Russia increased its commitments and threw its military power behind the Syrian government. Indeed, the rebel resurgence (mostly by the support of regional and international actors) of 2014-2015 was important for Russia's direct military involvement in Syria. However, equally important was

the rise of ISIS and its successful capture of the desert city of Palmyra, where ISIS publicly beheaded dozens of civilians and destroyed some of the city's UNESCO heritage antiquities (Saad and Fahim 2016). In other words, with the rise of ISIS, a possibility emerged for Moscow to intervene in Syria in defence of 'civilization', e.g. fighting international terrorism, radical Islam and for the Middle East Orthodox Christianity, which also suffered from the radicals during the crisis (Putin 2015f in Marshall 2015).

A month before the start of the Russian airstrikes, Moscow actively began calling for an international coalition for fighting terrorism (parallel to the Western one, already bombing ISIS in Iraq and Syria), while not disclosing its planned upcoming military operations in Syria (Putin 2015). At the same time at domestic level, the NCSS ideas became a popular strategic culture, when Russian media started bringing back in public discourses some memories of the Chechen Wars, especially of the so called *Mujahideen* (foreign fighters with a radical religious ideology fighting in the Russian soil against the Federal Government), and their terror attacks with the large number of civilian casualties in Russian cities, including Moscow. The link was made between Chechen Wars and Syria by arguing that the same *Mujahideen* that fought in Chechnya now was fighting on the side of ISIS (*Rossiia* 24 2015). Moreover, the

Russian media gave an approximate number of two thousand of Russian citizens mostly from North Caucuses who were recruited by ISIS and the similar number from the former Soviet states of Central Asia. Moreover, a threat was discursively constructed in the argument that Russian ISIS fighters in Syria would upon their return organise similar terror attacks to those that were organised by the Chechen radicals in the early 2000s, and the main idea promoted was that it would be a wise move to eliminate them now in Syria before their return to Russia (*Rossiia* 24 2015). As Putin argued, 'if the fight is inevitable then strike first' (Putin 2015c, translated from Russian). According to Levada Center's survey, before the airstrikes, about 55 percent of Russians viewed ISIS as posing a threat to regional and international security and about 72 percent of Russians already on the first days of airstrikes supported Russian military involvement in Syria (Levada 2014; 2015). While fighting "evil" in the form of ISIS or terrorism was Russia's great moral obligation under the NCSS, it was also in accord with the NCSS geopolitical reasoning for Russia's military involvement in the Syrian crisis.

Of the two, the civilizational dimension in Russia's self-portrayal to engage military in Syria was the stronger. Like Kremlin, the Russian Church actively called for an international coalition to fight against terrorism in Syria and

labelled it as “a holy war” (Patriarch Kirill of Moscow 2015a in Weir 2015). ‘Today the war against terrorism must be common to the world community, it is not only Russia’s concern but the concern of all nations. We must unite in order to defeat evil, and I call this war a holy war’ (Patriarch Kirill of Moscow 2015b, translated form Russian). In the words of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, ‘Syria, and the Middle East, is the place where Christianity emerged, and the terrible conflicts tormenting the Syrian land today cannot but create threats including to the Christian presence’ (Patriarch Kirill of Moscow 2018a, translated form Russian) Indeed, the Russian Church was deeply alarmed after the mass flight of Iraq’s Christians following the US invasion and when the conflict in Syria began, the church began lobbying the Kremlin to take a strong stand in defence of Syrian Christians, who are about 10 percent of the population (Weir 2015). Putin seemingly internalised this discourse and stated that ‘it is a moral duty upon Russia to change this terrible situation in the region and prepare for operation “Salvation” and with God the Almighty’s help we shall cleanse Syria from ruthless terrorists’ (Putin 2015d in Marshall 2015). On the first days of the airstrikes Putin blamed the US for supporting radical Islamic organizations who were engaged in a “genocide of the Christians” in the Middle East (2015e in Marshall 2015). ‘We have nearly two

million Orthodox Christians in the Levant—Syria and Lebanon— and approximately 5 million Christians across Middle-East...regardless of America's presidential election outcome, the White House craves chaos in that oil-rich region by supporting fanatic Islamist organizations, i.e. ISIS and al-Nusra Front' (Putin 2015f in Marshall 2015). Putin also noted that the Islamic State not only posed a direct threat to Christians but to the Muslim nations as well. Moreover, ISIS 'tarnishes one of the greatest world religions with its atrocities...the ideologues of these extremists make a mockery of Islam and subvert its true humanist values (Putin 2015g in Kremlin 2015).

### **7.3.3 Regional and International Reaction**

Although there were intelligence reports on and increased Russian military activity on Syrian soil, neither regional nor international actors expected such a commitment from Moscow. From the first days of the Russian airstrikes, the West (mostly the US, the UK and some EU countries) actively engaged in an information war with Russia. On the official level and on the Western media, over the Russian insinuations that it was hitting only ISIS and other terrorist targets, Moscow was heavily blamed for targeting mostly positions of the

Syrian opposition, killing hundreds of civilians and causing the mass refugee flee from Syria to Europe (Dearden 2016).

Russia, in turn, rejected all the allegations and through its media tried to give an impression that it was targeting only terrorist positions, 'which were fully coordinated with the intelligence on the ground' (MOD 2015; RT 2015; Sputnik 2015). Moreover, Moscow was rather eager to demonstrate how the Russian airstrikes were successful, comparing them favourably to the Western ones already hitting terrorist positions well before the Russia's in Syria since September 2014 (Cooper and Schmitt 2014). In this instance, the concert conducted by the Russian *Mariinsky* Symphony Orchestra in the ruins of Palmyra after it was recaptured, was indeed symbolic. Kremlin tried to demonstrate that within a limited time, Russia brought a peace to a city that was previously used by ISIS for openly slaughtering people. In the NCSS presentation the Russian actions contrasted with the American policy based on export of liberal democratisation on other countries arguing that it brings disorder, chaos but not peace. Kremlin assumingly sought to subvert the Cold War understanding that Moscow (Soviet Union) was a trouble maker, while the US was a guarantor of the peace in the world.

Among the main regional actors, Turkey was the most vehemently opposed to the Russian airstrikes. Alongside joining the western countries in condemning the Russian bombings that 'killing hundreds of civilians' (Davutoglu 2015), Ankara also downgraded a strong tie with Moscow by shooting down the Russian Su-24 and killing one serviceman. Ankara explained its actions by blaming the Russian bomber crossing Turkish airspace from Syria, which was denied by Moscow by providing a full space monitored pictures of the course of the targeted Su-24 (MOD 2015). The Russian military intervention, as one observer noted, 'rolled back many of Turkey's rebel allies' recent gains' (Philips 2016: 222), and targeted rebel and ISIS oil smuggling routes from Syria to Turkey, which was a favourable source of income in Turkey (Trenin 2016). After the jet incident, Russia reacted furiously by placing sanctions on Turkey, which was predicted to cost Ankara at least £7bn in lost business (Girit 2016). The relations between the two countries normalised only when in June 2016 Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan apologised over the downing a Russian war plane.

#### **7.3.4 Consequences of the Intervention: Bear's Trap?**

On the eve of the Russian military intervention, some Western leaders expressed a caution that Russia by further embroiling itself in the Syrian conflict would find itself bogged down in a "second Afghanistan" (Staff 2015). For members of the NCSS, however, the Russian military involvement in Syria served to take Russia a "step up" towards higher status in the international order. Certainly, this was noticeable when the US dropped the diplomatic isolation it had imposed on Russia after the Ukrainian crisis, as Washington had to consult closely with Moscow in the rapidly revived Syrian peace process in month/year (Philips 2016). During the post-intervention peace talks known as 'Vienna and Geneva III', which were co-chaired by Russia and the US all sides now initiated and endorsed a Russia's preferred option, which included Iran's participation and did not necessarily call for Assad's immediate departure.

The nature of the peace talks and resulting ceasefire afterwards suggested that Russia's intervention impacted the situation in Syria and forced the rebels and their external backers, especially the US to negotiate (Philips 2016). Any insistence on Assad's departure had been shelved. More importantly, Russia's



action shook the war out of a stalemate situation as Assad's forces were boosted and began retaking territories back both from the rebels and the extremist groups.

On 11 December 2017, Putin visited the Russian Khmeimim airbase in Syria and announced that the Russia's operation in Syria was completed successfully. Putin's visit both in Russia and Syria was marked as historical, since he was the first foreign leader visiting war-torn Syria since the crisis broke out. After Putin's visit, the Russian Defence Ministry started withdrawing some military hardware and the personnel but leaving an undisclosed number of both as permanent presence in the Russian airbase (*NTV Novosti* 2017).

With a self-declared success in Syria, Moscow seemingly confirmed the validity of the strategy it has been following. Although Putin at the beginning of the airstrikes stated that Russia has no intention to keep the Russian Khmeimim airbase in Syria after the operation was completed, he announced that it will be under the Russian control for an indefinite time. Moreover, in January 2018 it was announced that Russian Navy port Tartus in Syria was renovated (*Rossiya* 24 2018). This followed after the Putin's decision to strength the Russian navy and expand its reach around the globe. Soon after, in summer 2018, Russia has

started its permanent naval presence in the Mediterranean Sea as was stated in the 2001 *Russian Maritime Doctrine*.

Moreover, between 1 and 8 September 2018, Russia's Defence Ministry scheduled a massive naval exercise in Mediterranean Sea, which involved 25 warships and some 30 aircraft, including the permanent ship formation of the Russian navy in the Mediterranean Sea (MOD 2018). As Peter Korzun, an expert on wars and conflicts of Strategic Culture Foundation journal, noted:

'Like it or not, the Mediterranean Sea has ceased to be a "NATO Lake" dominated by US 6th Fleet. American vessels don't own these waters anymore. As a great power, Russia has its own interests in the region and it has a powerful naval force permanently deployed to defend them' (2018).

Putin explained his decision to strength and expand Russian navy as a need for keeping balance of power in the world. Indeed, with its new modernized military, and Russia's strengthened position in the Middle East, Moscow now begins to view itself as a power balancer to the US. This was clearly noticeable during the press-conference in St-Petersburg in May 2018, when Putin quipped with the French President Emanuel Macron that Russia is able to provide complete security to France and Europe after the French president mentioned

that Europe is to some extent dependent on the US as a guarantor of European security (Putin 2018 in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* 2018).

#### **7.4 Russia's Re-engagement with the post-Qaddafi Libya**

The Russian-Libyan relations that were dislodged due to the Libyan civil war began to resume after the return of the Neo-conservative strategic thinking to dominate the Russian strategic culture in 2012. Russia demonstrated its interest in engaging with the new Libyan leadership, and Ivan Molotkov, the Russian Ambassador to Libya, stressed the desire of the Russian government to reactivate the cooperation agreements signed with Libya before the civil war (Korzun 2016). Soon, the head of the Libyan National Forces Alliance, Mahmoud Jibril el-Warfally, welcomed the idea of renewal of Russia's contracts in Libya, especially in the energy, transportation, and construction sectors (Krylova 2017). In March 2012, Libyan Prime Minister Abdel Rahim al-Keib announced that military-technical cooperation with Russia will continue and asked for Moscow's assistance in repairing previously supplied Russian military equipment (*Voyenny Obozrevatel'* 2012). Russian *Rosoboronexport* estimated the value of new contracts with the Libyan authorities at \$2 billion (*Voyenny Obozrevatel'* 2012).

Moreover, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister and the special Presidential Representative for the Middle East and Africa, Mikhail Bogdanov stated in February 2013, that Russia was discussing with the new leadership of Libya the possibility of renewing old contracts and concluding the new ones (*RIA Novosti* 2013). In February 2013, the Libyan government announced the resumption of the deal with the *RZHD* (Russian Railways) signed in 2008, for construction of the 544-kilometre railway from Sirte to Benghazi (*Libya Herald* 2013). Similarly, the Russia's oil corporation *Gazprom Neft* also managed to renew its major oil and gas project "Elephant" that was suspended at the beginning of Libya's civil war (Krylova 2017). Moreover, Libyan Petroleum Minister Mashallah Zwai announced that Libya needs Russian technology in the country's oil industry in order to return as a player on the market (*Sputnik* 2016).

In September 2015, Vladimir Putin, speaking at the UN General Assembly, announced the necessity to help Libya, along with other Arab states such as Iraq and Syria, to restore their governmental institutions and to fight against terrorism. In December 2015, the Libyan Armed Forces' Commander Brigadier General Khalifa Haftar voiced Libya's readiness to cooperate with Russia in fighting terrorism, adding that 'Russians are serious in [the] fight against

terrorists' (*Sputnik* 2015). As Andrei Akulov, an expert of Strategic Culture Foundation journal, noted:

'Libyans remember well the NATO intervention of 2011 and don't trust the West, especially in view of its failure to achieve any positive results in Syria. Russia's operation in that country has changed the political landscape and strengthened Moscow's standing among the region's powers'.

In 2016, Haftar visited Moscow twice where he met with Sergey Lavrov and the Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu. Haftar had strong ties with Russia that originated in the 1970s when he received his military training in the Soviet Union (Krylova 2017; Akulov 2017). Haftar commanded the Libyan National Army and supports one of the two competing governments, the House of Representatives against the General National Congress (GNC). Moscow has maintained good contacts with both bodies in order to make them reconcile the differences and come to an agreement on forming one government to rule the country (Korzun 2016). According to observers, although Russia maintains its Navy presence in the Mediterranean through the Syrian port of Tartus, it is considered too small to harbour large warships like the aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov, which welcomed General Haftar on board in 2016 in the Mediterranean (Akulov 2016). Therefore, Russia is looking for a larger base to allow a sustained significant maritime presence in the region (Puszatai 2017).

Russian preferred option could be Tobruk in eastern Libya, which is controlled by General Khalifa Haftar. According to, *Novaya Gazeta* (2018), Russia sent some military hardware and Russian military specialists to Eastern Libya.

## CHAPTER 8: SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

It has been commonplace to view the Russia's foreign policy conduct through the lens of geopolitics and the notions of realism. Such standard interpretations have especially found momentum in the wake of the Georgian War of 2008, the Ukrainian Maidan Revolution of 2014 and during the Syrian crisis. According to these interpretations, within the structure of the international system, Russia as a contending state has been forced to engage in a power struggle with the United States (Mearsheimer 2014; Van Herpen 2015; Götz 2017). Post-positivist or interpretivist approaches, on the other hand, have inclined to interpret Russia's foreign policy behaviour by looking at its cultural, historical and contextual perceptions (Hopf 2002; Tsygankov 2013). Those perceptions, as per these accounts, are distinct from those of the West while the ethnocentric approach of positivism remains insufficient in providing a comprehensive explanation of Russia's strategic behaviour.

Constructivism is the most employed post-positivist approach in foreign policy analysis (Wendt 1992; Checkel 1993; Mendelson 1993; Stein 1994; Koslowski and Kratochwil 1994; Lebow 1994; Herman 1996; Evangelista 1999; Bennett

1999; Risse 2000; English 2000; Hopf 2002; Larson and Shevchenko 2003). Constructivist studies as applied to the Russian case have challenged the positivist assumptions of Russia's axiomatically given power-seeking nature, arguing rather that Russia holds a unique and distinct identity deriving from its cultural and historical norms. Those norms, according to pioneering studies, have been constructed by Russian interactions with other members of international society, especially with the West, which has played the role of the significant Other (Tsygankov 2013). Nevertheless, those perceptions, including 'the established sense of national identity', are subjects to change depending on the international actions of the Other and the interpretative structures that surround them (Tsygankov 2013).

However, the present thesis, through the development of a new analytical strategic culture framework, sought to demonstrate that the external developments alone cannot explain and initiate perceptual and identity changes, hence has highlighted the important role of specific pre-existing collective ideas, beliefs and attitudes in Russia's foreign policy making. Moreover, unlike the constructivist assumptions, this thesis has demonstrated that the self-imageries or self-ascribed identities in Russian policy making have been remarkably consistent, which had been maintained by well-established



collective discourses, regardless of the nature of external constraints or the international actions of rival powers.

### **8.1 Russia's Strategic Culture Revisited**

The main assumption of strategic culture paradigm is the influence of pre-existing set of collective ideas, beliefs and attitudes on a state's strategic behaviour in addition to, or irrespective of, external constraints and material forces. Based on the analysis of the fourth wave's strategic culture paradigm, this work has suggested to approach Russia's strategic culture as non-monolithic, consisting of distinct and competing strategic subcultures, which each represent a distinct Russian self-identity and geographical imagery, and a distinct set of collective ideas, beliefs and attitudes, derived from cultural and historical perceptions. As this work has demonstrated, these extant self and geographical imageries, collective ideas or attributes of each subculture have been durable and consistent. When changes to Russian strategic culture occurred, they occurred due to the shift within the strategic culture by way of a displacement of one strategic subculture for another.

In the suggested Russian strategic culture framework, one of the subcultures may hold a dominant or privileged position of power, which guides the state's

strategic decision-making process based on that particular subculture's accepted strategic preferences. The apparent inconsistency of foreign policy thus occurred not due to inability to pursue consistent objectives but due to the fluctuating domination of strategic subcultures, leading to the changes in Russian foreign and security policy behaviour.

While new foreign and security policy priorities were promulgated in the foreign and security policy discourses by Russian officials and politicians, they were also popularized and socialized among the wider public through the mass media. More importantly, the new priorities became formal strategic culture by being reflected in the official Russian strategy documents and on operational strategic culture by way of Russian foreign and security policy actions informed by the formal strategic culture, which reflected the preferences of the dominant strategic subculture.

## **8.2 Summary**

In order to demonstrate the operationalization of Russia's strategic culture and its implications on Russian foreign policy behaviour, this work examined Russia's changing foreign policy towards Syria after the Cold War.

After the historical overview of the Soviet MENA policy in Chapter 5, the thesis proceeded with the late-Soviet and post-Soviet Russia's MENA policy from 1986 to 1999, in which four different influential strategic subcultures and their implications on Russia's Syria and Libya policy were examined.

This thesis subdivided the Russian strategic culture into two distinct clusters, namely the pro-Western and neo-Soviet clusters. Each cluster is an umbrella group of distinct strategic subcultures. Under pro-Western cluster, this thesis evaluated three subcultures, which individually and collectively are distinct from the neo-Soviet groups, in their view of the world and the "self". These subcultures, which were labelled as Late-Socialist Reformist, Liberal Integrationist and Institutional Modernist, generally share a belief of appreciation of the Western liberal values (political, economic and social) and articulate a more accommodative and to some extent a submissive foreign and security policy vis-à-vis Western states. Under the neo-Soviet cluster, this thesis also evaluated three groups, which were labelled as Eurasianist, Counterhegemonic, and Neo-Conservative strategic subcultures. Unlike, the pro-Western, strategic subcultures in neo-Soviet cluster generally do not perceive the West, particularly the United States, as a partner, but as a "rival" and, to some groups, it is a constant enemy whose elements of power are all

directed towards the domination of the world and towards the destruction of any adversaries, including Russia. Both Syria and Libya played a significant strategic role in Soviet's regional policy during the Cold War, a policy that had been formulated through the strategic preferences of the traditional Soviet strategic culture, which was based on Moscow's power struggle and its quest for the balance of influence in the world vis-à-vis with the West.

However, starting in the mid-1980s, these foreign and security policy priorities were deprioritized due to the predominance of Late-Socialist Reformism strategic subculture (LSRSS) over the traditional Soviet strategic thinking. The shift or predominance of LSRSS had occurred with the elevation of its key members, especially Mikhail Gorbachev's appointment to the highest position in the Soviet Union, the General Secretary of the Communist Party. The new dominant Soviet strategic subculture prioritized Universalist values over the class struggle, which were manifested in the idea of *novoye myshleniye* (new thinking). LSRSS invalidated the well-established previous beliefs and concepts such as inevitable and necessary confrontation with the West and the spheres of influence. Instead, as LSRSS articulated the Soviet Union and the West must cooperate in achieving a better world, focusing on global security issues such as nuclear disarmament, environmental protection, and poverty elimination. The

world was seen as *nedelimyy mir* (an indivisible world), and it was portended that both political systems should fight for *vseobshchayu bezopasnost* (common security), rather than against each other. This meant desecuritization of the Western capitalist threat on the Eastern socialist system, and the securitization of the *sud'ba mira* (the fate of the world), which had been for long disregarded due to the bipolar confrontation. The desecuritization of the previous threats became formal strategic culture and was reflected in the Soviet Military Doctrine, which has been tasked with the 'prevention' or with 'not permitting a war', whereas the previous version had been formulated to 'prepare and wage a victorious war' (FitzGerald 1990: 487).

With these dramatic changes in Soviet strategic thinking, both Libya and Syria, which had previously provided key platforms for Soviet political and military presence in the region, became less significant to Moscow. To continue the close relations with those Arab states with strong anti-American orientations, was now undesirable for Moscow, and similarly it was unappealing not to have full diplomatic relations with Israel. Thus, Moscow resumed its diplomatic ties with Israel by instating the consular delegations between 1987 and 1988.

Moscow's relations with Libya and Syria have not improved with another shift in strategic culture, which occurred in the early 1990s. As discussed in Chapter 5, the Liberal Integrationist Strategic Subculture (LISS) became dominant in Russia's strategic thinking, concomitant with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Along with negating discourses about the 'Western threat' and deprioritizing the previous Soviet foreign policy practise of seeking bases and allies, the Late-Socialist Reformism strategic subculture also discredited the entire Soviet system, which assisted in strengthening the influence of the LISS. The eventual dominance of the LISS was facilitated by the elevation of its key members to high office, especially Boris Yeltsin's appointment as the president of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) and later as the president of the Russian Federation. The LISS articulated the ideas of *integratsiyu s Zapadom lyuboy tsenoy* (integration with the West at any cost) and *razryv s Sovetskim naslediyem* (break with the Soviet legacy).

The underlying notion of the LISS was to transform Russia to the Western economic, political and security system via rapid membership in Western-dominated institutions. Moreover, the LISS viewed Russia as an organic part of Western civilization and therefore, viewed 'the United States and other Western democracies as natural friends and eventual allies of the democratic Russia as

they were foes of a totalitarian USSR' (Kozyrev 1994). Therefore, the LISS articulated Russian integration with the West and isolation of it from autocratic states. As discussed in Chapter 5, during this period, Russia's foreign policy in Middle East and North Africa had been largely supportive and accommodative of the Western regional agenda, e.g. by supporting sanctions against Iraq, Iran and Libya, and backing the US cruise missile strikes on Iraq in 1993.

The pursued policy of the LISS, however, turned into point of contention between other strategic groups and the LISS. Two groups within the neo-Soviet strategic cluster, namely, Eurasianist (ESS) and Counterhegemonic (CHSS) strategic subcultures criticised the "destructive reforms" and the foreign policy course set by the LISS for serving Western, rather than Russian, interests. In the ESS account, Russia's national interests were by definition "anti-Western". They articulated the need of Russia's immediate divergence from the Western-oriented policy towards a more "resistant" course, by preserving control over the former Soviet territories and creating a strategic alliance with other Eurasian states.

With the increasing influence of the ESS, Yeltsin had to actively arbitrate the competing strategic preferences in the foreign and security policy practise of

the Russian Federation. As discussed in Chapter 5, in this period Russia demonstrated a more independent and sometime counter-Western agenda in the MENA, e.g. by seeking to lift sanctions on Iraq, unilaterally involved itself in the Arab-Israeli conflict after the Hebron incident in 1994, and seeking to improve its relations with Syria.

However, a more independent and active Russian regional policy behaviour took place during the influential years of the Counter-Hegemonic Strategic Subculture (CHSS), namely the years 1996-1999. The influence of the CHSS in Russia's strategic culture was facilitated by the elevation of its key members to high political positions, especially Yevgeny Primakov's appointment as the Foreign Minister in 1996 to replace Andrei Kozyrev, one of the key articulators of the LISS, and later as the Russian Prime Minister in 1998. In the view of the CHSS, the unipolar structure of the world under the economic and military domination of the United States was an immediate threat to Russia's national interest. The CHSS argued that Russia must restore its status of *velikaya derzhava pervogo urovnya* (a great power of the first rank) within the *mnogopolyarnom mire* (multipolar world), where *Rossiya yavlyayetsya derzhatelem mezhdunarodnogo balanssa sil* (Russia is holder of international balance of power) or maintainer of the world equilibrium. During the influential years of the CHSS, along with



other Eurasian states, Moscow prioritised the MENA dimension of Russia's foreign policy and actively re-engaged with regional affairs in the MENA region.

As discussed in Chapter 5, Russia's foreign policy engagement, however, has not frequently gone as far as expected by the Eurasianist and Counter-Hegemonic subcultures (ESS and CHSS). As Russian strategic culture had been dominated by the LISS, Yeltsin as an arbiter had manoeuvred the strategic decisions in order not to contradict the West.

Strategic priorities and the structure of Russia's strategic culture experienced a dramatic change in the late 1990s with the rise of the Neo-Conservative strategic subculture (NCSS) in Russian strategic thinking. As discussed in Chapter 6, in the late 1990s Russia's strategic culture saw another shift, which had been brought by the predomination of the NCSS over the LISS. The NCSS domination was facilitated by the elevation of its members to high political positions, especially Vladimir Putin's appointment as the Prime Minister in 1999 and later as the President of the Russian Federation on the final day of 1999.

The NCSS perceives Russia as the Eurasian great power, the geographical imagery of which stretches well beyond Russian national borders. In the view of the NCSS, the fairness in the international system has been for long abused by the West, especially, by the United States, largely due to American global hegemonic ambitions. Therefore, the NCSS articulates that Russia must have a self-sufficient economy and self-reliant powerful military in order to respond to the challenges posed by the West. As discussed in Chapter 4, the NCSS articulations became formal strategic culture by incorporation into Strategy documents and hence turned into operational strategic culture. The NCSS revived ideas about the need for a strong military in the international system where the NCSS argued that international law was disregarded and norms were imposed arbitrarily and used cynically by the West. According to the well-established neo-conservative belief the world functions under the overarching principle of *kto-kovo* (someone dominates over others, the question being who is powerful and who is subservient). To this end, the NCSS re-securitized the Western threat both as hard and soft power and articulated the uniqueness of Russia, *strana s tysyacheletney istorii* (a country with a thousand years of history), which manifested itself in the popular idea of the *Russkiy mir* (Russian World). In a form of rival universalism to Western cosmopolitanism,

the moral values, which are traditional within the worldview of *Russkiy Mir* are argued to be Universalist rather than cultural-relativist, according to Russian neo-conservatism. As the Eurasian great power, the NCSS proclaims that Russia has a special role in maintaining peace and stability in Eurasia in particular, and articulates the need to strengthen Russian political and military influence in the continent, but there is no civilizational or regional restriction of Russia's scope of action.

As discussed in Chapter 6, during the dominant years of the NCSS, namely 2000-2008, Russia demonstrated a renewed interest in the MENA region. Particularly in Libya and Syria, the military-technical cooperation that existed during the Soviet Union was resumed. The Russian Navy started visiting the Syrian port of Tartus, and Moscow was interested in such access for its Navy in the port of Tripoli (*Lenta.ru* 2010). Moreover, the economic cooperation between Russia and both Arab states intensified, and Russian firms actively worked on improving infrastructure and oil fields in these countries, especially in Libya (Katz 2008).

However, in 2011 with the onset of the uprisings in Libya and Syria, Russia's military technical cooperation and economic interests came under threat, especially as the uprisings turned into civil wars.

In 2008, with the election of Dmitri Medvedev as the President of the Russian Federation, the Russian strategic culture shifted by way of the predomination of the Institutional Modernist Strategic Subculture (IMSS) over the NCSS. IMSS formulated Russia's self-imagery as Euro-Atlantic and, being attracted by the Western model of development, IMSS articulated the need for modernizing the Russian economy, its political system, social dimensions and bringing technological changes to the country. As discussed in Chapter 4, the main articulations of the IMSS have reflected in the discourses of the official documents and became formal strategic culture. Unlike the conceptions of the NCSS, to the IMSS the West is not a threat. Moreover, adherents to IMSS sought to modernize or restructure the security architecture of the Euro-Atlantic region which would include Russia as well. This is mainly due to the IMSS's perception or imagine of Russia as being part of the Western community, and its national interests are identical with those of the leading Western world powers.

As Chapter 6 illustrated, during the dominant years of the IMSS, Russia largely concentrated on its Euro-Atlantic foreign policy arena and viewed other arenas especially, the MENA, as less significant. During the Libyan crisis, Russia along with the leading countries of the G7 condemned the Libyan regime and called it illegitimate. Moreover, as detailed in Chapter 7, Moscow supported Western sanctions on Libya and viewed the UN Security Council Resolution 1973 as not only legitimate but necessary. The particular decision of the IMSS on Libya was repulsive for adherents to the NCSS, and it has opened up a clear rift between the two subcultures. Since the dominant strategic subculture in Russian strategic thinking at the time was the IMSS and the arbiter of Russian strategic culture was the member of this subculture, the decision on the resolution to the Libyan crisis was made according to strategic preferences of the IMSS. Similarly, during the Syrian uprisings, the IMSS was mostly aligned with Western ideas on the resolution of the crisis. Like Western leaders, Medvedev urged the Syrian regime to end the violent crackdown and in August 2011 sent Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Mikhail Bogdanov to Syria to convince the regime to undertake the demanded reforms in the country. Later, in October 2011 again like Western leaders Medvedev urged Assad to step down if he unable to reform and meet the aspirations of

the Syrian people (Lenta.ru 2011). This approach however, discontinued and Assad's departure was fiercely opposed after the return of the Neo-Conservative strategic thinking at the helm of Russian strategic culture.

With the election of Vladimir Putin for the third Presidential term in 2012, the NCSS again revived as the dominant strategic subculture. As discussed in Chapter 4, the return of NCSS as the dominant strategic thinking has been marked by Moscow's revision of all the central strategy documents, and the main ideas and beliefs of the NCSS were found reflected in the discourses of the official strategic documents. Hence, the NCSS became formal strategic culture, guiding Russian foreign and security policy objectives.

Like in the Libyan case, the NCSS has demonstrated its opposition to any UN Security Council Resolution on Syria that might lead to the external intervention by Western powers and has kept its uncompromised stance at the time of the completion of this thesis.

Moreover, when Russia interpreted the situation in Syria as critical and foresaw the chance of the regime's survivability eroding against the opposition forces, which were seen as largely supported by the West, Moscow decided to involve the Russian Armed Forces in Syria. From September 2015 to the time of the

writing of this thesis Russian military has been supporting the Assad regime against the Islamic State (IS), the Free Syrian Army (FSA), other insurgent groups supported by Turkey or the West, thus tipping the balance in the war.

During the influential years of the NCSS (2012-present), Russia has increased its military presence in the region by securing the Russian Khmeimim Air Base in Syria for an indefinite time to be used by Russian Armed Forces and similarly, has been upgrading Navy base in Tartus, which facilitates Russia's permanent presence in the Mediterranean Sea (Talmazan 2017; Korzun 2018). Overall, thus, Russia's military presence in the Middle East has eclipsed the US as the primary external power in the region.

Moreover, in October 2018, Russia upgraded the Syrian air defence system by supplying S-300 surface-to-air missiles for free, after the incident when Russian reconnaissance plane was shot down during the Israeli air operations in Syria (Staff 2018). While the Russian decision to supply such sophisticated weapons demonstrate that Moscow regards the Syrian security, not as a foreign but as a domestic matter, it has also changed the balance of power in the region (Kortunova 2018).

Furthermore, during these years, Russia has demonstrated its interests in engaging with the post-Qaddafi Libya, and Ivan Molotkov, the Russian Ambassador to Libya, stressed the desire of the Russian government to reactivate prior cooperation agreements signed with Libya before the 2011 civil war (Korzun 2016).

As discussed in Chapter 7, starting already in 2012 Russia resumed its military-technical cooperation with Libya and agreed to assist in repairing previously supplied Russian military equipment (*Voyennyy Obozrevatel'* 2012). Similarly, the Russian Railways and Russian *Gazprom Neft* have resumed major projects that were suspended at the beginning of Libya's civil war (*Libya Herald* 2013; *Sputnik* 2016; Krylova 2017).

In 2015, Russia announced the necessity to help Libya to restore its governmental institutions and to fight against terrorism (Putin 2015). Russian announcement was positively responded to by the Libyan Armed Forces' Commander Brigadier General Khalifa Haftar, who visited Moscow on a number of occasions in 2016. According to, *Novaya Gazeta* (2018), Russia sent some military hardware and Russian military specialists to Eastern Libya. Moreover, the Russian Navy remained interested in using the Libyan port of



Tobruk (Puszatai 2017), which was controlled by General Khalifa Haftar, who in early April 2019, launched a military offensive on the capital, Tripoli, which continues at the time of writing of this conclusion (Elumami 2019).

### **8.3 Findings and Contributions to knowledge**

As 'any scholarly work on strategic culture is granted importance because of its rarity' (Gray 1999: 51), this work has sought to offer a valuable contribution to this 'underexplored' (Poore 1999: 279) paradigm. By developing a new analytical framework, this thesis sought to contribute in overcoming the general flaw of strategic culture paradigm, namely its weaknesses in accounting for apparently aberrant strategic behaviour and change (Bloomfield 2012). By employing a strategic subculture perspective, building on the fourth wave in foreign policy analysis, this work demonstrated in the case study at hand that a change in strategic behaviour occurred due to the shift in strategic culture which in turn related to the substitution of the dominance of one strategic subculture over another. Such strategic shift do indeed occur, when one (dominant) subculture within strategic culture are eclipsed by a hitherto subordinate one or a competing strategic narrative of an otherwise subordinate subculture is included in the spectrum of ascendant ones. The new ascendant

subculture with its dominant strategic narrative may present a different understanding of state's international social/cultural context, a distinct interpretation of external conditions and, hence unique understandings of the appropriate ways of defining and resolving the various strategic challenges and opportunities that state faces.

Moreover, in order to analyse Russian foreign policy behaviour through the strategic culture approach, this thesis used constructivist and critical geopolitics insights to enrich the strategic subculture perspective. This is because Russian foreign policy analysis requires understanding of security not merely limited to its physical form but rather as intangible or ontological forms of security, including spatial conceptions that reveal the self-identities and geographical imageries of Russia's foreign policy elites. As this thesis demonstrated, there are more than one constructed self and multiple geographical imageries, in addition to variant notions of security in Russia's foreign policy establishment.

As the first analysis to apply a strategic subculture analysis in the pursuit of understanding Russian foreign policy, this thesis forms a valuable contribution in reconceptualizing and understanding Russian strategic culture and its impact on strategic decisions.

Furthermore, Russian Syria policy after the Cold War has not been thoroughly analysed in existing literature. Although there are some works that have engaged with Russo-Syrian relations within Moscow's broader Middle East policy, the changing nature of the Syrian factor in Russia's regional policy has not been captured as a key theme. More importantly, while existing studies have engaged with the changes in Russian-Syrian relations, these analyses have not discussed how and why these changes occurred. This thesis has sought to fill this gap by discussing Moscow's policy towards Syria from 1986 to 2016 and demonstrating that the changes in Moscow's foreign policy behaviour towards Syria can best be understood by adopting a perspective of strategic subcultures in a rigorous framework that includes ideational aspects of strategic thinking as well as group dynamics.

By applying the strategic subculture perspective towards an understanding of Russia's changing foreign policy towards Syria, this thesis found that both economic and geopolitical lenses are insufficient in their respective accounts, for at the different historical junctures after the Cold War, Russian leadership have demonstrated ostensibly irrational behaviour if viewed from purely economic or geopolitical perspectives. For instance, in the 1990s Russia mostly supported the American agenda in the MENA, frequently against its own

economic and sometimes its geopolitical interests. Similarly, before and during the Arab Spring, Russia neglected its economic interests by supporting Western-led sanctions on revisionist MENA states e.g. supporting arms embargo on Libya and cancelling the delivery of S-300 to Iran. In order to understand the motivations behind such decisions, as this thesis demonstrated, it is necessary to analyse the cultural contextuality, ideational commitments and valuational constructions of distinct strategic subcultures. Indeed, culturally and historically conditioned understandings, ideas, and imagery about the self, the significant Other, values and contests play a significant, and sometimes decisive, role in the foreign policy making of the Russian Federation.

Moreover, the thesis found that the strategic preferences of each strategic subculture have been enduring and consistent over the time, contrary to the postulates of constructivism, which viewed that Russia's foreign policy changes imposed largely by international interactions with other actors or overarching (social or political) structures (Tsygankov 2013). Contrary to the accounts that dominate the analysis of Russian foreign policy behaviour, Moscow's differential approach during the Arab Spring in regards to most significantly Syria (but also in the case of Libya), has been explained through a similar

model of changing dominance relationships between strategic subcultures, rather than changing interests or, despite the constant refrain, changing international structures.

**Appendix. 1** Chronology of important internal and external events, 1986-2016

February 1986	The 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the first congress presides over by Mikhail Gorbachev as the General Secretary.
April 1986	The United States bombs Libyan cities of Tripoli and Benghazi.
June 1986	The Soviet Union proposes that the Warsaw Pact alliance and its NATO counterpart each demobilize up to 150,000 soldiers in Europe within a year or two.
October 1986	Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan meet in Reykjavík, Iceland for US-Soviet summit.
April 1987	Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad visits Moscow to meet Mikhail Gorbachev.
October 1987	Boris Yeltsin's, a candidate member of the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee and first secretary of the Moscow City Committee of the Communist Party, gives speech at plenum criticizing the pace of <i>perestroika</i> (restructuring) and position in the party.

December 1987	Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan sign a treaty on the Elimination of the Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles (INF Treaty).
May 1988	Soviet-U.S summit in Moscow.
December 1988	Mikhail Gorbachev, in his first speech to the United Nations General Assembly, declares a unilateral 10 percent cut in Soviet's 5 million-strong armed forces and a partial withdrawal of soldiers and tanks facing NATO forces in Eastern Europe.
February 1989	Complete withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.
March 1989	Boris Yeltsin is elected as the chairman of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR).
May 1989	Mikhail Gorbachev assures the Council of Europe that Soviet Union will not utilize military force against developments in Eastern Europe.
September 1989	Boris Yeltsin's first (unofficial) visit to the United States.

October 1989	Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze publicly proclaims the Soviet's right to intervene in Afghanistan in 1979.
December 1989	The Soviet Union, the United States, Great Britain and France meet to discuss the status of Berlin.
February 1990	Talks on German unification.
March 1990	Mikhail Gorbachev is elected as the President of the Soviet Union.
May 1990	U.S-Soviet summit in Washington.
June 1990	The new Russian Parliament adopts the declaration of state sovereignty of the RFSR.
August 1990	Soviet Union and Syria support coalition forces against Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.



January 1991	Mikhail Gorbachev orders to involve military in Baltic States of USSR to suppress demonstrations; Boris Yeltsin visits Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia to support their demands against Gorbachev.
July 1991	Boris Yeltsin is elected as the President of the RFSR.  Warsaw Pact is disbanded; START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) is signed between the United States and the Soviet Union by Presidents George H. W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev;  Ten Soviet republics reach an agreement on new Union treaty to be signed on 20 August.
August 1991	Coup against Mikhail Gorbachev.
December 1991	Russia, Ukraine and Belarus establish CIS;  the Soviet Union is dissolved;  Gorbachev resigns as the president of the USSR.
January 1992	Arab-Israeli peace talks held in Moscow.

March 1992	Russia supports the UNSC resolution against Libya.
April 1992	George H. W. Bush and Helmut Kohl announce \$24 billion aid to Russia;  Russian embassy in Libya is attacked.
May 1992	Russia joins IMF and World Bank.
September 1992	Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq Al-Shara visits Moscow to discuss new directions of bilateral relations.
January 1993	Boris Yeltsin and George H. W. Bush sign START II.
April 1993	The first Foreign Policy Concept (FPC) of the Russian Federation is adopted.
September 1993	Boris Yeltsin signs decree No. 1400.

October 1993	Constitutional crisis in Russia.
November 1993	The first Military Doctrine (MD) of the Russian Federation is adopted.
December 1993	The influence of the Liberal Integrationist strategic thinking is weakened as the result of parliamentary elections.
February 1994	Russia is involved in Arab-Israeli peace process after the incident in Hebron.
April 1994	Russian first Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Sokovets visits Syria;  Russia signs a military-technical cooperation agreement with Syria.
November 1994	Russian Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev visits Syria;  Russia's Middle East envoy for the Russian President, headed by Victor Posuvalyuk visits Syria;  Russia cancels \$2 billion Syrian debt.

December 1994	Moscow launches military offensive in Chechnya.
December 1995	National-Communists strengthens their position as the result of the parliamentary elections.
January 1996	Yevgeny Primakov replaces Andrei Kozyrev as the Russian Foreign Minister.
April 1996	Yevgeny Primakov visits Syria and Israel to mediate the Lebanon ceasefire.
July 1996	Boris Yeltsin is re-elected as a President.
December 1996	Yevgeny Primakov visits Iran;  Russia is admitted to the Asian and Pacific Economic Council (APEC).
April 1997	Russia and China sign the Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Formation of a new International Order.

May 1997	Boris Yeltsin signs Russia-NATO Founding Act with NATO leaders.
December 1997	The first National Security Concept (NSC) of the Russian Federation is adopted;  Yevgeny Primakov prevents the US attack on Iraq by negotiating the terms for the return of the UN inspections to Iraq.
May 1998	Boris Yeltsin meet Bill Clinton in Birmingham;  Russia joins the G8.
September 1998	Yevgeny Primakov's appointment as the Prime Minister.
March 1999	NATO launches airstrikes against Serbia;  Primakov cancels scheduled negotiations with the United States on the plane and ordered to change course and return to Moscow.
April 1999	Yevgeny Primakov started negotiations on the resolution of the crisis in Serbia;  Yeltsin replaces Primakov with Viktor Chernomyrdin as the Russian special envoy on Yugoslavia.

May 1999	Yevgeny Primakov as removed from his post;  Sergey Stepashin is appointed as a Prime Minister.
July 1999	Syrian President Hafez al-Assad visits Moscow.
August 1999	Russia engages Armed Forces to counter Chechen incursion into Dagestan;  Vladimir Putin is appointed as a new Prime Minister.
December 1999	Boris Yeltsin resigns from his post;  Vladimir Putin becomes an acting President of the Russian Federation.
January 2000	The new National Security Concept of the Russian Federation is adopted.
March 2000	Vladimir Putin is elected as the President of the Russian Federation.
April 2000	The new Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation is adopted.

June 2000	<p>Russian-U.S summit in Moscow;</p> <p>Hafez al-Asad dies;</p> <p>Bashar al-Assad becomes a President of the Arab Republic of Syria.</p>
July 2000	<p>The new Foreign Policy Concept of the Russia Federation is adopted.</p>
June 2001	<p>George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin meet in Ljubljana, Slovenia.</p>
September 2001	<p>Terrorist attacks in the United States;</p> <p>Chechen leader Akhmad Kadyrov visits Damascus;</p> <p>Syria supports Russian campaigns in Chechnya condemning terrorism</p>
November 2001	<p>Vladimir Putin visits the United States</p>
May 2002	<p>An agreement on joint declaration on energy cooperation between Russia and the United States is signed in Moscow.</p>

June 2002	The United States unilaterally withdraws from Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty.
October 2002	U.S-Russia energy summit in Houston, Texas.
January 2003	Russia joins an anti-war coalition against Anglo-American intervention in Iraq.
March 2003	The United States and Great Britain invade Iraq;  Russia condemns the invasion;  Syria is isolated.
December 2003	An economic sanction is imposed against Syria prepared by the US congress: "Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act".
March 2004	Vladimir Putin is re-elected as the President for the second term.



September 2004	Terrorist attacks in Beslan, North Ossetia.
November 2004	Orange Revolution in Ukraine. Protests are prompted by the perception that the results of the Presidential elections were unfair and corrupted in favour of Viktor Yanukovich over Viktor Yushchenko.
January 2005	Bashar al-Assad visits Moscow for talks with Vladimir Putin;  Moscow cancels 75% of Syrian debt;  Russia-U.S summit in Bratislava, Slovakia.
March 2005	Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan. 2005 Parliamentary elections were criticized by the foreign observers. Protesters alleged corruption and authoritarianism by Askar Akayev's regime.
April 2005	Vladimir Putin visits Israel.
June 2006	Russia declares its opposition to the NATO membership of Ukraine and Georgia.
September 2006	Russia imposes economic and political sanctions on Georgia.

February 2007	Vladimir Putin delivers speech at Munich Security Conference (MSC), Germany.
April 2007	The United States announces its plans to deploy elements of a missile defence system to Eastern Europe.
March 2008	Dmitri Medvedev is elected as the President of the Russian Federation; Vladimir Putin is selected as the Prime Minister.
June 2008	Dmitri Medvedev proposes a new-pan European security treaty.
July 2008	The new Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation is adopted.
August 2008	Georgia launches military offensive against South Ossetia and Abkhazia; Russia engages in the war against Georgia; Russia recognizes independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia; Syrian President Bashar al-Assad visits Moscow and supports Russian military campaign in Georgia; Syria offers to install Russian missiles on the Syrian soil.

November 2008	Barack Obama is elected as the President of the United States.
March 2009	U.S-Russia “reset policy” is initiated by Washington.
May 2009	The new National Security Concept renamed as Strategy of the National Security (SNS) of the Russian Federation until 2020 is adopted.
June 2009	Russia-U.S summit in Moscow.
July 2009	Russia agrees to U.S military overflights to and from Afghanistan.
February 2010	The new Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation is adopted.
April 2010	Russia and the United States sign new START Treaty.

May 2010	The United States imposes sanctions against Syria; Dmitri Medvedev visits Syria.
June 2010	Russia supports the UNSC sanctions against Iran and cancels the agreed delivery of S-300 air defence system; Revolution in Kyrgyzstan.
March 2011	Russia supports UNSC arms embargo on Libya; Russia abstains from voting the UNSC Resolution 1973 on Libya; Uprisings begin in Syria.
August 2011	Western leaders demand Bashar al-Assad's resignation.
October 2011	Dmitri Medvedev urges Bashar al-Assad to step down.
December 2011	Russia joins World Trade Organization (WTO); Protests in Russia against Vladimir Putin.
March 2012	Vladimir Putin is elected as the Russian President for the third term; Dmitri Medvedev is selected as the Prime Minister.

February 2013	The new Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation is adopted.
August 2013	Chemical attack in Syria; The Syrian regime is accused of utilization of its chemical weapons.
September 2013	G-20 summit in St. Petersburg; Russia and the United States reach an agreement on phased elimination of the Syrian chemical stockpile.
February 2014	Maidan Revolution in Ukraine; Viktor Yanukovich fled; Russia sent additional troops to Crimea.
March 2014	Referendum in Crimea to join Russia; Crimea becomes the part of the Russian Federation; Western sanctions are imposed against Russia.
September 2014	U.S-led Coalition forces begin airstrikes in Syria against terrorists.
October 2014	Vladimir Putin delivers speech at Valdai Club in Sochi, "Munich speech II".

December 2014	The new Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation is adopted.
April 2015	Russia resumes the deal with Iran on the delivery of S-300 air defence systems.
May 2015	Vladimir Putin signs a law on NGO's, giving right to persecutors to shot dawn undesirable international organizations.
July 2015	The United States, Great Britain, France, Russia, China and Iran sign a nuclear agreement limiting Iranian nuclear program in exchange for lifting economic sanctions.
September 2015	Syrian President Bashar al-Assad write letter to Vladimir Putin over military support; Vladimir Putin delivers speech as UN General Assembly; Vladimir Putin requests permission form Russian Federal Council of the use of the Russian military contingent outside the national borders; Russia's airstrikes begin in Syria.
October 2015	Syrian President Bashar al-Assad visits Moscow to meet Vladimir Putin.

November 2015	Turkish Air Forces shutdown Russian SU-24 in Syrian-Turkish border.
December 2015	The new Strategy of National Security of the Russian Federation is adopted.
November 2016	The new Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation is adopted; Donald Trump is elected as a President of the United States.

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