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A NEOREALIST ANALYSIS OF IRAN-RUSSIA RELATIONS:
TAJIK AND SYRIAN CIVIL WARS

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TAJIK AND SYRIAN CIVIL WARS

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ABSTRACT

A NEOREALIST ANALYSIS OF IRAN-RUSSIA RELATIONS: TAJIK AND SYRIAN CIVIL WARS

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Civil wars not only influence the countries they break out but they also lead to significant policy changes on a regional and global scale as observed in Syria. On the other hand, the civil war in Tajikistan between the years 1992-1997 is the first and only civil war in Central Asia following the Soviet demise. Both civil wars have varying degrees of impact on Iran by shaping Tehran's foreign policy and providing a basis for cooperation between Iran and Russia. In this thesis, Iranian politics towards Tajik and Syrian civil wars will be examined comparatively and it will be made inferences about Iran's policies towards Russia. Examining both civil wars as case studies, this thesis argues that there are significant differences between Iran's policies towards the Middle East and Central Asia/Transcaucasia regions. One of the main determinants on these differences is "Russia factor". While Iran has pursued an interventionist, assertive and even aggressive policies in the Middle East, Tehran's policies in Central Asia/Transcaucasia has been more non-interventionist, timid and conciliatory. This thesis uses Neorealism as theoretical framework and states that for Iran, close relations with Russia stand as an important opportunity for balancing the threat of Western penetration into the Middle East and Central Asia/Transcaucasia as

well as a strong source of stability against any threat around its borders. Lastly, the thesis covers the factors limiting the close relations between Iran and Russia by departing from Tajik and Syrian civil wars.

Key Words: Iran, Russia, Neorealism, Syrian Civil War, Tajik Civil War

ÖZ

İRAN-RUSYA İLİŞKİLERİNİN NEOREALİST BİR ANALİZİ: TACİK VE SURIYE İÇ SAVAŞLARI

Yanık, Esra

Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Orta Doğu Araştırmaları

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İç Savaşlar, Suriye’de gözlemlediğimiz üzere sadece gerçekleştikleri ülkeleri etkilemekle kalmayıp bölgesel ve hatta küresel boyutta önemli politika değişikliklerine yol açmaktadır. Öte yandan, Tacikistan’da 1992-1997 yılları arasında gerçekleşen iç savaş Sovyet Rusya’nın yıkılmasının ardından Orta Asya’da yaşanan ilk ve tek iç savaş olma özelliği taşımaktadır. Her iki iç savaş da Tahran’ın dış politikasına yön vererek ve İran ve Rusya arasında işbirliği imkanı sağlayarak İran üzerinde değişen oranda etki sahibi olmuştur. Bu tezde, İran’ın Tacikistan ve Suriye’de yaşanan iç savaşlar ile ilgili politikaları karşılaştırmalı olarak ele alınacak, buna göre İran’ın Rusya’ya yönelik politikaları hakkında çıkarımlarda bulunulacaktır. Her iki iç savaşı birer vaka analizi olarak inceleyen bu tez, İran’ın Orta Doğu ve Orta Asya/Transkafkasya politikaları arasında önemli farklar olduğunu belirtmektedir. Bu farklara yol açan etmenlerden biri “Rusya faktörü” dür. Buna göre, İran Orta Doğu’da, daha müdahaleci, iddialı ve hatta agresif bir politika izlerken Orta Asya ve Transkafkasya bölgesinde ise, müdahaleci olmayan, çekingen ve uyumlu bir politika takip etmektedir. Bu tez, Neorealizm’i teorik çerçeve olarak kullanmaktadır ve Rusya ile yakın ilişkilerin, İran için Batı’nın Orta Doğu ve Orta

Asya/Transkafkasya üzerinde nüfuzunu genişletmesi tehditi karşısında güç dengelemek adına önemli bir fırsat, sınırlarında oluşabilecek herhangi bir tehdit karşısında güçlü bir istikrar kaynağı olduğunu ifade etmektedir. Son olarak, bu tez, Tacik ve Suriye iç savaşlarından yola çıkarak İran-Rusya arasındaki yakın ilişkileri sınırlandıran etmenlere de yer verecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İran, Rusya, Neorealism, Suriye İç Savaşı, Tacik İç Savaşı

To My Family...

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BRICS	Brazil Russia India China South Africa
CA / TC	Central Asia / Transcaucasia
CIS	Commonwealth Independent States
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organization
EU	European Union
FSA	Free Syrian Army
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IR	International Relations
IRI	Islamic Republic of Iran
IRGC	Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps
IRPT	Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan
ISIS / DAESH	Islamic State of Iraq al-Sham
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
RF	Russian Federation
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization

SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UTO	United Tajik Opposition
YPG	People's Protection Units

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Iran and Russia are two important actors that not only have been affected by but also have considerable impacts on the developments in different regional systems such as Eurasia, Central Asia, Transcaucasia and the Middle East. Having a long history with an abundant cultural, civilizational and social heritage as well as considerable material power in terms of military, demography and surface area, both Iran and Russia are viewed as transit points between the civilizations and considered as powerful states encompassing a vast sphere of influence. Thus, the regional developments such as inter-state wars and civil wars prompt both states to compose appropriate foreign policies in order to survive in the most advantageous position with minimum losses. Tajik Civil War that broke out in Central Asia immediately after the Soviet demise (1992) and Syrian Civil War at the heart of the Middle East directly affected Iran and Russia albeit in differing degrees.

In this thesis, Tajik Civil War and Syrian Civil War will be examined as two case studies with regards to their impacts on Iranian foreign policy and its relations with Russia. While comparing these two cases' influence on the foreign policy agenda of Tehran, the thesis acknowledges the existence of methodological problems and the difficulty of comparing the intricateness of the power dynamics in the Tajik and Syrian cases. The Tajik and Syrian civil wars occurred in two different time frames – the former in 1990s and the latter after 2011 and in different international conditions – Tajik civil war in the Russian backyard immediately after the Soviet demise with an ambiguous post-bipolar world order and Syrian civil war following the Arab Uprisings in the “post-American Middle East”¹ in a relatively multi-polar world order. Internally as well, the Syrian case has a longer history of modern state formation since 1946 and a longer and fiercer struggle against imperialism which has

¹ See Phillips, Christopher. *The Battle For Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*, (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2016)

widen the gap between loyalty to the state identity and supra-state as well as sub-state identities. On the other hand, Tajikistan gained its independence in the nearer past and without an intensive fight for sovereignty compared to Syria. Moreover, the clash between state, supra-state and sub-state identities is much more smother in Tajikistan. Yet again, both Syria and Tajikistan, distinctly from other states in their regional systems, experienced a rare phenomenon “civil war” and went through and continue to go through bloody conflicts among a host of internal actors with external meddling. Although differences -which may even exceed the similarities-, exist between two cases, a comparative approach and assessment of these two cases’ importance in the eye of Iran as well as their impact on Iran-Russia relations would hopefully contribute to develop a more insightful analysis in regard to the Iranian foreign policy approaches towards the Middle East and Central Asia/Transcaucasia. In their comparative study entitled as *Sovereignty after Empire Comparing the Middle East and Central Asia*, Sally Cummings and Raymond Hinnebusch summarize their assumptions while they compare the experience of imperialism and its impact on the post-imperial conditions in the Middle East and Central Asia with the sentence below;

Imperial experiences matter for post-imperial states and states systems- for sovereignty – hence, that similarities and differences in the empires that ruled the Middle East and Central Asia should help to explain similarities and differences in the post-imperial outcomes in the two regions.²

Both Syria and Tajikistan stand as microcosms of their regions and have a potential to guide further region-wide analyses thanks to their cases’ correspondence with the region-wide conditions. In summary, my aim is not to draw a picture with full of similarities between Tajik and Syrian cases and reach a clear—cut analysis about Iran-Russia relations. In contrast, I aim at performing elaborative explorations via learning from both differences and similarities as not only similarities but also differences are worth exploring in comparative studies.

Moreover, Iran’s approach to the Tajik and Syria civil wars bear resemblance with its foreign policy approaches towards the Central Asia/Transcaucasia (CA/TC)

² Cummings, Sally, and Raymond Hinnebusch. “Introduction” in Hinnebusch, Raymond, and Sally Cummings. (eds). *Sovereignty After Empire Comparing the Middle East and Central Asia*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

and the Middle East. Yet, although Iran pursues different and even contradictory approaches towards each civil war; these approaches, far from jeopardizing its relations with Russia, even enhance the collaboration and dialogue between Tehran and Moscow. In this thesis, departing from these two cases, Tehran's foreign policy towards CA/TC and the Middle East will be discussed with a reference to the policy differences and the reasons behind them and the significance of "Russia factor" on Iran's foreign policy will be handled consequently. By using the term "Russia factor", the thesis not only refers to Russia's existence in CA/TC as a regional hegemon with an extensive influence but also its policies in the Middle East- which directly or indirectly favors Iran's regional position and assertive policies in this region.

For the analysis, Neorealism will be used as the theoretical framework. The reason of my selection of Neorealism is to maintain an academic and consistent analysis within the boundaries of one of the most important theoretical approaches in the International Relations (IR) discipline. As Raymond Hinnebusch admits, the Middle East "appears to be the region where the anarchy and insecurity seen by the realist school of international politics as the main feature of states systems remains most in evidence and where the realist paradigm retains its greatest relevance".³ Indeed, Neorealism and its conceptual tools such as power, international system as anarchy, balancing, bandwagoning, chain-ganging, buck-passing possess a significant capacity and explanatory power about the foreign policy and inter-state relations. However, the thesis does not intend to provide an exclusionary approach and underestimate the power of other IR theories, which greatly contribute to the discipline and supply multi-layered, multi-dimensional and stimulating analyses. Therefore, while applying Neorealism in my analysis; on the one hand, I incorporate the prominent Neorealist sources from the chief representatives of this approach such as Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer. On the other hand, I refrain from overemphasizing the role of international system-level determinants. For instance, while exploring the Syrian and Tajik cases, the foreign policies of Iran and Russia and their approaches towards the two cases and wider-regions, I try to understand the

³ Hinnebusch, Raymond. *The International Politics of the Middle East*, (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 2003).

analyses regarding state formations and incorporate state, sub-state and supra-state levels as well. Not only the systemic variables but also the domestic conditions are laid out in the thesis as seen in the explanations about the domestic factors and state structures leading to the Tajik and Syrian civil wars, the factions and political tendencies in Russian and Iranian policy arenas. Moreover, the thesis acknowledges the criticisms against the limitations of Neorealism such as its “ahistorical tendency” and assumptions of states systems as unchanging. Again, the thesis explains the historical legacy in the Middle East and CA/TC, the role of imperial legacies of the USSR in CA/TC and Western powers in the Middle East by pushing the limits of Neorealism but without diminishing the theoretical consistency.

1.1 Literature Review

The relations between Russia and Iran, each of whom has hosted numerous historical breaking points, regime changes and revolutionary scenes, have been subjected to examinations based on different historical periods and a variety of theories and perspectives. Iran-Russia relations being analyzed with a wide scale of standpoints ranging from historical enmity to practical cooperation or (as some scholars prefer to call) to a 'strategic partnership' continues to attract scholarly attention today, as well. All the global and regional elements such as the US' invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, the NATO's eastern expansion into the Central Asia and the Caucasus at the end of 1990s and the beginning of 2000s, the waves of Arab Uprisings after 2010s leading to a number of political transformations throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the nuclear consensus reached in 2015 between Iran and P5+1 (United Nation Security Council members plus Germany), the subsequent disagreements, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, the eight year-long civil war in Syria, the economic and military cooperation between Tehran and Moscow continue to add new dimensions to Iran-Russia relations.

An overview of the literature analysis about the relations between Russia and Iran indicates that the realist and neo-realist outlook overwhelmingly predominate to the literature. Moreover, the same outlook is widely applied to the studies which solely deal with foreign policy motivations of each country. However, there are also

alternative approaches and theories regarding the relations and the number of these approaches have been relatively getting higher day by day. The scholars adopting the framework of Neorealism suggests that there is an attempt to counter balance the US hegemony behind the contemporary good relations between Russia and Iran despite their history of mistrust and enmity. The areas of convergence albeit limited have emerged due to the regional and global events such as post-Cold War world order and the US hegemony in the late 1990s and 2000s. Stephen Flanagan indicates that "Russian leaders find Tehran's anti-Americanism useful as a way to balance US political influence".⁴ It is highlighted that two countries having possessed a number of historical problems and geopolitical clashes among themselves are inclined to form a partnership as a result of the pushing factor of the unipolar world order in the post-Cold War period.

To begin with the Russian foreign policy, a group of scholars put forward that one of the major constituents of the Russian foreign policy is its desire to reemerge as a global power ("*derzhaunichestvo*" in Russian). Russian academician Alexei Arbatov makes a list of problems which Russia had to deal within 1990s. Firstly, Russia was obliged to work on in its relations with the new republics in the former Soviet Union territory. Secondly, Russia had to formulate a foreign policy towards the regional conflicts challenging Moscow to find a balance between its own national interests and the goals of cooperation with the West. While the third problem was to deal with new regional centers of power, Russia in its fourth problem had to address certain positions of a global character inherited from the USSR and crucial to its role as something more than a regional power.⁵ Some scholars examining the Russian President Vladimir Putin's foreign policy also underline that his presidential terms display several realpolitik qualities and an international posture focused on balance of power and interests. Carol Saivetz argues that Russia's choice of policy has been

⁴ Flanagan, Stephen. "The Turkey, Russia, Iran Nexus: Economic and Energy Dimensions". CSIS, 2012.

⁵ Arbatov, Alexei. "Russia's Foreign Policy Alternatives". *International Security*, 18 No.2, (1993): 5-43.

designed to "make US policy more expensive", which resembles "traditional balancing behavior in international relations."⁶

As is known, during Putin's second term (2004-2008), Russia's relations with the Western states have deteriorated remarkably. The pro-Western color revolutions taking place in the former Soviet territories such as Georgia (Rose Revolution in 2003), Ukraine (Orange Revolution in 2004), Kyrgyzstan (Tulip Revolution in 2005) intensified Putin's determination to exclude the US' influence in the Central Asia and Transcaucasia, the regions regarded as Russia's "near abroad". Dina Spechler states that "although Washington is not always the center of attention for Russian decision-makers, Russia's relations with the West impact significantly its policies toward countries in other regions." Dividing Putin's foreign policy into four distinct phases, Spechler indicates that in the fourth phase which is Putin's second term (2004-2008), Russian comments on Western policy began to be marked by a voice of deep suspicion and even open hostility as opposed to the second phase in which 9/11 fostered Russian support for the US in its war on terror.⁷

Many scholars describe Russian moves in the Middle East as a tool for strengthening its identity as a world power. Stephen Blank states that Russia by exporting military technologies to the Middle East countries, seeks to expand its status as a world power. According to this argument, the main factor that drives Russia to sell weapons to the third world countries is not to generate revenue but to facilitate its image as a superpower. Therefore, the arms sale is an integral part of this process of image creation. Described as an opportunist and exploiter of the Middle East; Russia, Blank elaborates, perceives the Syrian civil war not only a "market of opportunity" to make money but also a "strategic foothold" needs to be defended. That's why, Russia continues its arms supply to ensure a future influence in Syria, particularly and in the region generally. Blank summarizes that Russia, thanks to its

⁶ Saivetz, Carol. "Making the Best Hand of a Bad Hand: An Assessment of Current Trends in Russian Foreign Policy". *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 22, No.2, (2006): 166-188.

⁷ Spechler, Dina. "Russian Foreign Policy During the Putin Presidency". *Problems of Post-Communism*, No.5, (2010): 35-50.

energy independence "stabilizes instability" in the Middle East.⁸ Likewise, Pavel Baev mentions that "[the Middle East] provides the best opportunity for Moscow to reassert its status as a key player in the global arena". Baev also adds that Russia "plays the role of a best friend" and develops good-neighborly relations with Iran by appeasing Iran's nuclear program.⁹ This point of view tends to attribute a kind of deeper calculations for the Russian side in its dealings with the Middle East region and Iran. Actually, the debates about whether Russia turned back to the Middle East or not generally examines Russia's growing influence in the region and its cooperation with Iran as well as its intervention in the Syrian conflict and mostly concludes that Russia sees the Middle East as a fertile ground for its not only economic interests but also political and security interests whose first parameter is to counter balance the US influence.

Describing Russian leader Vladimir Putin's visit to the Gulf states (Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan) in 2007 as a part of Moscow's return to the region, Mark Smith points out that the failure of US policy in Iraq after the 2003 invasion and subsequent Muslim discomfort has created a further opportunity for Russia that had already freed from Marxist-Leninist ideological boundaries to broaden its regional presence. According to Smith, rivalry with the US constitutes an important feature of Putin's policies towards the Middle East and Russia looks at the Middle East from a framework of geopolitical competition. In addition to geopolitical concerns, Moscow sees the region as a potential market for Russian goods and it is interested in cooperation in the energy sector with the Gulf countries.¹⁰ Russian security interests in its policies regarding the Middle East come into forefront in some arguments. Eugene Rumer indicates that "Putin's approach posits Russia as a major power, a handful gravitational poles in the international system that determine its shape and

⁸ Blank, Stephen. "Russia's New Presence in the Middle East". *American Foreign Policy Interests*, 37, (2015): 69-79.

⁹ Baev, Pavel. "Russia as Opportunist or Spoiler in the Middle East?". *The International Spector*, 50, No.2, (2015): 8-21.

¹⁰ Smith, Mark A. "Russia and the Persian Gulf The Deepening of Moscow's Middle East Policy". *Conflict Studies Research Center Middle East Series*. (August) 2007.

direction" and suggests that the Middle East concerns the Russian policymakers due to its proximity to Russia's southern borders. According to Rumer, as opposed to the US policy seeking to bring a systematic and long-term change in the Middle East, Russian politics towards the region intend to preserve the status quo and prevent a major change. Rumer assesses that Russian approaches towards Iran, Syrian regime and Hamas is emerging out of its need to break the country's international isolation.¹¹ From this perspective, Russia perceives the overthrow of autocratic regimes during the Arab Uprisings as a threat to regional stability. Moreover, the Western intervention into the Libyan crisis in 2011 led to a correlation between Arab Uprisings and color revolution in the Russian psyche. The Arab Spring, therefore, not only damaged the economic and energy interests and Russian economic penetration into the region but it also propelled Russia to a fear of spillover effect to the post-Soviet space. Tobias Schumacher explains that the Southern Mediterranean emerged as an important vector in the Russian agenda which operates with a multi-vector foreign policy. According to him, Russia's lack of strategy in its approach to the region emerges out of its willingness to support some regional regimes that oppose Western influences and its collaboration with the Western states in combating extremism. In this context, the Arab Spring causing significant losses for the Russian defense sector, has astonished Russia due to the uncertainties waiting for the Middle East.¹² In the literature regarding Russia's approach to the Middle East, the general idea is that the Middle East creates a perfect playground where Russia has an chance to assert its influence beyond the former-Soviet territories and to exploit the opportunities emerged out of the US policy failures in the region.

In addition to the arguments mentioned above which generally correspond with the theoretical approaches of Neorealism, alternative theories and approaches towards Russian foreign policy have been showing up in the literature. Most of these alternative approaches criticize the neo-realist viewpoints. Giovanni Baldoni, for instance, applies a theoretical model which was developed by Charles F. Hermann

¹¹ Rumer, Eugene. "Chapter Two: Putin's Foreign Policy- A Matter of Interest. *The Adelphi Papers*. 47, No.390, (2007): 23-42.

¹² Schumacher, Tobias. Cristian Nitoiu. "Russia's Foreign Policy Toward North Africa in the Wake of the Arab Spring. *Mediterranean Politics*, 20, No.1, (2015): 97-104 .

and tries to analyze the most influential elements that shape Putin's foreign policy in his latest terms. He explains that although some aspects of realist theory are clearly reflected on Russia's behavior, neither realism nor liberalism is the most appropriate approaches to analyze Russian foreign policy. In accordance with Hermann's model, Baldoni aims to interpret the situations in which Russian government decides to change the foreign policy directions. Among Russia's core national interests, Baldoni ranks that the prioritization of the relations with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), opposition to NATO's eastern expansion, criticism of Western intervention into the domestic affairs of other states, call for a multipolar world and achievement of its Great Power status as invariable foreign policy objectives. According to Baldoni, as a "predominant leader" Putin's desire to maintain his power and to secure popular support are the most determinant foreign policy change agents. The fall in the oil and gas price, subsequent economic crisis in 2008 and its reflection on the lives of ordinary people and finally the discontent towards the predominant leader are described as a "domestic restructuring". Baldoni underlines that Russia's operations in Ukraine and Syria can be seen as good examples of how a predominant leader, Putin in this case, who has been threatened by an unfavorable domestic structuring has consulted to foreign policy in order to regain support and trust of the masses. He interprets the protests in 2012 in Russia as people's rejection of authoritarianism when their financial situation gets better off. Baldoni concludes that; "Putin had no choice but to pull up his sleeves and manufacture new international crises that Russia would resolve and new foreign enemies determined to harm and destroy Russia that Russia would defeat."¹³ Baldoni applies a more agency-oriented approach towards the Russian foreign policy and explains the foreign policy changes seen as program changes rather than international reorientations with the domestic constraints on the leader.

Moreover, as an alternative to the neo-realist frameworks, the social constructivist approaches also come into forefront while examining the Russian foreign policy. Social constructivism which views the international relations as a socially constructed phenomena emerged with powerful arguments in the late 1980s

¹³ Baldoni, Giovanni. "A Theoretical Analysis of Russian Foreign Policy Changes Under Vladimir Putin. *E-International Relations Publishing*. 10 September 2016.

when the existing dominant theories failed to predict the end of the Cold War. Criticizing the realists' tendency to perceive the international relations as a single objective reality, the Constructivists emphasize the social dimensions of the international relations such as identities, norms, historical and cultural forms. The dramatic changes at the end of the Cold War led the theoreticians to put an emphasis on the concept of "change" as well as historical context. As opposed to the rationalists assuming a static world of states who primarily concerned with material interests, Constructivists tie them directly to the identity of the subject without denying the importance of interests. According to them, the choices are taken in a mutually constituted way.¹⁴ Ray Taras edited a book with the name of *Russia's Identity in International Relations Images, Perceptions, Misperceptions* in 2013 which contains numerous articles dealing with a variety of Russian foreign policy subjects from a social constructivist approach. Raymond Taras, in the first article of this book, handles the relation between images and power. Taras states that "after the Cold War ended, identity not ideology and reciprocal state images and perceptions of each other not the strategic nuclear balance became pivotal factors promising a better understanding of international politics." He asserts that self-drawn images of becoming a strong state could be unsettling for the neighboring states and sometimes for international community. To attract attention to the mutually constructed nature of the images, he explains that the Western terms describing the Russian Federation such as expansionist, revanchist, security threat or destabilizing actor began to be widely used after the reentrance of Russian concept "derzhava" (power / domination) into the Russian political lexicon following the collapse of the USSR.¹⁵

Vladimir Lukin, another author who provides a constructivist understanding towards the Russian foreign policy, examines modern Russia's search for identity with exploring practices in Germany and China which, the author suggests, "successfully adapted national identity to the need for modernization and effective development in a new historical environment". Lukin finds Russia's tendency

¹⁴ Dunne, Tim. editor. *International Relations Theory Discipline and Diversity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

¹⁵ Taras, Ray editor. *Russia's Identity in International Relations Images, Perceptions, Misperceptions*. (Routledge: London, 2013).

towards putting emphasis on the past and making the factor of space an absolute criterion as a risky factor and he offers ways for establishing Russia's new identity. According to the constructivist author, the lack of consistency and coherence in the foreign policy practices of the "new Russia" stems from its being at the very beginnings of its quest for identity in the post-imperial as well as post-Soviet period. As Russia's modern statehood began only twenty-five years ago, it would be hard to formulate a clear foreign policy agenda composed of consistent intentions. As Lukin puts forward, after the collapse of the USSR, Russia suffers from a great problem of how to identify itself with respect to the Soviet Union.¹⁶

Andrei Tsygankov, on the other hand, estimates the validity of the "authoritarian expansionism" theory and compares it with realism and constructivism. According to Tsygankov, the theory of "authoritarian expansionism" overlooks the significant resources of foreign policy contestation inside Russia by seeing Moscow's institutional and historical distinctiveness as a threatening criterion against the West. While assessing the cases such as the Crimean War, the Cold War and Russia-Georgia War in 2006, the author underlines the role of elements other than the explanations focusing on Russia's authoritarianism in its foreign policy. The theory of "authoritarian expansionism" assumes the geo-political expansionism and imperialism as Russian's international objectives and determines domestic authoritarianism as the main reason of Russian pursuit of expansionist foreign policy. According to Tsygankov, the theory of expansionism is widely applied by the conservative Western perception-holders in a way to justify NATO's eastern expansion. He states that this theory is essentialist and overlooks the interactive nature of Russia-West relations and claims that most of the Russia's assertiveness stems from the US's regime-change politics, its intentions to achieve nuclear superiority and the post-cold War advancement by the West into where Moscow sees as the sphere of its geopolitical interests. As he goes on, except a short period of the drive for world revolution, what the Kremlin mostly seeks for is not a geopolitical expansion of its boundaries but to establish itself as a prestigious world-power recognized as a member of international society. Another fallacy of the "authoritarian

¹⁶ Lukin, Vladimir. "The Foreign Policy of Post-Soviet Russia: A Quest for Identity". *Strategic Analysis*, 40, No.6, (2016): 486-497.

expansionism" theory emerges out of its ethnocentrism which approaches other cultural societies and systems with skepticism by viewing them as a potential threat. Tsygankov suggests that "a more complex classification of Russia's foreign policy" would be a much better approach to Russia, and as historically proven Russia has been following "several distinct trajectories" in its relations with the West ranging from cooperation, defensiveness to assertiveness. He concludes that understanding Russian foreign policy necessitates the establishment of a meaningful context, analysis of the level of power and resources and a careful monitoring of the Western states' actions towards Russia.¹⁷

The assessments regarding the Iranian foreign policy shows certain parallelisms with the assessments of the Russian foreign policy. In comparison with the neo-realist explanations, the number of the articles utilizing alternative theories such as social constructivism is relatively low but worth examining for their ability to put forward new frameworks and dimensions about Iranian foreign policy. The main argument of the articles based on mostly neorealist assumptions about the Iranian foreign policy is that Iran's post-revolutionary foreign policy is driven by its security concerns and desire to counterbalance the Western influence by establishing interest-based alliances despite the heavy ideological, Islamist rhetoric adopted by the Iranian policy makers. Barbara Flanagan states that "While religious rhetoric often billowed from Friday sermons, pragmatic policies driven by a basic understanding of realism generally determined foreign policy over the last thirty years." According to Flanagan, Islam and religious principles "take a backseat to realism, power politics and the survival of the state".¹⁸

According to the neo-realist scholars, the foreign policy fundamentals of the Islamic Republic are composed of a primary importance attached to the stability throughout its borders which requires good relations with the neighbors, overriding security concerns accompanied by a fear of encirclement, an attempt to develop good

¹⁷ Tsygankov, Andrei. "Assessing Cultural and Regime Based Explanations of Russia's Foreign Policy Authoritarian at Heart and Expansionist by Habit". *Europe-Asia Studies*, 64, No.4, (2012): 695-713.

¹⁸ Flanagan, Barbara. "Islamic Realpolitik: Two-Level Iranian Foreign Policy". *International Journal on World Peace*, XXVI, No.4, (Dec, 2009):7-35.

relationship with great or regional powers in order to counter the US power. In this quest for foreign policy fundamentals, the domestic power politics and factional problems among conservatives, reformists or hard-liners hold very little or no significant difference from the neo-realist approach which attributes a holistic rationality to the state as the main actor. Fred Halliday suggests that "the views of factions on domestic policy do not match up neatly with comparable views on foreign policy." He underlines Khatami's foreign policy to exemplify his assertion and finds Khatami far less open and comprehensible towards the West than Mao waiting for the US President Richard Nixon in Beijing in 1972.¹⁹

All in all, except a brief period of Khomeini's ideological foreign policy, which indeed carried its own limitations, Iran acts as a nation-state whose pursuit of interests dominate everything else. Shireen Hunter calls this as "de-ideologization of Iran's foreign policy after Khomeini". In this context, Hunter emphasizes that "perceiving Iran as an Islamic threat ignored the vast changes the nation experience in the aftermath of both its eighty-year war with Iraq and the Persian Gulf War of 1991."²⁰ For Iran, the consolidation of power at home as well as economic reconstruction became a priority rather than the exportation of its regime based on revolutionary Islam. Some academics explain Iran's interest-based politics mostly with the structural reasons rather than agency-led factors. For example, Volker Perthes highlights that the structural factors such as the regional instability, the security questions regarding the Persian Gulf, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict give a shape to Iran's relations with other states. According to this argument, Iran perceives itself as a regional power in an unstable and insecure region. The overthrow of Saddam regime in Iraq, the Taliban's decline in Afghanistan, Iran's geopolitical reach to the Levant via Hezbollah and the Gaza Strip via Hamas are the factors strengthening its regional status. Perthes claims that "Iran is both a rational and an opportunistic actor, that is, it uses and exploits opportunities in its regional and

¹⁹ Halliday, Fred. "Iran and the Middle East: Foreign Policy and Domestic Change". *Middle East Report*. No. 220, (Autumn 2001): 42-47.

²⁰ Hunter, Shireen. "Iran's Pragmatic Regional Policy". *Journal of International Affairs*, 56, No.2, (2003): 133-147.

international environment with little regard for the security perception of others or for the need to build trust."²¹ To summarize, the arguments in line with Neorealism attributes two important goals to Iran. One of them is the attempt to minimize the power of extra-regional hegemons particularly the US influence and the other is the desire to secure its status as a regional power. The neo-realist point of view tends to disregard the Islamic Republic's rhetoric based on the image of "defender of the oppressed" and finds it as a mask over the real issues and national interests at the core of the state. Therefore, it suggests an Iran whose primary occupation is the state survival in an international scene lacking a central authority.

Attaching a great importance to the concept of identity, Constructivist scholars examining the Iranian foreign policy tend to highlight the parts missed by the neo-realist assumptions. As is known, social constructivism views the identities as the basis on which the political actors form their interests. Accordingly, the actors are motivated by ideological and social interests and do not follow a strategy merely for survival. Assessing Iran's three major identities: Iranism, Islam and Shiism; Shahram Akbarzadeh emphasizes that Iran's problematic relations with the US mostly stem from the anti-imperialist and anti-Western rhetoric which is a component of Iran's social identity creation. Furthermore, he relates Iran's interactions with the states such as Tajikistan and Afghanistan to Iranism which highlights the importance of a shared history, geography, language and culture.²² Most of the constructivist approaches evaluate that Iran's anti-Israel stance does not conform with the rational cost-benefit analysis. Given its problematic relations with the Arab monarchies and the power competition in the Persian Gulf, Israel could have been as a balancing factor for Tehran. Yet, Iran's rhetoric to consolidate its Islamist and anti-Western identity is a primary reason in its anti-Israel stance. Kadir Ertay Çelik makes a constructivist analysis about Iranian identity and its foreign policy and asserts that demographically heterogeneous Iran has placed the process of

²¹ Perthes, Volker. "Ambition and Fear: Iran's Foreign Policy and Nuclear Programme". *Survival*, 52, No.3, (2010):95-114.

²² Akbarzadeh, Shahram. "State Identity in Iranian Foreign Policy". *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 43, No. 4, (2016):613-629.

social construction in the post-1979 period onto a religious/sectarian basis which is a much more homogenous phenomena in the state. Çelik claims that Iran pursues a Shii-dominated foreign policy and gives its close relations with Shia Hezbollah, Nusayri Assad regime and its support for Shia groups in Iraq after the 2003 US invasion, as examples to its Shia-based foreign policy structure.²³

Another constructivist author Hossein Karimifard suggests that Iran's policy orientations are mostly influenced by the ideas of national identity, which is a "cognitive subject based on mutual understanding of Iran and other countries". According to Karimifard, radicalism (by this term he means the rejection of hierarchical international system) in the area of international relations, opposition to Great Powers and support for liberation movements, anti-Americanism, resistance against the hegemonic system most of which constitute Iran's constitution are significant signs of Iranian identity in the field of foreign policy.²⁴ Mehdi Mozaffari also consults to Iran's constitution in his attempt to put emphasis on the discursive context and textual worldview in foreign policy making. Accordingly, there are four pillars of Iranian worldview: "revolutionary character" which perceives the current international system as unjust and repressive and advocates for revision, "totalitarian character" with the Velayet-e Faqeh system, "Non-Westphalian view" based on Umma concept rather than a nation concept and lastly "imperialist ambition" which can be found in its desire to have a nuclear weapon. Mozaffari pursues an interactional approach between interests and ideas and asserts that ideology occupies a hegemonic place in the formulation of Iranian foreign policy. According to him, the tension between interests and ideology is low in Iranian context and only in the periods of an encounter with a great danger facing the regime, the issue of "interest/survival" emerges. Viewing Iran as an ideological state, Mozaffari explains Iran's cautious policy in the Central Asia and the Caucasus with the word "anomaly". Iran's close relationship with Russia, Azerbaijan's ambitions concerning the Northern

²³ Çelik, Kadir Ertay. "İslam Devrimi Sonrası İran'da Kimlik ve Dış Politika: Konstrüktivist Bir Bakış" *Bölgesel Çalışmalar*. 1, No. 1, (Yaz, 2016).

²⁴ Karimifard, Hossein. "Constructivism, National Identity and Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran". *Asian Social Science*, 8, No. 2, (Feb. 2012): 239-246.

territory of the IRI, and the pro-Wahhabi Islamist movements in the Turkic nations of the Central Asia are given as explanations for this "anomaly".²⁵

Although Mozaffari calls as "anomaly", most of the neo-realist authors strengthen their arguments by giving examples from Iran's foreign policies regarding the Central Asia and Transcaucasia and particularly the relations between Russia and Iran. All in all, in line with Neorealism, despite ideological values on which Iran put its Islamic revolutionary rhetoric, Iran has been pursuing a pragmatic approach towards the Central Asia / Transcaucasia and recognizes Russian sphere of influence there. Shireen Hunter implies that Iranian policy regarding this region is heavily influence by its wish to remain on good terms with Russia even at the times when Russia becomes less cooperative for close ties with Iran. Thus, their relations have been highly one-sided and based on an unequal partnership. Because of its desire to counterbalance the Western influence, Iran maintains this kind of partnership despite its ideological rhetoric.²⁶ Shahram Akbarzadeh investigates the gap between the rhetoric of Iranian decision-makers and its real foreign policy objectives by analyzing Iran's relationship with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). According to Akbarzadeh, Iran finds the SCO as an instrumental vehicle for challenging the US military intrusion into the region and strengthen Iran's significance as a regional power. In this sense, Iran feels comfortable when allying itself with Russia and China, two states systematically suppressing their Muslim minority which contradicts with its "self-promoted image as the champion of Muslim interests".²⁷ Actually several neo-realist arguments point out that the births of the CIS republics after the Soviet collapse create a new opportunity of cooperation against the Western intrusion into the region. After the 1979 Revolution, Iran's pursuit of "neither East nor West" policy which strained its relations not only with

²⁵ Mozaffari, Mehdi. "Islamist Policy: Iranian Ideological Foreign Policy". *Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalization*. April, 2009.

²⁶ Hunter, Shireen. "Iran's Pragmatic Regional Policy". *Journal of International Affairs*, 56, No.2, (2003): 133-147.

²⁷ Akbarzadeh, Shahram. "Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Ideology and Realpolitik in Iranian Foreign Policy". *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 69, No. 1, (2015):88-103.

the USA but also with the USSR, subsequent Soviet invasion of Afghanistan add new tensions to the already-entangled relationship. However, the Soviet collapse and its retreat from Afghanistan in 1990s relieved the tension and the emergence of the CIS nations created more opportunities. Iran's cooperative relations with Russia in the Chechen conflict and Nagorno-Karabakh and Tajik Civil War are exemplified as Iran's pragmatic and interest-driven foreign policy regarding the Central Asia and the Caucasus.

According to the neo-realist perspective, the shared geopolitical interests contribute to the enhancement of the relations between Russia and Iran, whose historical accounts are full of wars, mutual aggressiveness and distrust with two Russian invasions of northern Iran during both Great Wars. Most of the neo-realist academics attract attention to the fact that Russia and Iran have been moving to a much closer relationship based on pragmatic and strategic considerations that did not exist at any other time since 1979. Adam Tarrock, for instance, suggests that;

The catalysts for the present 'strategic alliance' are Russia's needs for foreign currency and the desire to have a friendly neighbor to the Muslim states in Central Asia and Iran's need for Russian arms, new technologies, political support at both regional and international level. In addition, both countries have common security concerns and economic interests in the development of oil and gas in the Caspian Sea.²⁸

According to this perspective, Iran prefers using the "Russian card" against the West in response to the US-led intensification of the Western economic sanctions against Tehran. In this context, for Russia, what matters most in its relations with Iran are economic benefits and reaching to the Persian Gulf through Iran. Viewing the both countries as a "new power couple" after their military cooperation in the Syrian crisis which reached to its peak with Iran's decision to let Russia to send strategic bombers into Syria from the Shahid Nojeh Air Base in Hamadan; Ellie Geranmayeh and Kadri Liik question the sustainability of the cooperative relations between Iran and Russia. They put emphasis on both countries' aspiration to create a "multipolar world system" and their mutual opposition to the US unilateralism by describing them as "deep-seated commonalities" and attract attention to the areas of

²⁸ Tarock, Adam. "Iran and Russia in 'Strategic Alliance'". *Third World Quarterly*, 18, No. 2, (1997) : 207-224.

convergence such as insist on Assad's preservation his ruling place and areas of divergence such as the future of Syrian Kurds and the pro-Assad paramilitary agents in Syria. While establishing its foreign policy towards Iran, Russia neither desires an Iran who is extremely at odds with the West nor a absolutely pro-Western one as both of them carry a risk of the diminish of Russia's leverage.²⁹ From the neo-realist lenses, Russia views Iran as an arm market, a tactical ally against the Taliban in Afghanistan, a powerful couple against the threat of Sunni Central Asian nations. For Iran, Russia is a constant and stable source of arms, a diplomatic and tactical ally against Azerbaijan and Taliban.

A great number of scholars find the cooperation between Iran and Russia limited. Ari Heistein, for example, states that when either Russia or Iran experience periods of closer relations with the US, their mutual relations deteriorated. Russian support for Iranian nuclear program has its own limitations as a nuclear Iran is not something that Russia desires. Also, in spite of their arms trade, Russia refrains from sending sophisticated weapons such as S300 air defense system to Iran.³⁰

The alternative approaches to the Iranian-Russian relations mostly criticize the neo-realist perspective because of its overemphasis on certain themes such as balance of power against the West. They tend to emphasize the domestic factors leading the relationship between Moscow and Iran. Eric Moore in his book *Russia-Iran Relations since the end of the Cold War* put an emphasis on the Russia's former foreign minister Yevgeny Primakov's role in the developing relations of Russia with Iran and reaches to the conclusion that the tactical collaboration in Tajikistan and Afghanistan during 1990s and recently in Syria is not the cause but the result of "healthy bilateral relations" between Moscow and Tehran.³¹ Likewise, Tor Bukkvoll assesses the role of Russian economic groups and their interests in Russian arms

²⁹ Geranmayeh, Ellie. Kadri Liik. "The New Power Couple: Russia and Iran in the Middle East". *ECFR*. 13 September 2016.

³⁰ Heistein, Ari. "The Russia-Iran Alliance is Weaker than You Think." *The National Interest*. 5 April 2016.

³¹ Moore, Eric. *Russia-Iran Relations since the end of the Cold War*. Routledge, 2014.

trade with Iran.³² Stating that though a neo-realist framework explains a lot, Kimberly Marten argues that an "informal politics perspective" explains Russian policies regarding Iran better than realism. According to Kimberly, there is an overwhelming dominance of personal patronage system in Russia's business and political environment. "Putin's policy choices in Iran aligned well with the economic interests of his close personal network in St. Petersburg nuclear industry, in Russian defense industries and in Gazprombank.", he states.³³

Mariya Omeclicheva, on the other hand, applies a "critical geopolitics perspective" while assessing the Russian policy towards Iran's nuclear program. "Because of their materialist ontology, both political realism and economic pragmatism are limited in their ability to offer a comprehensive account of fluctuations in the Russian position on nuclear Iran", Omelicheva indicates. According to the critical geopolitics perspective, Russia have not been following a pre-determined geopolitical and geo-economic foreign policy in the Middle East. On the contrary, it has been developing its own "geopolitics code" based on its international and domestic experience and its identity as a 'great power' state. Omelicheva claims that "Russia's strategic independence has become prioritized and sought under the pretext of 'multi-vector' foreign policy allowing the Russian government to use a very elastic, opportunistic and pragmatic approach in its relations with other nations". Therefore, short-term strategic interests based on its "sovereign great power" identity rather than permanent commitments, alliances or rivalries compose its geopolitical principles. In this context, Russia's relation with Tehran is an indicator of this new logic of geopolitics and Moscow's 'multi-vector' foreign policy. By doing so, Russia not only refrains from alienating Iran, but it also achieves securing a stable relations with the West on Iranian nuclear issue as well as

³² Bukkvoll, Tor. "Arming the Ayatollahs: Economic Lobbies in Russia's Iran Policy". *Problems of Post-Communism*, 49, No. 6, (2002): 29-41.

³³ Marten, Kimberly. "Informal Political Networks and Putin's Foreign Policy: The Examples of Iran and Syria". *Problems of Post-Communism*, 62, No. 2, (2015):71-87.

preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear power.³⁴ To conclude, my survey of the resources about Iranian-Russian relations shows that there is an overwhelming influence of neo-realist theory on the literature. Likewise, the foreign policies of each country also mostly examined with the use of neo-realist calculations. The other theories' accounts, on the other hand, intend to fill the gaps that overlooked by the realist perspective.

1.2 Argument

This thesis argues that Iran follows different foreign policy projects towards Central Asia/ Transcaucasia and the Middle East. Consistent with its non-interventionist policy towards Tajik Civil War, Tehran mostly pursues conciliatory, non-involvement foreign policy towards the developments in Central Asia/Transcaucasia, which have so far prevented Iran to be at odds with Russia. Likewise the Tajik Civil War, Iran refrained from pursuing assertive policies towards the incidents such as Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the Chechen insurgency against Russia and China-Uyghur Muslim conflict. When it comes to the Middle East, Tehran greatly interferes into the regional developments breaking out in the neighboring countries as observed in the case of Syrian Civil War. Tehran has tense relations with most of the Gulf States primarily Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It has been greatly at odds with the regional hegemon Israel and extra-regional hegemon the United States (US) since the outbreak of Iranian Revolution. Consequently, Iran strictly adheres to its allies in the Middle East such as the Syrian government and possess intricate and complex relations with the non-state actors and paramilitary organizations primarily Hezbollah in Lebanon.

All in all, the regional restraints and opportunities for Iran in two above-mentioned regional systems vary. Bearing in mind these restraints and opportunities, Iran carries out a foreign policy agenda that best serves to its national interests rather than prioritizing ideological considerations. In this sense, by following mostly non-

³⁴ Omelicheva, Mariya. "Russia's Foreign Policy toward Iran: A Critical Geopolitics Perspective. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 14, No. 3, (2012): 331-344.

interventionist and constructive policies in Central Asia/Transcaucasia, Iran succeeds to prevent jeopardizing its relations with Russia by recognizing its regional power and claims over its “near abroad”. Moreover, it could introduce itself as an attractive regional partner in the sense of social, economic dialogue, which enables Tehran to overcome its international isolation resulted from the tense relations with the US and other Middle Eastern powers. While in the Middle East, Tehran pursues assertive and even aggressive policies in order to counterbalance its extra-regional (US) and regional rivals. The thesis explores the wide range of factors that cause differences between Iran’s foreign policies regarding these two regional systems and concludes that “Russia factor” –the existence of Russia in CA/TC as a hegemonic regional power and its Middle East policies favorable for Iran- stands as an important factor that taken into consideration while Iran determines its agenda. This thesis applies the norms, rules and approaches of Neorealism while defining the differences of Iranian foreign policy towards the Middle East and Central Asia/Transcaucasia and Iran-Russia relations without exaggerating the system-level analyses and by refraining from attributing any supremacy to Neorealism over other IR theories. As to be seen in the forthcoming chapters, the thesis uses the concepts such as anarchy, balance of power, bandwagoning, security dilemma, state survival as well as chain-ganging and buck-passing from the Neorealist tool box while explaining Iranian foreign policy and Tehran-Moscow relations.

1.3 Methodology

This thesis employs a qualitative analysis in order to present the historical information and support the arguments raised. While conducting the study, appropriate data composed of both primary and secondary sources is sorted out and analyzed. The thesis makes an extensive use of academic books, journal articles, the analyses of research institutions, news reports. The documents are mostly composed of English language sources as well as a significant number of Turkish language sources. The government documents such as Russian foreign policy and security concepts, the statements of Russian and Iranian policy-makers are also integrated into the thesis. As a result of insufficient language skills both in Persian and Russian,

the English translations of the original sources as well as the English materials belonging to native (Russian and Iranian) scholars are benefited.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter one composes of an introductory passage of the study with proving an overview of the literature about Russian-Iranian relations and a summary of the thesis' argument. Chapter two covers the theoretical framework and explains Neorealism with a discussion of its arguments and counter-arguments raised by other theories. Chapter two begins with the great debates in International Relations (IR) academic discipline, continues with a comparison between classical realism and neorealism. The concept of anarchy as the main feature of the international system based on self-help strategy and the feature of alliances and the agency-structure dichotomy are examined. Moreover, the concept of power, balance of power, the reasons and nature of competition and cooperation are defined. The differences between offensive and defensive Neorealist arguments are clarified. Within the chapter two, there is also a detailed reference to the Iranian foreign policy in order to exemplify the above-mentioned concepts from Neorealism.

Chapter three handles the first case, the Tajik Civil War. Firstly, the historical background is explained for the civil war in Tajikistan. Then, the factors leading to the war are laid out with a subsequent explanation of the conflict situation. Accordingly, Russian and Iranian foreign policies in 1990s are analyzed in a detailed way by touching upon their particular reactions towards the Tajik Civil War. Chapter four deals with the second case, the Syrian Civil War. Likewise the first case, it discusses the historical background, the factors and the conflict situation of the Syrian case. At this time, Russian and Iranian foreign policies in 2000s and their particular reactions towards the civil war in Syria are analyzed.

In chapter five, based on the two cases in the previous chapters, broader inferences are made about the nature of Iranian foreign policy projects towards the Middle East and Central Asia/ Transcaucasia regions. These Iranian foreign policy projects are discussed with a comparative approach. Within the parameters of Neorealism, the similarities and contrasts between Tehran's foreign policy towards

two distinct regional system and the factor creating these similarities and contrasts will be discussed in a detailed way. In the introductory section, Tehran's geopolitical significance with its advantages and disadvantages is examined. Then, for each region the Middle East and Central Asia/Transcaucasia; the historical legacy, regional opportunities, regional restraints and the results in the form of Iranian foreign policy will be explained. Consequently, the role of "Russia factor" on Iran's foreign policies will be assessed. Lastly, Chapter six is composed of conclusion remarks.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Realism and its variables stand as one of the oldest and most prominent theories in the international relations discipline. Classical Realism claims to date back to fifth-century with referring to the Greek historian Thucydides' narration of Peloponnesian War. The theory, then, was supplemented by theoreticians like Niccolo Machiavelli, Carl von Clausewitz and Hans J. Morgenthau. In the 1950s-70s, especially based on the writings of Kenneth Waltz, Neorealism (Structural Realism) reinterpreted the approaches of Classical Realism.

In this chapter, I will focus on Neorealism and assess this theory's relevance to Iran's foreign policy and its relations with Russia. Before examining Neorealism in a detailed way, it would be beneficial to mention "the great debates" in the field of international relations (IR) to have a clearer insight about the nature of Neorealism.

2.1 The Great Debates in International Relations Academic Discipline

Beginning from the years 1940s and 1950s, the history of International Relations discipline has witnessed deep divisions called as great debates covering the key issues in the discipline. These debates not only shaped the nature of the discipline but also created diversity with the existence of various theories. In this sense, the development of IR theories could be based upon four great subsequent debates. In 1940s following the Second World War, the first great debate whose main concern centered around the international peace occurred between Idealism and Realism. Idealists were motivated by the catastrophic result of the First World War and moved with the aim of developing international institutions and practices in order to control the risk of war in the international system. The US president Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Point Plan composes one of the historically key documents belonging to the Idealists. According to Idealism, the main source of the international conflicts is a lack of understanding about the international processes

and human reason as well as progress could maintain the necessary ground for a more peaceful world. In this debate moving around some basic assumptions about human nature, realism viewed the international politics as a struggle of power and interests. In this sense, realism drew a darker picture about the nature of humankind assumed to be based on the desire of become powerful. Therefore, the realists criticized the "value-driven" Idealist approach. Prominent representatives of the Classical Realism, Hans Morgenthau and E.H.Carr charged the Idealists with centering their arguments on "how the world ought to be" rather than "dealing with how it objectively was".³⁵

The second debate took place in 1950s and 60s between traditional realists and behaviorists and it centered around the question how the IR theories could be set upon a scientific basis. As a result of this debate, positivism offering the idea that the scientific methods of the natural sciences could also be applied to the social sciences, has become a dominant thought of the IR discipline. Positivism suggesting that "scientific knowledge emerges only with the collection of observable data" was embraced by the behaviorists in the field. The discipline hosted inter-paradigm debate during 1970s in which all the sides of the debate internalized the validity and importance of positivism in the field. The debate mainly consists of the academic discussion between the advocates of realism, liberalism (pluralism) and Marxism.

The fourth debate, which will be the main point of addressee in this chapter, refers to the argument between positivists (rationalism) and post-positivists (reflectivism). In this discussion starting in 1980s, the validity of the dominant IR theories such as realism, liberalism and their neo versions were questioned and alternative points of views were developed. As is known, positivism asserting that the methodology of natural sciences is also applicable for explaining the social world had dominated the IR field for more than 40 years. The positivists attempted to develop general laws based on empirical data. In 1980s, the differences between neorealism and neoliberalism became more and more ambiguous as both theories move with a rationalist research program, prioritize the anarchic structure of the

³⁵ Mearsheimer, John. "Neorealism". in Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (eds), *International Relations Theories*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.16.

international system in their analyses and deal with common issues such as conflict and cooperation in the structure. Because of these similarities, Ole Waever describes the positivist side as "neo-neo synthesis".³⁶ Similar to the plurality on the positivist side, the post positivist side also consists of a variety of theories such as Frankfurt School (critical theory), post-modernism, feminism and post-structuralism. All these theories find a common ground with their emphasis on socially-constructed nature of world politics. Accordingly, the international politics is based on social structures which constantly give a shape to the identities and interests of the actors. The post positivist approach which could be also described as interpretive approach asserts that "meanings and beliefs are the most important factors in the study of social processes and that social inquiry could play an important role in uncovering the deep meanings that exist beneath the surface appearance of observed reality."³⁷ The issues handled by the sides of the fourth debate compose the main points of discussions between the Neorealism and the opponent theories such as critical theories and so-called middle ground theories such as English School and Constructivism, as well. In the next chapters, I will explain the main arguments of Neorealism and the opponent arguments against it. While discussing these contradicting arguments, I will try to touch upon the Iranian foreign policy and its relations with Russia as an example.

2.2 Neorealism and The Cause of Anarchy

Although there are lots of variants of realism, there are also some basic core characteristics that they share. Both Classical Realists and Structural Realists emphasize the centrality of the concept of power in foreign politics. For them, the international arena is viewed as a "self-help system", in which states seek for opportunities to become advantageous in the face of other states. One of the significant representatives of realism Hans Morgenthau, in his *Politics among Nations* indicates that;

³⁶ Weaver, Ole. "The Rise and Fall of the Inter-Paradigm Debate". Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski (eds), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni.Press, 1996), p.163. (149-185)

³⁷ Mearsheimer, John. "Neorealism". in Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (eds), *International Relations Theories*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.22.

The struggle for power is universal in time and space and is an undeniable fact of experience. It cannot be denied that throughout historic time, regardless of social, economic and political conditions, states have met each other in contests for power... International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power. Whatever the ultimate aims of international politics, power is always the immediate aim.³⁸

States' power which is generally measured in terms of their material capabilities and their alliances with other states is major determinant of their survival. According to Classical Realism, as hubris and success prevent the great powers from self-restraining themselves, military power is seen as a "double-edge sword" that have a potential for both provoking and preventing conflicts.³⁹ Neorealism, on the other hand, draws attention to the relativity of the concept of power. In this regard, states care deeply about the amount of power they acquire relative to other states. Therefore, "it is important not only to have a substantial amount of power, but also to make sure that no other state sharply shifts the balance of power in its favour."⁴⁰ Recognizing the fact that the states seek to maximize their power, Classical Realists and Structural Realists come up with different answers to the reason why states want power. The former relates states' desire to become powerful to human nature. When explaining the reasons of the conflicts, for instance, Classical Realism indicates to human nature and claims that human beings are naturally flawed and prone to conflict, which limits the chance for cooperation. From this point of view, human beings are inclined to violence due to their natural drive for power. Therefore, Classical Realism suggests that establishing a world government is not achievable.

Although Neorealism agrees that a world government is not achievable, it focuses on social and structural reasons of the conflicts rather than natural causes. Neorealism suggests that the structure of the international system where there is no higher authority to restore order between states rather than human nature compel states to pursue power. Kenneth Waltz, in this regard, argues that "the organization

³⁸ Morgenthau, Hans. *Politics among Nations*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1978. p. 29.

³⁹ Lebow, Richard Ned. "Classical Realism". in Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (eds), *International Relations Theories*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.35-36.

⁴⁰ Mearsheimer, John. "Neorealism". in Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (eds), *International Relations Theories*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.51.

of social relations rather than the nature of man is what determines whether or not we have war”⁴¹. All in all, states, described as the main actors, act in an anarchic system that lacks a centralized authority above states. As Cynthia Weber summarizes, “the anarchy myth assumes that international politics is composed of sovereign nation-states and that these sovereign nation-states are beholden to no higher power.” According to Cynthia Weber, as the membership to such international organizations as NATO or the United Nations is voluntary, there is no world government that forces states to obey higher rules.⁴² In his book *Man, the State and War*, Waltz analyzes the role of the state system and anarchy, the nature of the system, on the occurrence of wars. He introduces three categories and assesses their impacts as causes of war in order to develop an extensive insight for the nature of war and possibility of providing peace. By using the term “man”, he handles the role of human nature and evaluates the role of individual. Waltz states that;

The locus of the important causes of war is found in the nature and behavior of man. War results from selfishness, from misdirected aggressive impulses, from stupidity.. . If these are the primary causes of war, then the elimination of war must come through uplifting and enlightening men or securing their psychic-social readjustment.⁴³

Waltz argues that "optimists" think that wars may end with human progress and reform of mankind while "pessimists" believe that wars will never end as human beings have evil and dark qualities by their nature. Finding human nature too complicated for justifying every hypothesis and finding the events that necessitate explanation too varied to be explained by a single phenomenon like human nature, Waltz argues that the explanation of the occurrence of wars by human nature is insufficient and moves to the second category, state and internal organizations of societies. As a second explanation for the occurrence of wars, Waltz handles the

⁴¹Webber, Cynthia. “ Realism”. *International Relations Theory: a Critical Introduction*. (Routledge: London, 2010), p.16.

⁴² Ibid.14

⁴³Waltz, Kenneth. *Man, The State and War A Theoretical Analysis*. (Columbia University Press: New York, 2001), p.16.

relevance of internal structure of states and concludes that "the influence to be assigned to the internal structure of states in attempting to solve the war-peace equation cannot be determined until the significance of the international environments has been reconsidered".⁴⁴ As understood from the quote above, at the last category, Waltz establishes a link between occurrences of war and the anarchic nature of the state system. He explains that "with many sovereign states, with no system of law enforceable among them, with each state judging its grievances and ambitions according to the dictates of its own reason or desire – conflict, sometimes leading to war, is bound to occur".⁴⁵ From this point of view, international anarchy, according to Waltz, is "a permissive cause of war" while former two categories are immediate causes.

This anarchic nature of the system, according to Neorealism leads the states to a never-ending suspicion about the intentions of the other states. Therefore, the feeling of fear and distrust preoccupies the states while they deal with each other. Jonathan Kirshner points out that "virtually all realists share the view that fear — alertness to the dangers of the world — is a primal motive of behavior, and that security is a principal and urgent desire".⁴⁶ In this regard, Neorealism introduces two types of states: status-quo states and revisionist states that challenge the status quo and attempt to change the balance of power for their own benefits. According to Neorealism, it is impossible to be sure about the future intentions and foreign agendas of the states and a status quo state today could turn into a revisionist state tomorrow.

The emphasis laid on the role of anarchy on the state behaviors by Structural Realists is exposed to criticism by the representatives of the other theories such as Critical Theory or Constructivism which attribute a great deal of significance to the role of social and intersubjective meanings between the actors. Anarchy is perceived

⁴⁴ Ibid.123

⁴⁵ Ibid., 159.

⁴⁶ Kirshner, Jonathan. "The Tragedy of offensive Realism: Classical realism and the Rise of China". *European Journal of International Relations*, 18, no.1, (2010): 55 (53-75)

as a system that is based on the principle of self-help by Structural Realists, according to whom lack of a central government and therefore security is main characteristic defining the concept of anarchy. Constructivism, on the other hand, states that anarchy refers to a situation in which there is no institution that is able to control states' actions. In this sense, anarchy does not mean that wars and conflicts could happen at any moment. One of the most influential constructivists, Alexander Wendt, in his "Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics" questions to what extent structure – anarchy- influences the actions of states. He begins his article with the question "Does the absence of centralized political authority force states to play competitive power politics?"⁴⁷ Wendt argues against the claim of Structural Realists that "self-help is given by anarchic structure exogenously to process and he explains that;

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 process, not structure...Self-help and power politics are institutions, not essential features of anarchy. Anarchy is what states make of it.⁴⁸

In this sense, Wendt indicates to the socially-constructed nature of self-help system and power politics. What is important, in this sense, is the processes of interactions between the actors. While not ignoring the significance of the material capabilities of the actors in the system and the distribution of power - the concepts highlighted by the Structural Realists- Wendt argues that the influence of these material capabilities on other states' calculations depends mainly on the "intersubjective understandings and expectations" which affects the identities and interests of the states vis a vis others.⁴⁹ To support his argument, he points out that for the US' perception of threat, there is a great difference of meaning between the nuclear weapons belonging to Great Britain and nuclear weapons belonging to the

⁴⁷ Wendt, Alexander. "Anarchy is what States make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics" *International Organizations*, 46, no.2, (1992): 391 (391-425)

⁴⁸ Wendt, Alexander. "Anarchy is what States make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics" *International Organizations*, 46, no.2, (1992): 394-95 (391-425)

North Korea. In this sense, according to Wendt, realism could not explain this observable fact because it ignores social relationships.

Based on the Neorealism's suggestion that the alliances are fleeting it could be asserted that although the US differentiates between Great Britain's possession of nuclear weapons and the North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons today, the US may not feel completely safe with Britain as well. Washington and its power politics could not disregard this latent fact and assess this reality in its security calculations. Moreover, Neorealism does not fully ignore the social relationships between the actors. John Mearsheimer asserts that "some states are especially friendly for historical or ideological reasons".⁵⁰ What is alarming for the Structural Realists, on the other hand, is the "uncertainty about the present and especially the future intentions of others."⁵¹

Moreover, Wendt's emphasis on intersubjective processes for shaping not only the state behaviors but also the identities and interests has some certain missing points. Although interactions have a great significance, states are self-organized entities as well. Therefore, they already possess an identity before they interact with each other. As Copeland points out, "If states were solely a product of interaction, there would be no independent things upon which interaction could have its effects."⁵² Likewise, Wendt's argument that "identities are the basis of interests"⁵³ is too general and it reduces the role of structure and power politics on state behaviors. From time to time as a result of various reasons such as international constraints, internal processes, realpolitik calculations...etc., states could pursue a foreign policy

⁵⁰ Mearsheimer, John. "The False Promise of International Institutions", *International Security*, 19, no.3, (1994-95):31 (5-49)

⁵¹ Copeland, Dale C. "The Constructivist Challenge to Neorealism: A Review Essay". *International Security*, 25, no.2, (2000): 188 (187-212)

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Wendt, Alexander. "Anarchy is what States make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics" *International Organizations*, 46, no.2, (1992): 398 (391-425)

that is completely different and even contradicting with their identities. Hence, it is hard to determine a solid and steady basis for states' interests.

2.2.1. Iranian Foreign Policy

Identity falls short in explaining the nearly-thirty-year-old alliance between Islamic Republic of Iran and Syria. As is known, for a long time Syria has been defined as “the beating heart of Arab Nationalism” and secular Baath regime under the rules of Hafez Assad and his son Bassar Assad has waved the flag of pan-Arabism, which is an integral part of Syria's state identity. Likewise, following the 1979 Revolution with the rule of Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran has acquired an Islamist, revolutionist as well as Shia identities and designed the state rhetoric accordingly. While Iraq claimed to fight against Iranian threat on behalf of Arab interests during Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), Syria was significantly the sole Arab country standing beside Iran which could not be explained by “interests” based on identities but by the “interests” based on realpolitik calculations that could be defined as inter-Baathist rivalry between Saddam Hussein and Assad regimes.

To give an example from a nearer past, Iran's contradictory approaches towards the Arab Uprisings do not support Wendt's argument about the relation between identity and interests. When the wave of protests broke out against the dictatorships in countries such as Tunisia and Egypt, Iran publicly announced its support for the pro-democracy movements and even likened them to the 1979 Revolution against the Shah. Labelling these movements as an Islamic awakening, Iranian government tried to pose its own revolution as an inspiration for the Uprisings. In these cases, it could be asserted that Iran followed its interests arisen from its revolutionary and Islamist identity. However, when the sparkles of the waves reached out Syria, Iranian government put aside its support for movements, reoriented its rhetoric, portrayed the demonstrators as “agitators” and supported Assad regime, one of its rare allies in the region. Actually, this ambivalent attitude is not peculiar to the Iranian government. Although the US has been constantly advocating democracy throughout the Middle East region, its alliances especially with the Gulf Kingdoms constrained Washington from supporting the movements in countries such as Bahrain and Yemen. The alliance with despotic leaders of the

Middle East has contradicted with the US' self-proclaimed mission of spreading democracy for a long time. In short, realpolitik calculations and power politics, most of the time, overshadow the identity politics. Moreover, the uncertainty about the present and future intentions of the actors and the fleetness of the alliances reduce the durability of intersubjective meanings. Therefore, based on the historical examples, my humble answer to Wendt's question "does the absence of centralized political authority force states to play competitive power politics?" would be "yes". As mentioned before, a status quo state could turn into a revisionist one which deeply affects the balance of power in the international system and changes the alliances. Uncertainty about the intentions lead the actors to be on a constant alert and turn them into security-seeking states.

The Middle East is a fertile ground that offers several perfect examples for the shift from a status quo state to a revisionist one. Iran's policy change after the 1979 Revolution is one of them as the revolutionaries grasped a new foreign policy agenda "Neither West nor East" after toppling down Mohammed Reza Shah's regime and damaging its long-lasting alliance with the Western world, especially with the United States. Following the revolution, the Western states led by the United States and the Gulf countries felt threatened by the new regime in Iran whose intentions and possible foreign policy steps became more unknown to them. As its neighbor that holds a huge number of Shia population, Iraq got the largest share of this feeling of threat and distrust. Iraqi attack and invasion of Iran and eight years-long war between them could be interpreted as one of the immediate results of Iran's becoming a revisionist state and a challenge to the international status quo. Kenneth Waltz indicates that "states forming a structure by their interactions and then being strongly affected by the structure their interactions have formed"⁵⁴. Based on this sentence, it could be stated that the war between Iraq and Iran shows that Tehran as a part of the international system is restrained by the impositions of the international structure after the 1979 Revolution.

⁵⁴ Waltz, Kenneth. "Evaluating Theories". *American Political Science Review*, 91, No. 4, (1997): 913 (913-917.)

The Iraqi attack and invasion of Iran in 1980 following the revolution led to a consolidation of revolutionaries' power in the country and intensified radicalism in Iran's foreign policy behaviors towards its Arab neighbors, Israel and the Western powers especially the US which supported Iraq against Iran. Therefore, the constraints Iran faced as a result of international reactions towards the revolution strengthened the anti-Western rhetoric generated by the revolutionaries. Roy indicates that;

The war against Iraq gave a strategic rational to Iranian ideological hostility toward the Sunni world: Baghdad got the support of the West as well as all Arab states save Syria...Tehran played the Islamic card to bypass the 'Arab front' in order to undermine the legitimacy of the conservative Arab countries and be the main player in the (Arabian) Gulf; it played more precisely the Shi'a card.⁵⁵

In short, the international structure and the reactions from its neighbors which intensified the existing potential towards an Anti-Western agenda that manifested itself with the ideological resources behind the revolution had a great impact on embodiment of the foreign policy agenda of the newly-established Islamic State. Without this window of opportunity created by the international structure, it is arguable whether the ideological potential would be powerful enough to direct the newly-established Islamic State's foreign agenda. As Waltz indicates,

Each state arrives at policies and decides on actions according to its own internal process, but its decisions are shaped by the very presence of other states as well as by the interaction with them. When and how internal forces find external expression, if they do, cannot be explained in terms of the interacting parties if the situation in which they act and interact constrains them from some actions, disposes them toward others, and affects the outcomes of their interactions.⁵⁶

As understood from this quotation, on contrary to criticisms finding Neorealism "too systemic", Neorealism do not solely rely on international structure and accept the role of internal processes in its explanations for actors' foreign policies.

⁵⁵Roy, Olivier. "The Iranian Foreign Policy toward Central Asia", 2005. p.2. Online available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/regional/royoniran.htm1> (accessed on January 5, 2017).

⁵⁶Waltz, Kenneth. *Theories of International Politics*. (New York: McGraw-Hill,1979), p.65.

In this regard, although we could not name it “an internal process”, the revolution in 1979 as a domestic political change affected Iran’s policies and decisions. In return, the external interactions of the post-revolutionary Iran with its neighbors and the Western world reshaped Iran’s foreign policy objectives. So, “the very presence of other states” had a direct impact on post-revolutionary Iran. Waltz suggests that “international structure emerges from the interaction of states and then constrains them from taking certain actions while propelling them toward others.”⁵⁷

Neorealism is exposed to criticism by agency-oriented International Relations theories for its overlook of revolutions in its explanations about international relations. As is known, revolutions are mostly regarded as agential phenomena. The critics mostly assert that Neorealism should answer the question “why states or societies prefer revolutions, which is in a way a kind of self-destruction?”⁵⁸ and it should handle not only the post-revolutionary socialization process of states but also the pre-revolutionary situation. Samuel Kent tries to develop a structural realist theory of revolutions and defines revolution as “a self-correcting mechanism of the state-unite that is structurally determined”.⁵⁹ Accordingly, “revolutions occur when a structural contradiction forms between state and society in which the dominant group or coalition in society obstructs the state strained by its position in the International system from realizing its capabilities.”⁶⁰ Extra-territorial geopolitical environment and intra-territorial social environment are determinant factors shaping the behaviors of the states, semi-autonomous entities. Samuel Kent explains that “the state already strained from the International system becomes fundamentally incompatible with a

⁵⁷Waltz, Kenneth. “Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory”. *Journal of International Affairs*, 44, No. 1, (1990 Spring/Summer): 29(21-37.)

⁵⁸ Kent, Samuel. “On Revolution and Realism: A Structural Realist Theory of Revolution”. Diss. Boston College, 2013. p.92, online available at: <https://dlib.bc.edu/islandora/object/bc-ir:102498/datastream/PDF/view> (accessed on January, 7, 2018)

⁵⁹ Ibid., 70.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 70.

high resource-mobilizing section of socioeconomic structure".⁶¹ According to this Structural Realist explanation, one of the key factors for the occurrence of revolutions lies in states' "structurally determined incompatibility" for states to deal with the revolutionaries. As Skocpol points out, "developments within the international states system...have directly contributed to virtually all outbreaks of revolutionary crisis".⁶² At this point, the critics may ask why revolutions are rare incidents while there are lots of states constrained by international developments. If being disadvantageous internationally has a direct contribution, then history should have witnessed revolutions in third-world countries. To reply this potential criticism, Samuel Kent underlines that in addition to exogenous pressure, revolutions require a contradiction between the state and society and resource-mobilization capability of the revolutionaries needs to be high enough to compete with the state apparatus. It could be said that systemic pressures set the permissive condition for the outbreak of revolutions and they open a window of opportunity for the agency to take advantages of that opportunity.⁶³

When we examine the Iranian Revolution, the lack of external support for the revolutionaries or a strong international pressure and hostility towards the Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi or a military defeat undermines the structural explanations while it was stressing the unique character of the Iranian Revolution as a successful populist social movement. Ten per cent participation of the various social segments, without doubt, underlines the agential power of the Iranian revolution. However, explanations based on purely ideological factors emphasizing the role of Khomeinism or Shia culture fail to cover the whole sides of the story. Mehdi Shadmehr in his article "Ideology and the Iranian Revolution", stresses the role of "the change in the opposition's ideology" for the outbreak of the Iranian Revolution.

⁶¹ Ibid., 83.

⁶² Skocpol, Theda. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). p.23.

⁶³ Kent, Samuel. "On Revolution and Realism: A Structural Realist Theory of Revolution". Diss. Boston College, 2013. p.85. online available at: <https://dlib.bc.edu/islandora/object/bc-ir:102498/datastream/PDF/view> (accessed on January 4, 2018)

According to his argument, "Khomeini's doctrine of the Islamic state provided a new alternative to the status quo that changed the Islamic opposition's goal from reforming the existing state to creating a new Islamic state."⁶⁴ In his article, Shadmehr compares the structural dynamics in Iran in 1960s and late 70s and concludes that in terms of state liberalization, international relations especially with the United States, the oppositional organizations and their resources and the economic conditions, Tehran in 1960s displayed same patterns with Tehran in late 1970s which disregards the role of structure in Iranian Revolution. This argument is at most incorrect and at least deficient. Even the structural conditions have no role in the outbreak of the Iranian Revolution - which is incorrect- an ideological explanation purely based on Khomeini's new doctrine of Islamic state would be a reductionist attitude towards the agency-factor of the revolution. The Iranian Revolution was not maintained only by religious groups influenced by Khomeini but by the participation of the various segments of the society such as students, leftists, women, trade unions, workers, intellectuals, bazaaris and ulama. Within a few years, the revolution ended up with the consolidation of the Ulama's power under Khomeini's leadership. One of the combining factors for all these social classes against the Shah rule was the discontent with the centuries-long foreign intrusion into the country. As Nikkie Keddie righteously points out, the social upheavals from the Tobacco Revolt to the 1979 Revolution "all involved, to a greater or lesser extent, efforts to throw off foreign control over the Iranian economy and to build an independent society and state".⁶⁵ The late 1960s and 1970s were globally characterized by mass-movements in countries such as Korea, Vietnam, and Cuba. The civil rights movements and anti-Vietnam War demonstrations were shaking the United States in the same period. The Iranian Revolution could not be considered as exclusive from all these anti-imperialist movements. An ideological explanation should not disregard also the rise of political Islam throughout the Middle East

⁶⁴Shadmehr, Mehdi, "Ideology and the Iranian Revolution". *SSRN*, January 27, 2012, online available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1999826> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1999826> (accessed on February 04, 2018)

⁶⁵Keddie, Nikki R. "Iranian Revolutions in Comparative Perspective", *The American Historical Review*. 88, No. 3, (1983 June): 580 (579-598)

arising with the major blow on pan-Arabism and nationalist ideology as a result of 1967 defeat by Israel.

Iran's economic integration to the world capitalist system as a rentier state and "the amalgamation of capitalist and non-capitalist forms"⁶⁶ in the country triggered the social discontent among the bazaris and the ulama, the traditional middle class towards the Shah's White Revolution and land distribution policies. The oil revenues, both in the periods of abundance and scarcity, added vulnerability to the country's economy. The luxurious coronation ceremony of Mohammed Reza Shah in 1967 was recorded to the public imagination as a complete contrast with the situation of lower class while the country was entering to 1970s. Moreover, the decrease in the world demand for oil following 1975 stroke a blow in the Shah's projects of modernization and industrialization which had been funded abundantly with the oil revenues increased with the 1973 Oil Crisis. In terms of economic structure of the country, 1970s were displaying a much more critical and alarming situation than 1960s.

All in all, although the agency factor is an important determinant for the fate and result of the revolutions, disregarding the structural environment to which the agents are bound looks like completing a puzzle with a number of missing parts. Structural contradictions between state and society disrupt the economic activities within the country. The depressing international situations such as conflicts, wars, isolation increase the tendency for the outbreak of revolutions. As Waltz points out, "In itself a structure does not directly lead to one outcome rather than another. Structure affects behavior within the system, but does so indirectly."⁶⁷ In short, neither ideologies nor agencies could be estimated as forces independent from the

⁶⁶Matin, Kamran. *Recasting Iranian Modernity International Relations and Social Change*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

⁶⁷Waltz, Kenneth. *Theories of International Politics*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979). p.74.

influence of structural limits. Otherwise, as opposed to Marx's argument, men would make their own history as they please.⁶⁸

2.3 Neorealism and Power

According to the Structural Realist approach, the balance of power is a deep consideration for states that compete among each other to gain power at the expense of others because the anarchic international environment which lacks a centralized authority pushes the states to maximize their capabilities and prospects for survival. Thus, the great powers that never fully trust each other are aware that the best way of survival is to become powerful. While international anarchy underlines that conflicts and wars are likely to occur, it also indicates that cooperation among states and alliances are limited. Therefore, though the states form alliances in the face of dangerous threats, they, at very last, prioritize their own interests comparing to the interests of the other states or the international society. Structural Realists do not define international relations as “a constant state of war” but views it as “a state of relentless security competition with the possibility of war always in the background.”⁶⁹ This pessimistic world view of Neorealism and its emphasis on power politics as well as balance of power concept is also exposed to criticism by the IR theories such as liberal institutionalism, collective security theory or critical theory prioritizing the role of international institutions on sustaining world peace. According to Institutionalists, institutions which represent certain types of rules and norms regulating how states cooperate with each other, have a potential capacity to alter the preferences as well as behaviors of states. In his “False Promise of International Institutions”, Mearsheimer points out that liberal institutionalism ignores a major obstacle to cooperation which is the relative-gains concerns. According to relative-gains concerns, states, while forming cooperation, consider not about the absolute gains but the gains they acquire in relative to the gains the other states acquire. A state tends to cooperate only if it acquires at worst equal and at best

⁶⁸Original phrase: Men make their own history, but do not make it just as they please...”Marx, Karl. The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, (Wildside Press, 2008) 15.

⁶⁹Mearsheimer, John. “The False Promise of International Institutions”. *International Security*, 19, No.3, (1994-95): 9 (5-49)

more gains vis a vis other states. Therefore, from the very beginning it is hard to establish a genuine cooperation between states via international institutions. The theory of collective security, as opposed to the Structural Realist arguments, aims at establishing a collective character to develop stability with a necessary management of military power, which would oblige “lonely aggressors” to act according to the rules and dictates of “responsible states”. The Collective Security theory prescribes usage of “creative diplomacy and economic sanctions” to an aggressor state. Although the goals of collective security are desirable, in practice they do not seem easily achievable.

First of all, the bilateral relations between states would complicate to define a state as aggressor or not. Even in terms of terrorist organizations, while a state labels an organization as terrorist, another could declare it as a freedom fighter. For example, while Israel is perceived as an aggressor by many Arab states, for the United States, it represents a genuine democracy and a real ally in the Middle East. Examining the success of “creative diplomacy and economic sanctions” in order to control a state’s preferences and behaviors is also another tough story. As is known, the United States under the Presidency of Bill Clinton adopted a policy of dual containment against Iraq and Iran during the post-Cold War period and following the Gulf War. Under the UN auspices, the economic embargo towards the Iraqi government continued and the existence of weapons of mass destruction was inspected. In this period, Washington also pursued a containment policy towards Tehran. In 1995, the US began to impose sanctions against the Iranian government. Nevertheless, as Meliha Altunışık points out, the dual containment policy encountered serious problems and fell short to achieve its goals. In the middle of 1990s, the permanent members of the UN Security Council such as France, Russia and China began to criticize the sanctions and inspections towards Baghdad and sign oil agreements with Iraqi government. The US sanctions towards Iran were not supported by such international institutions as the EU or the US’s regional allies such as Turkey.⁷⁰ Away from being a genuine mechanism for transforming the anarchic

⁷⁰Altunışık, Meliha Benli. “Ortadoğu ve ABD: Yeni bir Döneme Girilirken”. *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, 1, No.1, (2009,July): 73-74 (69-81)

international system into a “world society” in which rules based on trust and sharing govern states (as suggested by Critical Theory), “institutions are basically a reflection of the distribution of power in the world” and “arenas for acting out power relationships”. Mearsheimer rightfully asserts that “the most powerful states in the system create and shape institutions so that they can maintain their share of world power”.⁷¹ The inability of the UN to deter Assad regime’s humanitarian violations and stalemate over Syria in terms of adopting resolutions by the UN Security Council reveals that the international institutions are much far from achieving their purposes. What creates this stalemate is the clashing power politics between the US, Great Britain, France on the one side and Russia, China on the other side. This situation that we witness in the recent past and even today clearly shows that the concerns over sustaining balance of power and achieving states’ own interests overshadow their efforts to achieve a “world society” guaranteeing a peace system. All in all, as Neorealism puts forward, the security competition between states reduces the capabilities of the international organizations.

Due to the same logic based on power politics, the alliances, according to Neorealism, are “only temporary marriages of convenience, where today’s alliance partner might be tomorrow’s enemy and vice versa”.⁷² States establish alliances and cooperation against a common enemy in order to balance that power and their relative gains determine the fate of the alliance.

2.3.1. Iranian Foreign Policy

Upon analyzing the relations between Russia and Iran, it is possible to confirm the Structural Realist assumption about alliances and cooperation. Despite being two historically rival and opponent states, Russia and Iran express a very pragmatic cooperation towards the incidents in both Central Asia/Transcaucasia and in the Middle East. Their common stance beside the Syrian regime led by Bassar al Assad is one of the last examples of this cooperation. Likewise, as I will explain in

⁷¹Mearsheimer, John. “The False Promise of International Institutions”, *International Security*, 19, No.3, (1994-95): 13 (5-49)

⁷²Ibid, p.11.

the next chapter, Tajik Civil War fought between Moscow-supported Tajik government and the rebel groups composed of liberal democratic reformers and Islamists was also not an exception for Moscow-Tehran cooperation even though the Islamist rhetoric heavily used by Iranian regime after the revolution.

The presence of the United States in the Middle East and its increasing influence in Central Asia/Transcaucasia is regarded as a common threat by both Russia and Iran that counterbalance the United States by establishing a pragmatic alliance. Therefore, for Structural Realists, Russia and Iran, despite their history full of enmity and confrontation, their stance against a common threat, the increasing US presence in the region and unipolarity after the collapse of the USSR explains the pragmatic alliance between these two countries. Stephen Flanagan indicates that "Russian leaders find Tehran's anti-Americanism useful as a way to balance US political influence".⁷³ Likewise, the desire to counterbalance western influence and providing its security predominate Iranian foreign policy after the Revolution, which explains its interest-based alliance with Moscow despite its ideological and Islamist rhetoric. The feeling of encirclement by US-allies in the Middle East such as Israel, Saudi Arabia forces Iran to search for a sound alliance in the North with Russia. Of course, the cooperation between Iran and Russia has its own limits and international incidents continue to test their alliance. Russia's cooperative approach to the Gulf States and Israel do not correspond to Iran's foreign policy steps. Moreover, in the case of Syrian Civil War, despite their common support for Assad regime, Russia regards Tehran-supported paramilitary organizations in Syrian Civil War as a threat for the future of Syria. In Central Asia and Transcaucasia, on the other hand, the demarcation of the Caspian Sea that could not be completed yet remains as a key problem between the bordering states such as Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. All in all, as Neorealism suggests, when it comes to state interests, the cooperation between Iran and Russia has been exposed to serious tests both in the Middle East and Central Asia/Transcaucasia, because states prioritize their own interests over the interests of other states and international system.

⁷³Flanagan, Stephen. "The Turkey, Russia, Iran Nexus: Economic and Energy Dimensions". *CSIS*, 2012.

The uncertainty about other states' intention brings together another key concept for Neorealism: survival. Accordingly, survival is the main goal of the states, which are viewed as rational actors that pursue enduring strategies in order to maximize the probability of their survival. The ultimate desire to alter the balance of power for their own good leads states into a constant contest of power. The increase of power at one side creates a relative decrease in the power of other state which in return searches the ways for eliminating the threat and guaranteeing its own survival. As Shibashis Chatterjee points out, “the search for security of one becomes the cause of insecurity for its adversaries.”⁷⁴ This vicious circle and zero-sum game is described as security dilemma, another key concept that Structural Realists employ.

At this point, the question how much power a state needs for supplying its security becomes a major point of discussion among Structural Realists. Offensive Neorealism, which was firstly asserted by John Mearsheimer in his *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, postulates that in order to achieve security, states maximize their power and influence as their ultimate goal is domination and hegemony. Power maximization is an important tool for states that follows aggressive and expansionist policies to guarantee their survival. Mearsheimer explains this argument by stating that;

States in the international system aim to maximize their relative power positions over other states. The reason is simple: the greater the military advantage one state has over other states, the more secure it is. Every state would like to be the most formidable military power in the system because this is the best way to guarantee survival in a world that can be very dangerous.⁷⁵

On the other hand, defensive realism, founded in Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* finds the states' attempts of expansion unnecessary for their security as they argue that the international anarchy encourages states to pursue more reserved and moderate policies for providing security. According to defensive realism, “it is unwise for states to try to maximize their share of world power,

⁷⁴Chatterjee, Shibashis. “Global Images: ‘Realism’ Contra Culture?”. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40, no.52, (2005): 5497-5504.

⁷⁵Mearsheimer, John. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. (New York: Norton,2001). p. 11-12.

because the system will punish them if they attempt to gain too much power”.

⁷⁶Therefore, for defensive realists, aims of offense and expansion may backfire and even jeopardize state security. As Miller suggests, “Because a countervailing coalition will be formed against the most threatening power to prevent it from achieving its hegemonic objectives”, threatening other states by power maximization will not be profitable.⁷⁷

To summarize, whether offensive or defensive, Neorealism holds three key assumptions. Firstly, states are the main actors in an international system that is anarchic by its nature which means there is no higher authority regulating the relations. Secondly, because of its anarchic nature, international structure forces states towards a "self-help system" where struggle for power becomes the main focus of attention. Thirdly, states are assumed to be acting, by and large, rational. In the next chapters, I will handle Iran's foreign policy toward Tajik and Syrian Civil Wars and assess the influence of "Russia factor" on Tehran's foreign policy steps by applying a theoretical framework of Neorealism.

⁷⁶Mearsheimer, John. in Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (eds), *International Relations Theories*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.72.

⁷⁷Miller, Benjamin. “Is Peace Possible- and how? The four-fold Response of international relations theory”. *International Journal*, 65, no.1, (2009):176 (163-181)

CHAPTER 3

TAJIK CIVIL WAR AND IRAN

At the beginning of 1990s following the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the Central Asian Republics entered their independence processes with peculiar experiences. Among them, Tajikistan holds a unique position as it is the only Central Asian state going through a civil war in its first years as a sovereign republic. In this sense, Tajikistan is counted as “the particularly compelling case study for Central Asia.”⁷⁸ Lasting between the years 1992-1997, it will not be wrong to state that Tajik Civil War “represents the most significant violent episode in post-Soviet Central Asia”.⁷⁹ The war which is depicted as a contest between Russia-supported Kulobi-Khojand regional alliance against Islamist and pro-democratic oppositional parties composed mostly from the regions of Gharm, Pamir and Gorno-Badakhstan for a republic-level control over the country is a significant case not only for evaluating Russian foreign policy steps just after the collapse of the USSR but also for the foreign policy priorities of the decade-old Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI).

The factors leading to the civil war in Tajikistan range from socio-economic problems, regional rivalry, the hostility between the communist elite rulers of the republic taking its strength mostly from the support of the USSR and increasing oppositional ideologies such as Islamism and democracy following perestroika and glasnost policies of the Mihail Gorbachev's period. In spite of a huge amount of war casualties, the Tajik Civil War ended up with relatively successful peace negotiations initiated primarily by Moscow and Tehran. Despite initially having supported the oppositional bloc, Iran, in a short period of time, began to follow a more pragmatic

⁷⁸ Cummings, Sally, and Raymond Hinnebusch. “Introduction” in Hinnebusch, Raymond, and Sally Cummings. (eds). *Sovereignty After Empire Comparing the Middle East and Central Asia*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

⁷⁹ Kevlihan, Rob. “Insurgency in Central Asia: A Case Study of Tajikistan”. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 27, No.3, (2016): 417.

foreign policy calling for a dialogue between the warring parties and trying to initiate a peace process.

In this chapter, the foreign policy behavior of Tehran regarding the Tajik Civil War and accordingly its relations with Russia, the most prominent external factor for the war will be analyzed. Firstly, the context and historical background information will be outlined with the details of the factors and key actors of the conflict. Then, the foreign policies of Russia and Iran during 1990s will be generally discussed and lastly Iran's foreign policy behavior related to the Tajik civil war will be handled as a case study.

3.1 Historical Background

Tajikistan's national and demographic structure has been shaped by long-standing Soviet heritage of governance and policies more than any other historical influences. While analyzing the civil wars both in Syria and Tajikistan, the historical heritage of imperialism should be analyzed meticulously. Raymond Hinnebusch argues that "the roots of conflict and much state behavior are to be found in the peculiar historical construction of the regional system. One aspect of this was an extremely damaging form of core-periphery relations".⁸⁰ Tajikistan historically stands as "the poorest periphery in the region but also the most colonially militarized".⁸¹ Moreover, as a result of Soviet national policies, two historically important cities Bukhara and Samarkant were not included into Tajikistan's boundaries but left in Uzbekistan's territories while there are approximately 25 per cent Uzbek nationals living in Tajikistan. Rob Kevlihan asserts that "Like other countries in the Central Asian region, the contemporary Republic of Tajikistan owes its origins most directly to Soviet nationality policies rather than to any inherently cohesive ethnic polity."⁸² Describing Tajikistan as a "new phenomenon", Payam

⁸⁰ Hinnebusch, Raymond. *The International Politics of the Middle East*, (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 2003).

⁸¹ Cummings, Sally, and Raymond Hinnebusch. "Introduction" in Hinnebusch, Raymond, and Sally Cummings. (eds). *Sovereignty After Empire Comparing the Middle East and Central Asia*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

Foroughi states that "the current borders of Tajikistan are a creation of Soviet planners and have only been in place since 1929".⁸³ Furthermore, the Soviet rulers incited ethnic nationalism as a step against pan-Turkic or pan-Islamic movements. Partly as a result of the Soviet efforts for fostering ethnic nationalism, supra-state indentities such as pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism "has no comparable power" in contrast to the strength of pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism in the Middle East.⁸⁴

Yet, the sub-state loyalties and the regional fragmentation of the ethnic and religious groups created significant gaps among the Tajik communities. The mountainous geographical structure of Tajikistan adds more density to the regional and social fragmentation in the country. For example, the Pamiris living in Gorno-Badakhstan region in the east of the country speak a different dialect and maintaining a more reserved lifestyle away from the capital Dushanbe. Furthermore, most of the Pamiris belong to Ismailia Shia sect while 90 per cent of Tajik population belongs to Hanefi denomination of Sunni sect. Therefore, like other Central Asian republics, Tajikistan does not have a homogenous population, a fact that contributes to the eruption of the civil war. In spite of the Sunni dominance on the population, Persian language that is spoken in the country creates a cultural and linguistic link between Tajikistan and Iran who shared a common historical background as the Samanid Empire. This common historical background separates Tajikistan from other Turkic republics in the Central Asia, apparently making the country more easily accessible for the Iranian influence. At the beginning of the Tajik independence, Iran tried to use this cultural and linguistic card for gaining more influence in the region taking advantageous from the power vacuum originated from the collapse of the USSR.

Despite having common historical ancestors and language, the national experiences for statehood of Tajikistan and Iran do not bear much resemblance. As

⁸²Kevlihan, Rob. "Insurgency in Central Asia: A Case Study of Tajikistan". *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 27, No.3, (2016): 418.

⁸³Foroughi, Payam. "Tajikistan: Nationalism, Ethnicity, Conflict, and Socio-economic Disparities-Sources and Solutions". *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 22, No.1, (2002): 42.

⁸⁴Cummings, Ibid.

opposed to Iran which has witnessed a variety of independent empires and states on its territories throughout its national history ranging from the Qajar Dynasty to the Pahlavis and lastly the Islamic Republic, Tajikistan do not manage to establish a sovereign state from the period of the Samanid Empire until 1991 when the Soviet system collapse creates a room of opportunity for independence among the Central Asian and Transcaucasian republics who were once parts of a unique whole. The lack of a long, enduring “strong state” tradition amplifies the historical imperial legacy of the USSR while Tajikistan was completing its transition to sovereignty.

3.2 The Factors leading to Tajik Civil War

The unimagined independence coming via the failure in the Soviet system created uncertainties for Tajikistan in a conflicted environment. These uncertainties brought together the rivalries between the regions whose economic and social differences had already been reinforced by Soviet system for years. The USSR as the core “created and left behind elites and classes which have an interest in dependent relations.”⁸⁵ In the Tajik case, the elites that dependent to the core were the Khujandis supported by the Soviet policies. Arguing that the “national identity is secondary to the primary regional identity” in Tajikistan, Shavkat Kasymov points out that “the recruitment policies” of the Soviet rulers create a power gap between the more developed north where the Khujandis had hold the administrative ranks of the Tajik SSR (Soviet Socialist Republic) and underdeveloped regions in the South who had a rare opportunity of representation in institutional level .As a result, during the Soviet period, “regional, local, clan, and kin ties remain at the core of recruitment practices and policies in Tajikistan’s state institutions.”⁸⁶ In a world in which regional affiliations have a great impact on people's economic welfare and social status, the resentments and power contest could be inevitable.

The resentments intensify especially when the country shows some features of a “weak state”. That’s why the fact that Tajikistan’s being a “weak state”, which

⁸⁵ Hinnebusch, Raymond. *The International Politics of the Middle East*, (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 2003).

⁸⁶ Kasymov, Shavkat. “Regional Fragmentation in Tajikistan: The Shift of Powers between Different Identity Groups”. *Asian Geographer*, 30, No.1, (June 2013): 1-20.

means a state lack of capacity to cope with problems during transition periods, is listed among the key factors of the civil war. According to this argument, Tajikistan witnessed a quick and unplanned power transfer with an underdeveloped economic situation based on agriculture and raw materials without a broad industrial capacity when it gained its independence. According to Iji Tetsuro, “[b]y the mid-1980s, as the Soviet regime underwent reform and its control over Tajikistan’s state apparatus weakened, power struggles among the country’s different regions intensified”.⁸⁷ That’s why, the opposition movements from the southern regions of Gorno-Badakhstan, Kurgan-Tyube and Gharm with mostly Islamist, nationalist and democratic tendencies found a room for maneuver to challenge the ruling elite in the northern region of Khojand (Leninabad) as a result of weakened state capacity. Accepting the ideological dimension of the war, Dov Lynch asserts that concepts of state weakness throw light on the causes of the Tajik Civil War.⁸⁸ It can be said that the state weakness which opened a power vacuum made Tajikistan a more available and fertile ground for a potential conflict. This does not mean that the “weak state” argument covers the whole story that led Tajikistan to the conflict when it is considered that other Central Asian and Transcaucasian countries went through the same process of independence like Tajikistan but did not experience a civil war. All in all, “[w]hile Chechens were fighting against Russians, Armenians against Azeris, Ossetians against Georgians, Tajiks were fighting against each other”, which puts Tajikistan into a unique position of analysis.⁸⁹ Therefore, the “weak state” argument remains relatively weak for explaining the reasons of the civil war.

Highlighting the inadequacy of the “weak state” argument, İdil Tunçer Kılavuz draws attention to the lack of a “simple correlation between weak states and the occurrence of civil war.” According to her, the Civil War in Tajikistan can be described as a “bargaining failure”. That’s why, the most significant factor is “the

⁸⁷Tetsuro, Iji. "Negotiating an End to the Conflict in Tajikistan". *Ritsumeikan Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*, 29, (2010): 4 (1-22).

⁸⁸Lynch, Dov. "The Tajik Civil War and Peace Process". *Civil Wars*, 4, No.4, (September 2007): 55 (49-72)

⁸⁹Shapoatov, Sayfiddin. *The Tajik Civil War: 1992-1997*. Diss. METU, 2004. pp.1.

disparity between the distribution of power and distribution of benefits: the greater the disparity, the greater the likelihood of war.”⁹⁰ On the eve of the Civil War, the Tajik government was mostly dominated by the hardliners who had a much uncompromising attitude during conflict situations. On the other hand, the self-perception from the opposition side relating to its power was also high because of the election results in November 24, 1991 when the presidential candidate of the oppositional parties Davlat Khudonazarov won 30 per cent of the votes against the candidate from the Communist Party of Tajikistan Rahmon Nabiev winning 56.9 per cent of the votes. This electoral success on the oppositional side created a sense of empowerment for the opposition to mobilize the masses. In addition to the high self-perceptions which led the both sides to go to war instead of bargaining and negotiations for their own interests, the elite structure in Tajikistan is another important factor for the eruption of the war. To highlight this factor, Kılavuz makes a comparison between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, both of which have passed through more or less similar transitional periods. Because of the Soviet policies, only one dominant regional elite group, the Khujandis (Leninabadis), had a continuous dominance over the government cadres from 1946 till the fall of the USSR. Both as a result and a reason of this support, Khujand region became the most industrialized, prosperous and developed region of the Tajikistan Republic. Moreover, the Khujandis were well-educated and mostly Russian-speaking community in comparison with the other economically disadvantageous regions such as Kulyab, Gorno-Badakhstan and Garm. Among the reasons that lead Tajikistan to a unique position there is this disproportionate elite structure. While Uzbekistan possessed “three more or less equally powerful elite networks”, the Soviet policies in Tajikistan created a single elite group dominant with respect to others.⁹¹

In addition to administrative policies of the USSR related to the Central Asian and Transcaucasian Republics, there is an organic relationship between the Gorbachev’s perestroika (restructuring of the Soviet economic system) policy in the

⁹⁰Kılavuz, İdil Tunçer. "Understanding Civil War: A Comparison of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan". *Europe-Asia Studies*, 63, No.2, (March 2011): 266, 271.

⁹¹Kılavuz, İdil Tunçer. "Understanding Civil War: A Comparison of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan". *Europe-Asia Studies*, 63, No.2, (March 2011): 273.

years of 1985-91 and the eruption of conflict situation in Tajikistan. With perestroika, Soviet economy entered a process of decentralization which caused a distress on the subsidies coming from Moscow to Tajikistan who was poorest republic in the USSR. Moreover, individual republics put a ban on exports to other republics. It is not a coincidence that the riots were generally initiated by unemployed young men against the economically privileged segments of the society. In this sense, the economic complaints merged with the national complaints against the Soviet regime-backed political rulers. Isaac Scarborough makes an extensive summary about the effects of perestroika on the Tajik society;

When the Tajik government collapsed in August of 1991, it did so in the context of complete and utter economic ruin. Unemployment had reached close to 30% of the working population. Industrial production in the republic was at a standstill; the republican government was barely making ends meet; and less and less of the population was able to provide for its basic needs...the underlying causes for political struggle in the republic remained conditioned on the economic collapse.⁹²

In short, the economic depression resulting from perestroika policies laid the background for the Tajik conflict with causing discontent among the politically unrepresented masses against the developed northern elite supported by Soviet recruitment policies.

While explaining the factors leading to the eruption of the fighting between government supporters and the opposition, Flemming-Splidsboel Hansen employs a Neorealist term: offense and defense balance. The collapse of the central authority is the permissive cause of the conflict which led to a self-help situation in which each group in Tajikistan is urged to depend on its own strength with its allies to counter potential aggressors. According to Hansen;

The emergence of anarchy formed the central background to the outbreak of the Tajik civil war. While the collapse of central authority does not in itself explain why the conflict broke out, it does explain how it could break out or, in other words, it draws our attention to the permissive cause of the fighting.⁹³

⁹² Scarborough, Isaac. "(Over)determining Social Disorder: Tajikistan and the Economic Collapse of Perestroika." *Central Asian Survey*, 35, No.3, (2016): 447.

⁹³ Splidsboel-Hansen, Flemming. "The Outbreak and Settlement of Civil War: Neorealism and the Case of Tajikistan". *Civil Wars*, 2, No.4, (Winter 1999): 1-22.

Thus, the opposition groups -with the aim of ending their socio-political and economic destitution- put forward their demands for change following the weakness of the political system. At this stage, Hansen draws the attention to the notion of offense-defense balance. The opposition is convinced that it had an offense advantage which turned them more uncompromising and less negotiable. As “the opposition overestimated the subjective value of its offense advantages and therefore failed to accept the compromise solution balancing in the most optimal way both its own interests and those of the regime”, the fighting transformed into a civil war in 1992.⁹⁴

3.3 The Civil War: The Conflict Situation

What ignited the wick of the conflict is the failed coup attempt against Gorbachev's rule by ultra-communist elements in August 1991. The opposition in Tajikistan accused Qahhor Mahkamov, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Tajikistan and the first President of Tajikistan of supporting the coup promoters and they organized large demonstrations with a demand of his resignation. Upon Mahkamov's resignation, Qadriddin Aslonov who was then the chairman of the Supreme Soviet (the parliament) became the acting president and in a very short period of time like less than a month he made radical decisions. As an acting president, he banned the activities of the Communist Party of Tajikistan (CPT) all around the Republic, removed the statue of Lenin in the main square of Dushanbe and legalized the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). The Supreme Soviet, however, removed him from the acting presidency, abolished the ban on the Communist Party, banned the IRPT and chose Rahmon Nabiev in the place of Aslonov. This sparkle was followed by further polarization with the presidential elections on November 24, 1991 ending up with Nabiev's coming into the power despite a high percentage of vote for Davlat Khudonazarov, the common candidate of oppositional parties. Bringing his own circle to the key positions, Nabiev began to target the opposition parties and their members. For example, upon refusing to use

⁹⁴ Ibid.

force against the protestors during the September (1991) demonstrations, Mahmadayoz Navjuvanov, the Minister of Interior, was dismissed.

The protestors, as a result, began to gather in the Shahidon (Martyrs) Square protesting the dismissals and detentions of the oppositional figures and calling for the Speaker of the Parliament, Safarali Kejaev's resignation. The supporters of Kenjaev, on the other hand, were gathering in Ozodi (Freedom) Square, where became the other symbol of the long-lasting encampment besides Shahidon Square. At this very moment, Nabiev's decision to arm his supporters in Ozodi Square and establish a National Guard headed by Kulyobi crime leader Sangak Safarov became the threshold of the armed conflict in the Republic. So, the conflict that began in the capital Dushanbe gradually spread to the rural areas by May 1992 which led to serious conflicts around Kulyob and QurganTepa. By the time, the opposition forces were capturing the airport, train stations and presidential palace and in this way forcing Nabiev to negotiate with the oppositional figures.

By the end of 1992s while the armed conflicts were getting intensified and the pro-government forces were uniting under the name of Popular Front of Tajikistan (PFT), Russia decided to send additional border guards to the Afghan border in order to prevent the arm smuggling. Moscow provided its facilities to support the PFT and Kulyobis, led by Emomali Rahmon (Rahmonov). With Russian support, the Kulyobis began to consolidate their power around the republic and replace Khojandi's long-standing rule over the country. The United Tajik Opposition's (UTO) military advances which highlighted the military flaws of Russia, the increasing power of Taliban movement in the Afghan civil war led Russia together with Uzbekistan to launch their initiatives to contain the conflict. Emomali Rahmon was forced to negotiate with the UTO representatives by means of pressures coming from Russia and Uzbekistan. As the major external power to the war, Russia's desire to contain the conflict created an impetus for the peace process, first round of which began in Moscow in April 1994 under the United Nations (UN) supervision.

3.4 Russia's Foreign Policy in 1990s and Tajik Civil War

At this point, the question “why did Russia increase its peace initiatives during the third year of the civil war?” needs to be analyzed. Firstly, as aforementioned, Tajikistan, situated at the border of Afghanistan, was a buffer zone between Russia and Afghanistan, where the Islamic fundamentalist groups such as Taliban were enlarging their zones of influence after the Soviet troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989. As is known, the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that lasted nine years put heavy economic, military and diplomatic burdens on the USSR and thought to be one of the key factors that contributed to its fall. The Tajik Civil War made the Tajik-Afghan border much more pervious particularly for arm and drug smuggling. Increasing vacuum of authority had a direct impact on the criminal activities throughout the border which complicated Russian efforts to control the area. While at the last stages of its existence, the USSR made tracks for mending its relations with the West and while the Central Asian and Transcaucasian countries, in this regard, were perceived as an obstacle to the pro-Western development, the civil war which paved the way for the advance of the fundamentalist groups in Tajikistan forced Russia for a reevaluation of its foreign policy regarding Central Asia and Transcaucasia.

The collapse of the USSR created a new uncertain situation in terms of Russian foreign policy, in which the political elite defended a variety of foreign policy concepts ranging from pro-Westernism to Eurasianism to adjust the country to the new global reality. In this process, Russia was unable to constitute a consistent and coherent foreign policy. Under Boris Yeltsin's presidency, the Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev followed “pro-Western” policies which were subjected to serious criticisms among the prominent political elites within the Duma (Russian parliament) as well as the Presidential circles. The NATO enlargement during the first periods of unipolar world system as it was observed in the NATO's efforts to deploy in the Balkans generated much more criticism than praise for pro-Western policies that sought warm relations with the US and Europe. Moreover, Kozyrev were criticized not only by hard-liner nationalists but also by the pro-Westerners because of the inconsistencies of his policies. Paul Goble states that;

Pro-Western reformists and anti-Western nationalists increasingly distrust the Russian foreign minister, the former because they believe that Kozyrev has now sold out to the nationalists and the latter because they believe he is simply a demagogue who cannot be relied on to keep any of his various words.⁹⁵

The failures of Kozyrev's policies activated Russia's policies towards post-Soviet space of Central Asia and Transcaucasia by the end of 1992. It will not be wrong to suggest that the reluctance of the Western countries to evaluate Russia's pro-Western initiatives contributed to the empowerment of Eurasianism to a great extent. With the parliamentary elections held in 1993 and 1995, The Duma began to be dominated by nationalists, who were against the idea of Atlanticism which highlighted the necessity of Russia's being a part of Western civilization.

Accordingly, in 1993, the "near abroad" doctrine declared the former Soviet Union's geography a vital sphere of influence for economy and security perspectives. Neorealism posits that "states strive to maintain their positions in the system. Thus in their twilight years, great powers try to arrest or reverse their decline."⁹⁶ Hence, Russia internalized the term "near abroad" to restore its influence over the former Soviet territories in order to reverse its decline. The "near abroad" term generally refers to the newly independent republics that had once been a part of Soviet territories including the Baltic states, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in Central Asia, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan in Transcaucasia, and the Slavic states such as Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. With the rise of "near abroad" doctrine, the Eurasianist (*evraziistvo*) policy concept gained popularity among Russian political circles since 1992. Eurasianism prescribes the necessity for Russia to maintain a stable relationship with the Central Asian countries and ensure prosperity in the region. The replacement of Andrei Kozyrev with Yevgeni Primakov, a Middle East expert in 1996 empowered the position of Eurasianists according to whom the Commonwealth Independent States (CIS) and

⁹⁵ Goble, Paul A. "Kozyrev's 'Shock Diplomacy' is Increasingly Unpopular at Home". *The Jamestown Foundation*. PRISM, 1 No.7, (1995). online available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/kozyrevs-shock-diplomacy-is-increasingly-unpopular-at-home/> (Date Accessed 25 May, 2017)

⁹⁶ Waltz, Kenneth. "The Emerging Structure of International Politics". *International Security*, 18, No.2, (Autumn, 1993):44-79.

the “near abroad” were of top-priority for Russia’s security policy. In 1992, the Russian political scientist, Sergey Karaganov urges that;

A decisive component of Russia’s new mission in the world is to ensure, with help from the world community, that the ex-Soviet area does not become a geostrategic hole radiating instability and war and ultimately endangering the very existence of humanity.⁹⁷

These lines, all in all, stand as a good explanation for the reasons that led Russia to intervene into Tajikistan Civil War beginning from 1993 after it stayed aloof from the conflict for two years. As Neorealism suggests, the states living in an anarchic international structure, prioritizes their security interests especially near their borders. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the states in Central Asia and Transcaucasia turned into a buffer zone between Russia and the Middle East. Tajikistan shares its borders with Afghanistan which makes it open to the negative effects of political instability and rise of fundamentalism. A potential replacement of pro-Moscow regime with an anti-Moscow one in Tajikistan would trigger contests against Russia’s upper-hand and thus a deeper power vacuum in the region. As a result of all these internal and global developments, Russia “decided to keep its foothold in Tajikistan in order to be able to prevent the emergence of any situation against Russia’s national interests.”⁹⁸

All in all, Moscow’s intervention into the conflict and its call for dialogue contributed to the acceleration of the peace process ended up with General Agreement of 1997. The involvement of mediators was certainly a major contributing factor for the peace process. “It was clearly the collaboration between Russia and Iran that served as the driving force behind the progress of the peace process.”⁹⁹ Consequently, the warring sides agreed to make a ceasefire and negotiate in 1996, after years of confrontation. The General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace

⁹⁷Sergunin, Alexander. "Euroasianism". *Explaining Russian Foreign Policy Behavior: Theory and Practice*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 91.

⁹⁸Shapoatov, Sayfiddin. *The Tajik Civil War: 1992-1997*. Diss. METU, 2004, pp.3.

⁹⁹Tetsuro, Iji. "Negotiating an End to the Conflict in Tajikistan". *Ritsumeikan Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*. 29, (2010): 17.

and National Accord signed by the President Rahmon and Seyyid Abdullo Nuri representing the UTO in Moscow granted the UTO 30 per cent of governmental positions. In this way, for the first time in Central Asia, an Islamist party (the IRPT) was incorporated into the government system as the IRPT constituted the backbone of the UTO.

The civil war left behind a heavy casualty. Approximately 50.000 people died and more than 500.000 became refugees. The economic collapse put a stamp on the country during and after the civil war. Both Russia as well as Uzbekistan had a direct impact on the emergence, acceleration and culmination of the civil war. Although it was not so forthcoming as Russia; Iran also -directly or indirectly- influenced the war process, too. In the next section, I will explain the role of Iran on Tajikistan Civil War and Tehran's foreign policy structure during 1990s.

3.5 Iran's Foreign Policy in 1990s and Tajik Civil War

Iran's approach to the Tajik Civil War reveals significant clues about its interactions with Russia, who posed the most prominent external influence on the war. In spite of the ideological stand inside the country in order to protect the decade-old Islamic Republic regime, Iran followed a cautious and pragmatic policy regarding the war. As a Shia country, one of the key factors of this pragmatic policy is the rise of Sunni fundamentalism on the neighboring territories perceived as a threat to the regime in Iran. Another factor, on the other hand, is the President Rafsanjani's foreign policy steps prioritizing the national interests and economic restructuring after eight years of war with Iraq. Iran's prudent approach towards Tajikistan strengthens the neo-realist argument stating that in spite of ideological values on which Iran builds its Islamic revolutionary rhetoric, Tehran has been pursuing a pragmatic approach towards Central Asia and recognizes Russian sphere of influence there. In line with the neo-realist argument, the foreign policy fundamentals of the Islamic Republic are composed of a primary importance attached to the stability throughout its borders which requires good relations with the neighbors. Therefore, the religious rhetoric inside the country is overshadowed by a foreign policy driven by security concerns, pragmatic and opportunistic policies.

The Tajik Civil War owns its existence mainly to the local political dynamics and the Soviet policies after the mid-1980s without any further external imposition. However, upon the emergence of the conflict, the external powers tried to manipulate the conflict in accordance with their interests. Unlike the Syrian Civil War, the power dynamics in Tajikistan were much less intricate owing to the lack of enough global attention and external penetration into the Soviet space. Yet again, the conflict captured the attention of Iran, to whom the power vacuum in the CA/TC after the Soviet demise was a welcoming regional opportunity as seen in its power contest with Turkey regarding the region in 1990s. Similar to Russia and Uzbekistan, Iran sought ways for acquiring political gains from the chaos at maximum level, too. Before mentioning Iranian foreign policy towards the Tajik Civil War, Tehran's overall foreign policy concepts during the post-Revolutionary period and especially during 1990s need to be analyzed in order to have a better understanding about the "Tajik case".

Following the Iranian Revolution against the Pahlavi rule in 1979 and the Islamists' consolidation of their power in the post-revolutionary era, the main aims of Iranian foreign policy has been defined within the context of revolutionary values and ideological standing. The Islamist leader of the Revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini combined Shi'ism with populism and revolutionism when he constituted the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic. As a protest against the current world system, the Islamist revolutionaries labeled both the US and the USSR as "satans" and undertook a mission of protector of the oppressed (mostazafin).¹⁰⁰ In this context, Tehran's foreign policy was fundamentally dominated by "Neither West, Nor East" policy rejecting all sorts of hegemony. With this policy framed within the "non-aligned" movement, Iran not only rejected the hegemony of the great powers but also their regional allies such as Israel and Gulf states. The policy of non-alignment which called for resisting against the cultural, political and economic hegemony of the US and the USSR, promoted Iranian regime as a role model to primarily regional countries. Hence, "regime exportation" strategy accompanied to the policy of "Neither West not East". In spite of this ideologically garnished foreign

¹⁰⁰Shireen Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Resisting the New International Order*, (Westport: Preager, 2010): 29.

policy stance advocated by the Supreme Leader Khomeini, in reality Iran would not follow purely ideological foreign policy due to the international limitations. Instead, the ideological rhetoric has served to mobilize the masses to consolidate the regime's power. According to "domestic vulnerability model" of foreign policy analysis, "regimes, facing greater threats at home than abroad, adopt belligerent or rhetorical foreign policies to appease domestic opinion."¹⁰¹ During the first years of the revolution, the Hostage Crisis initiated by a group of radical students against the American Embassy staff in Tehran counted among the most ideologically-driven incident during Khomeini's era, which created a radical deterioration of Iran's relations with the Western countries. This incident serves to the interests of Khomeini and clergy in terms of their internal rivalry against the moderates of Mehdi Bazergan government. However, following the US' step to freeze the Iranian assets and emergence of a potential of a conflict with Iraq, Iran came to an agreement with the US via Algiers Accord in 1981. Hence even during Khomeini's period, "when the security and survival of the regime and state were in significant danger, the foreign policy behavior prioritizing Iran's national interests became predominant."¹⁰²

The Iran-Iraq War that lasted eight years made the security concerns dominate the political and economic problems and lead them to a secondary position in the public psyche. The regime further succeeded to consolidate its power and eliminate the oppositional voices as the war united the masses against a common enemy. Therefore, although the war had no-winner side at the end of eight years, the regime's success to protect the territorial integrity against Saddam Hussein's threat made it show up in a more advantageous position. Following the Iraq-Iran War and the death of Khomeini in 1989, Iranian foreign policy entered into a period of "confidence building" and "détente" with the President Hashemi Rafsanjani's

¹⁰¹ Hinnebusch, Raymond. *The International Politics of the Middle East*, (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 2003).

¹⁰² Gedikli, Gürsel Fırat. *Iranian Foreign Policy in the 2000s: A Neo-Realist Perspective*. Diss. METU, 2014. pp.10.

promotion of economic reconstruction.¹⁰³ Shireen Hunter calls this period as “de-ideologization of Iran’s foreign policy after Khomeini.”¹⁰⁴ The end of the Iran-Iraq War activated normalization of the relationship between Iran and the European countries which had already been relatively stable in contrast with the US-Iran relations. The partial elimination of threat posed by Iraq increased Iranian efforts to promote stability and security in the Gulf region, as well. For example, via bilateral visits of high-ranking officials, Saudi Arabia-Iran relations were readdressed and rehabilitated. However, at the beginning of 1990s, the international isolation that reinforced by the dual containment policy of the US President Bill Clinton restrained Iranian initiatives for political, diplomatic and economic reconstruction. The international developments such as the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the emergence of Sunni fundamental movements around Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf and its spillover to the Central Asian Republics, the demise of the USSR pushed Iran to establish better relations with Russia. Actually, the signals of the better relationship had already been apparent in 1988 with the exchange of letters between Khomeini and Gorbachev. While assessing the role of ideology on Iran’s policy motivators during 1990s, Kenneth Katzman highlights that “[a]s of the late 1990s, Iran apparently has abandoned that (ideology) goal because promoting it succeeded only in producing resistance to Iran in the region.”¹⁰⁵ As Katzman suggested, Iran pushed back its efforts for regime promotion and ideological standing for having friendly relations with its neighbors and Russia in order to overcome economic and international restraints during 1990s.

¹⁰³Barzegar, Kayhan. "Iran's Foreign Policy in Post-Invasion Iraq". *Middle East Policy Council*. Winter 2008. online available at: <http://www.mepc.org/journal/irans-foreign-policy-post-invasion-iraq> (accessed on July, 07, 2017)

¹⁰⁴Hunter, Shireen. "Iran's Pragmatic Regional Policy". *Journal of International Affairs*, 56, No.2, (2003): 13

¹⁰⁵Katzman, Kenneth. "Iran's Foreign Policy". *Congressional Research Center*. June 30, 2015. online available at: https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc795759/m1/1/high_res_d/R44017_2015Sep25.pdf . pp.2 (accessed on July 07, 2017).

The Tajik Civil War erupted while more pragmatic and national interests-orientated foreign policy motivators were dominating to Tehran's political agenda. Muriel Atkin states that "by mid-1992, when the civil war began in newly independent Tajikistan, Iran was still in the process of adjusting to politics after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 and the end of its devastating war with Iraq in 1988."¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, even in 1990s Tehran's pragmatism had its own limits. Anoushiravan Ehteshami indicates that;

In the 1990s and beyond, despite its more integrationist and non-ideological foreign policy, nonetheless Tehran has tried to keep pace with the politicized Islamic groups in the Arab world and has been active in showing support for the following movements: the Hizbollah in Lebanon, the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) in Algeria, the Turabi regime in Sudan, Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Palestine, the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, the al-Nahda Party in Tunisia and the Jihad group in Egypt. Further afield, Tehran has been quite content to allow itself to be portrayed as a supporter of Islamic movements of all denominations. The support given to the Islamic Moro National Liberation Front movement in the Philippines in the 1980s and to the Bosnian Muslims in the 1990s are good examples of this Iranian strategy.¹⁰⁷

The Islamic democratic opposition under the banner of the IRPT also got the initial low-key support from Tehran. However after Russia's assertive intervention in Tajik Civil War, Iran sidelined its efforts of "keeping pace with the politicized Islamic group" in Tajikistan. Although Tajikistan of 1990s is not comparable with Syria of 2010s in Iranian foreign policy agenda, the IRPT may have been much remarkable and had much leverage in Tehran's agenda than the FIS in Algeria, the Turabi regime in Sudan, the Al-Nahda in Tunisia or the Moros in the Philippines. Yet, Iranian pragmatic and non-interventionist approach towards the Tajik Civil War may lead to the exclusion of the IRPT from Ehteshami's list of Islamic denominations supported by Iran in 1990s. At this point, the significance of "Russia factor" comes into forefront alongside other regional and international factors.

¹⁰⁶ Atkin, Muriel. "Iran, Russia and Tajikistan's Civil War", in Stephanie Cronin (ed.), *Iranian-Russian Encounters* (Routledge: London, 2013)

¹⁰⁷ Ehteshami, Anoushiravan. "The Foreign Policy of Iran" in Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (eds), *The Foreign Policies of the Middle East States*, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), pp. 283-310.

Iranian rulers overwhelmingly focused their attention to the Middle East and refrained from “backing the Islamist movements in the Central Asian countries...in part to avoid offending Russia, its most important arms and technology supplier and an ally in support of Syrian President Bashar Al Assad.”¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, the shared geopolitical interests against the US encroachment into the Central Asia after the fall of the USSR contribute to the enhancement of Russia-Iran relations. While dealing with Tajikistan, Iran did not give up maintaining friendly relations with Russia. As Clark Brenton suggests, “this so-called ‘Russian factor’ would be a central element in shaping Iran’s foreign agendas and interests in Tajikistan throughout Rafsanjani’s presidency”.¹⁰⁹ Iran, in this sense, did not give up its national interests in order to promote Iranian regime model for the Tajik Opposition. At that moment, the national interests required friendly relations with Russia to succeed economic restructuring policies and put an end to international isolation. It will not be wrong to state that “Russia factor” has a significant impact upon shaping Iran’s foreign policy towards Tajik Civil War. The Iranian Foreign Minister of Rafsanjani’s presidency, Ali Akbar Velayeti’s expressions reveal the significance of “Russia factor” in Iranian approach to the Tajik Civil War;

Our [Iran’s] position is clear. We went to these republics through the Moscow gate. The Islamic Republic does not intend to take advantage of the existing sensitive circumstances in the Soviet Union. We, as a neighbor of the Soviet Union, wish to see that their situations return to normal as soon as possible. We respect whatever the people of that country as a whole desire, and the republics [of Central Asia] in particular. But we have no intention of provoking or speeding up anything....We do not intend to dictate anything. We do not intend to contribute toward the further deterioration of the situation.¹¹⁰

In this context, Iranian officials acted pragmatic enough to follow good relations with all the parties of Tajikistan from the very beginning of its independence. The Iranian foreign ministry delegation headed by Velayeti paid a

¹⁰⁸Katzman, Kenneth. "Iran's Foreign Policy". *Congressional Research Center*. June 30, 2015. online available at: https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc795759/m1/1/high_res_d/R44017_2015Sep25.pdf . pp.3 (accessed on July 07, 2017).

¹⁰⁹ Clark, Brenton. "Iran and The Civil War in Tajikistan". *OAKA*, 9, No.18, pp.89.

visit to Rahmon Nabiev in his first days as a President. In 1992, The Iranian Embassy was opened in Dushanbe. So, Iran followed a way of increasing its cultural and economic influence and thus tried to protect its geostrategic interests within a peaceful and diplomatic framework.

Nonetheless, accepting Iranian cautious approach towards the Tajik Civil War and the lack of its direct role in the eruptions of the violence does not mean that Iran fully refrained and stayed aloof from the war. Rather, Iran's foreign policy in the case of Tajik Civil War was opportunistic and multi-lateral. First of all, Iran tried to establish dialogue with the oppositional groups including the Sunni-inspired IRPT in the early periods of 1992 during their most effective and influential period. However, even when it established relations with the opposition, "Iran was not driven by ideological concerns. Instead its leaders supported the groups that would best forward Iran's political and strategic interests, which just happened to be the IRP."¹¹¹ The IRPT was the largest and most well-organized group within the United Tajik Opposition (UTO). Moreover, as Sophie Roche indicates, "Claiming to act in the name of all Tajik Muslims, the IRP mobilized far more people than any other opposition group during the Civil War."¹¹² However, in spite of its Islamist tendency, the IRPT did not make plans for building a possible Islamic state which made Iran an unlikely role model for the group. Like all other oppositional groups, the IRPT mobilized its efforts to gain more leverage within the existent system. The inheritance of a secular state system from the Soviet period made it harder for religious movements to have an extensive basis for promoting an Islamic state. Article 1 of the constitution of the Tajik Republic defines Tajikistan as a "sovereign, democratic, rule of law, secular and united state."¹¹³ As opposed to Iran where the clergy had a rooted and powerful social status, the secular state system had been more intertwined with the social sphere in Tajikistan and the IRPT was a Sunni

¹¹¹ Clark, Brenton. "Iran and Civil War in Tajikistan". *OAKA*, 9, no.18, pp.108.

¹¹² Roche, Sophie. "From Youth Bulge to Conflict: The Case of Tajikistan". *Central Asian Survey*, 29, No.4 pp.411.

¹¹³ Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan. Article One. Online available at: <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/untc/unpan003670.htm>

Hanafi-inspired organization. Thus, Iranian support for the opposition and the IRPT which constituted the largest segment within the opposition could hardly be evaluated within ideological terms.

Indeed, in the face of increasing Russian interference into the conflict, Iran pushed its already-limited support for the opposition into the background and began to pursue a conciliatory approach towards the conflict and maintained its existent dialogue with all sides of the conflict. All the same, "Tajik Civil War did not fuel a rivalry between Iran and Russia."¹¹⁴ During Nabiev's visit to Tehran in 1992, Rafsanjani offered to mediate negotiations between the warring parties. Moreover, Iran put pressure on the oppositional groups in order to make them sit around the negotiation table. Both Iran and Russia strengthened their efforts to end the conflict due to the growing Taliban influence in Afghanistan. Consequently, throughout the Tajik Civil War, Iran followed a foreign policy that prioritized the state interests and its relations with Russia. "An Islamic revolution and the interests of the so-called Tajik 'Islamists' were never paramount in Iran's political calculations. What was paramount, however, was the need to expand Iran's political influence and defend its geopolitical position. "¹¹⁵ In this sense, Iran's approach to the Tajik Civil War complies with its foreign policy agenda during 1990s in which it pursued a moderate policy that emphasized its national interests. It gives clues about the nature of Iranian foreign policy projects in Central Asia/Transcaucasia.

While Iran was adjusting its foreign policy agenda after the Soviet Demise with the aim of preserving its security interests in the new international structure, the developments in the Middle East were growing much unpromising as Washington was consolidating its presence in the Gulf. Like the political transformations in Central Asia and Transcaucasia in 1990s, the Middle East would experience a wave of political transformations after 2011 under the influence of Arab Uprisings. The Syrian Civil War erupted under these circumstances and while approaching the

¹¹⁴ Atkin, Muriel. "Iran, Russia and Tajikistan's Civil War", in Stephanie Cronin (ed.), *Iranian-Russian Encounters* (Routledge: London, 2013)

¹¹⁵ Clark, Brenton. "Iran and The Civil War in Tajikistan". *OAKA*, 9, No.18, pp.120

Syrian Civil War, Tehran adopted a more assertive and interventionist foreign policy tools distinctively from the Tajik case.

CHAPTER 4

SYRIAN CIVIL WAR AND IRAN

The second decade of 2000s has prepared a new impulse for the Middle East which has been called as Arab Spring or in less controversial words, Arab Uprisings. Beginning in 2011 with the successful anti-government protests against Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the former leader of Tunisia, the waves of protests have spread throughout the region and affected the countries to differing extends. Depicted as pro-democratic public uprisings by the Western media, Arab Uprisings have hardly unseated the authoritarian rules such as in Jordan, the Gulf states except the civil war in Yemen. Without doubt, other than Yemen, the Arab Uprisings played its most detrimental and devastating scene in Syria where the prolonging civil war since 2011 has so far cost thousands of life and displaced millions of people.

There is a parallelism between the term Arab Uprisings and the independence movements in Eastern Europe in 1989 when the Communist regimes started to fall down by mass public protests resulted in the establishment of democratic political systems under liberal economies. The dissolution of the Soviet Union caused a momentum for the foundation of sovereign states not only in Eastern Europe but also in the Central Asia / Transcaucasia. As mentioned before, Tajikistan was unique in the sense that it was the sole country that experienced a civil war within the turmoil in the wider post-Soviet region. Likewise Tajikistan, Syria has been going through a civil war under an uncertain and hazy atmosphere dominating the wider Middle East region. At this case, the conflict was much more intricate, complex, protracted and composed of more interventions from a wide range of internal and external actors than the conflict in Tajikistan. Actually, the similarities and differences between Tajik and Syrian Civil War show a significant parallelism with the similarities and differences between the Middle East and Central Asia / Transcaucasia. Raymond Hinnebusch and Sally Cummings make a list of similarities between these two regional systems such as “a continuous civilizational area”, Islam as “the undisputed

religious identity”, “the rule of non-Islamic imperial”, “imperial-engineered states systems”, “inheritance of post-colonial elites”, “huge hydrocarbon reserves” and rentierism”. However, they assert that in spite of these similarities, the regions do not end up with similar state systems. Then, while defining the differences, they indicate that;

In MENA, inter-state conflict is endemic both within the region and in its relations with the core, but less so in CA. While the Middle East states system was “born fighting” (emerging amid the 1948 Arab-Israeli war), its CA counterpart was born peaceful. While both have some border conflicts and irredentism from imperial boundary drawing and imperial-sponsored ethnic mixing, in MENA these have led to violence, ethnic cleansing, protracted conflicts, inter-state intervention and high levels of militarization and periodic state-to-state wars, while CA experienced much less of such large-scale violence, except for the Tajik civil war.¹¹⁶

According to Cummings and Hinnebusch, the similar imperial creation paved way for some similarities, primarily their common sovereignty deficits, in the post-imperial statehood in the Middle East and Central Asia. On the other hand, the differences between the level of stability in both regions could be partly linked to the differences in the empires that gave a shape them. All in all, both Tajikistan and Syria, representing a microcosms of their regions, have suffered from sovereignty deficits but the level of stability and the volume of the civil war change dramatically partly because of the differences in the international system of 1990s and 2010s, the regional conditions and the distinctive experiences of their state formation. Yet, despite being part of two distinct regions, once Tajikistan and now Syria represent the most fragile piece of the dominos of their times and places. The question "Do the differences and similarities between Tajik and Syrian civil wars express itself in Iranian and Russian foreign policy, as well?" is a matter of discussion. Therefore, this chapter will handle this discussion as a central point by exploring the factors leading to the Syrian Civil War and analyzing the Iranian and Russian foreign policies in 2000s as well as their approaches to the Syrian Civil War.

¹¹⁶ Cummings, Sally, and Raymond Hinnebusch. “Introduction” in Hinnebusch, Raymond, and Sally Cummings. (eds). *Sovereignty After Empire Comparing the Middle East and Central Asia*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

4.1 Historical Background

The Middle East of 2010s which is the scene for Syrian Civil War has expectedly lots of differences from the Central Asia / Transcaucasia region of 1990s, the battlefield for Tajik Civil War ranging from the international systemic circumstances to societal conditions. Even within the Middle East itself, there have been tremendous changes in last years. Taking these changes into considerations is necessary to put forward a detailed analysis for the Syrian Civil War.

After the Second World War, the Middle East did not occupy a primary concern for the agendas of newly emerging superpowers. For the United States, securing the oil supplies was the premier occupation, while Moscow, with its traditional impulses, engaged in securing its southern border by giving priority to Iran and Turkey.¹¹⁷ With the emergence of Cold War, Soviet Union had begun to seek for a buffer zone against the US' containment policies. The Suez Crisis in 1956 symbolizing the end of "British moment" for the Middle East came as a watershed for the spillover of great powers' struggle for influence to the region. Christopher Coker in *Britain since 1945* explains this end of European influence by saying;

The Suez crisis was provoked in 1956 by the decision of the Egyptian leader Abdul Nasser to unilaterally nationalize the Suez Canal in order to pay the costs of...the Aswan Dam. In response, Britain and France decided to seize control of the canal. But they were unable to act quickly enough. For the first time, too, they faced opposition from both the United States and the Soviet Union...in the face of overwhelming international condemnation the British and French were forced to withdraw, leaving Nasser's authority in the Middle East higher than ever and their own lower than ever before.¹¹⁸

During the Cold War, regarding international system, the thing that defined the conditions for the Middle Eastern countries was bipolarity, which meant a room for maneuver and another option in terms of the alignments. "The Arab states had divided into groups of moderate and radical states, the moderate group corresponding to the symmetrical group of pro-US states, while the radical group corresponded to

¹¹⁷Hansen, Birthe. "Bipolarity and the Middle East". *Unipolarity and the Middle East*. Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000, pp. 34.

¹¹⁸Coker, Christopher. "Foreign and Defence Policy". *Britain since 1945*. edited by Jonathan Hollowell, Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p.6.

the pro-Soviet states.”¹¹⁹ The alliance between Syria and Moscow dates back to this period as Syria benefitted from the Soviet assistance against the other powers in the subsystem such as Turkey, Israel and Iraq. The Arab-Israeli conflict and Lebanon War were the major zones of conflicts in the region and they were exposed to Great Power interventions throughout the Cold War.

The post-Cold War era witnessed a systemic change with the rise of US unilateral power. Kenneth Waltz suggests that “changes of structure and hence of system occur with variations in the number of great powers.”¹²⁰ Therefore, “the distribution of capabilities was hardly constant in this period but rather was changing rapidly as the Soviet Union declined economically and technologically.”¹²¹ Moscow began to be more occupied with its own internal problems following the collapse. With the Soviet demise and rise of US power across the region, “the core-periphery relations” were entering into a new stage. Hinnebusch indicates that,

When the core was split, as under Cold War bi-polarity, nationalist states were able to exploit superpower rivalry to win protection, aid and arms from the number two state, the USSR, enabling them to pursue nationalist foreign policies, and to dilute economic dependency.¹²²

Hence, the core was no more split which weakens the capability of the states in the periphery to exploit the super power rivalry. After the Cold War, the fear of devaluation in the regional worth and the feel of deprivation in the sense of the countries' capacity to maneuver in a unipolar world have penetrated to the Middle East. Yet, the region continued to be central in terms of its status as a fertile ground surrounded by conflict zones. None of the “four durable sources of conflict” such as

¹¹⁹Hansen, Birthe. "Bipolarity and the Middle East". *Unipolarity and the Middle East*. Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000, pp. 43.

¹²⁰ Waltz, Kenneth. "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory". *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. 18, No.4, (spring 1988): 615-628.

¹²¹ Wohlforth, William. "No One Loves a Realist Explanation." *International Politics*. 48, No.4/5, (2011):441-459.

¹²² Hinnebusch, Raymond. *The International Politics of the Middle East*, (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 2003).

“the struggle over Palestine”, “the frustration of identity by the arbitrary imposition of borders”, “the struggle against imperialist control” and “the struggle over control of the region’s oil” imposed by “the external imposition of a very flawed system” was successfully addressed and overcome even after the end of Cold War.¹²³

First and foremost, the Middle East entered into 1990s with the Gulf War. Having been at grips with the newly-established Islamist regime in Iran during eight years without attaining any significant result, Iraq contradicted with other creditor Gulf countries over its debts to them, and as a result annexed Kuwait historically perceived as an Iraqi land. In response, intervening into the conflict, the US-led international coalition blew away Iraq in a short period of time. The Gulf War possesses a great deal of significance as it symbolically displays the changes in the world order and power balances in the Middle East. Waltz explains that “with the waning of Soviet power, the United States is no longer held in check by any other country or combination of countries.”¹²⁴ Coming out of the war as victorious and following the dissolution of the USSR, the US took an opportunity to present itself as a hegemonic power. As Shibley Telbami puts forward; “for the world’s sole remaining superpower, extraordinary opportunities emerged.”¹²⁵ In this sense, with the disappearance of the USSR's balancing leverage, the Gulf War became the first war showing that the US turned into an unrivalled power in its struggle for influence. In addition to strengthen the US influence over the region, the Gulf War and its results also pave way for strengthening the radical movements throughout the Middle East in the long term. Therefore not only Iraq was damaged in the demographic and state authority senses, but also the Middle East turned the page of a new process. “After the Gulf War and the end of Cold War, American influence in the Middle East has substantially affected the distribution of military and economic power within the

¹²³ Hinnebusch. Ibid.

¹²⁴ Waltz, Kenneth. “The Emerging Structure of International Politics”. *International Security*, 18, No.2, (Autumn, 1993):44-79.

¹²⁵ Telbami, Shibley. “Kenneth Waltz, Neorealism and Foreign Policy”. *Security Studies*, 11, No.3, (Spring,2002):158-170.

Arab world and the relevance of this distribution.”¹²⁶ Of course, it will not be adequate to put the blame on the Gulf War for all the current developments in the region. However, it will not be wrong to state that the Gulf War represents a starting point in terms of the US’ penetration into the Middle East as a real and existing power not a virtual one. As mentioned by Raymond Hinnebusch;

The Gulf War did not, as some expected, radically transform the Middle East System which instead, remained locked into the old power politics. What it did do was open the region to much greater external penetration and shift the regional balance of power to the advantage of the non-Arab peripheries.¹²⁷

1990s witnessed political and military dynamism not only in the Gulf but also in the Levant region. As is known, the First Intifada by thousands of Palestinians revolting against Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip evoked at the end of the 1980s, following an Israeli army vehicle’s killing four Palestinians. The First Intifada had significant repercussions throughout the international media which led to a US-led initiative peace process for the Arab-Israeli conflict. Nevertheless, this peace initiative called as Oslo process quickly came to a deadlock. Although Israel and Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) led by Yaser Arafat recognized each other with the Oslo Agreement in 1993, the two failed to get to the roots of the problems. Consequently, upon Ariel Sharon’s (then the candidate for premiership from Likud Party) provocative visit with Israeli police officers to the Temple Mount, the Second Intifada erupted in Jerusalem and quickly spread throughout the Palestinian community, which damaged the Oslo Process irreversibly.

All in all, the Middle East was welcoming the millennium by having experienced a number of conflicts and mass public movements. In the meantime that followed the end of the Cold War, the US, being driven by an impulse for creating a new order in the Middle East, applied double containment policy towards Iraq and Iran, took steps for Arab-Israel potential peace and attempted to make political and economic reforms by advocating democracy throughout the region. However, as Meliha Altunışık indicates, these strategies failed one after another at the end of

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Hinnebusch, Raymond. "The Middle East in a Decade of Globalization" *The International Politics of the Middle East*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003, pp. 222.

1990s.¹²⁸ Criticizing Bill Clinton by holding him responsible for inefficient policies, George W Bush was to face one of the most serious terror attack in the US history a while after his presidency . This terror attack meant that the Middle East would continue to remain as a focal point for the international politics.

The 21th century, also called as "American Century" by Bahrat Korany, kept the region in the center as a result of President George W. Bush's "war on terror" initiative. Few years after the al-Qaeda affiliated militants' hijack of four airplanes and their coordinated attacks against several US targets such as Pentagon nearby Washington D.C and World Trade Centers in New York, the US' "war on terror" policy accompanied by its military invasions first in Afghanistan in 2001 than in Iraq in 2003. Prioritizing the security of Israel and safe reach to oil and promoting democracy by pre-emptive strikes, the US turned into a real actor in the region rather than a virtual one, as Korany suggests.¹²⁹ The Middle East has become the scene for trans-border public movements and increasing turbulence of ideas. Indicating these dynamism throughout the Middle East, Marten Valbjorn and Andre Bank emphasize on the US invasion of Iraq and overthrown of Saddam Hussein.¹³⁰ Using the term "Post-Arab" for the New Middle East, abovementioned scholars state that the region witnesses a new kind of cold war after the 2003 invasion and as opposed to 1950s, this cold war took place in the society-state level rather than inter-state one. In this sense, while the non-state actors are represented by groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, called as radical block, the states jump on the US wagon such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan or Egypt represent the moderate wing. The two scholars define "the New Middle East" as deeply affected by sectarian cleavages within Islam. The above status-quo autocrats' criticism towards the Lebanese Hezbollah's war against Israel in 2006 as "irresponsible adventurism" seems as a part of their efforts to balance

¹²⁸ Altunışık, M Benli. Ortadoğu ve ABD: Yeni Bir Döneme Girilirken. *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, 1, no.1 (2016): 69-81. Published electronically <http://dergipark.gov.tr/ortetut/issue/22568/241104>

¹²⁹ Korany, Bahgat. "The Middle East since the Cold War: the Multilayered (in)security Dilemma". In Louise Faw *International Relations of the Middle East*. edited by Louise Fawcett, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

¹³⁰ Valbjorn, Marten. Andre Bank. The New Arab Cold War: Rediscovering the Arab dimension of Middle East regional politics. *Review of International Studies*, 38, no.1 (2012): 3-24.

Shia Iran, rising power in the region, according to Valbjorn and Bank. Although the terms “moderate” and “radical” are open to discussions in terms of their reductionism, “the growing delink between states and societies” could be counted as one of the primary reasons of both Arab Uprisings and Syrian Civil War. The deadlock of Arab-Israeli conflict, the security threats arising from the superpower invasions, the societal stress as a result of oil-dependent economy, the huge wealth gap between oil-rich and resource-poor countries, the transnational groups politicizing Islam as well as demographic challenges such as unemployment and youth bulge all set the background for Arab Uprisings and hence Syrian Civil War.

4.2 The Factors leading to Syrian Civil War

There is an organic connection between Arab Uprisings and Syrian Civil War as the public movements in Syria against Bashar al Assad's regime were heavily inspired by the mass movements throughout the Middle Eastern states in the second decade of 2000s. The civil resistance across the region against the decade-old regimes has proved that a will for change and an opt for uncorrupt pro-democratic governments in the psyche of the Middle Eastern communities developed. Although promising changes that have come with the mass movements turned into a more obscure future in most of the countries, what Arab Uprisings approved that the Middle East is not an exception in terms of the tendency for changes and developments. As Bahgat Korany suggests about the Arab Uprisings, "Middle East exceptionalism - the assumption that the rest of the world is changing with the exception of this region - is dented, if not discredited"¹³¹. Yet, as a result of various challenges, the course of the events became troublesome. The endless civil wars in Yemen and Syria, the emergence and empowerment of ISIL, the immigrant crisis, the coup d'etat in Egypt and emerging power vacuums as a result of fragmented opposition groups such as in Libya, display that strong mass movements, on their own, are not enough for the development of desired administrations and there needs to be other elements for the success.

¹³¹ Korany, Bahgat. "The Middle East since the Cold War: the Multilayered (in)security Dilemma". *International Relations of the Middle East*. edited by Louise Fawcett, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 78.

As is known, the most successful story of the Arab Uprisings took place in Tunisia, the original scene for the movements. In the south of the country, popular and mostly nonviolent demonstrations started following a vegetable seller Mohammed Bouazizi's self-immolation in December 2010. Facing a rapidly spreading rallies and growing opposition, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, the president of the country, fled to Saudi Arabia. The apparent success of the revolution in Tunisia created a domino effect throughout the region in order to achieve political change. One of the first countries affected by the Tunisian case was Egypt where the President Hosni Mubarak resigned in February 2011 face of mass protests. Then came the death of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya and the departure of President Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen.

These rapid changes of power from autocratic rulers in a very short period of time were reflected by Western media organizations as the triumph of democratic movements. Yet, except Tunisia, most of the successful civil movements yielded to disillusionment. As Hinnebusch argues, "while in principle, the Arab Uprising, insofar as it leads to more politically inclusive institutions, could lead to state strengthening, in the short term the result has been a further state weakening, especially in the more fragmented societies."¹³² The coup d'état in Egypt that toppled down elected president Muhammed Mursi and General Abdulfettah al Sisi's coming to power was one of the most significant backlash in the history of Arab Uprisings. The social fragmentation in countries such as Libya and Yemen showed that the existence of organized oppositional groups following the toppling down of an autocratic regime is as important as the revolution itself. The strong opposition movements in the countries such as Bahrain and Syria, on the other hand, remained insufficient for a regime change. All in all, the high human crisis of the mass protests in other regional countries, primarily Syria, turned the inspiration of Tunisian case into desperation. The failures of Arab Uprisings movements in various countries proved that the management of the post-revolutionary period and developing an all-

¹³² Hinnebusch, Raymond. "The Arab Uprisings and the MENA Regional States System". *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, 11, No.42, (Summer, 2014): 7-27.

encompassing politics for the main segments of the society, economic capabilities is almost as important as the revolution itself.

Yet again, the Arab Uprisings include significant successes in the regional term despite being overshadowed by the failures. Firstly, the mass protests in the region developing in an unexpected way especially for the Western world clearly showed the righteous desire of the Arab communities for more fair representation right and economic well-being. With this change, the pace of democratic transformation in the Middle East, at least in the level of societal psyche, has accelerated. As Gregory Gause suggests, "The Arab Uprising indeed have opened the way to democratic development in the region, but the road is strewn with landmines."¹³³

This general phenomenon of Arab Public Uprisings in the Middle East encircled Syria only a year after it started. In this sense, Syria seems as another ring of the chain. However, unlike all the other regional countries, the uprisings in the Syrian Case, turned into a full-fledged civil war with the participation of various interest groups and with the emergence of hundreds of thousand of death toll as well as millions of refugees and internally-displaced people. At this point, we need to raise the question "why has Syria, not any other (except Yemen) regional country, entered into the spiral of civil war and endless violence?" After such a long period as 48 years that has been under the leadership of father Hafez Assad and son Bashar Assad, what could have triggered the sparkle of the conflict in a country where the law enforcement and intelligence apparatus have been overly and "successfully" used in order to pacify any oppositional voice. To answer the question "What was specific about Syria?"; a range of political, social, ethnic, economic elements peculiar to Syria need to be examined. Arab Uprisings served as an outside immediate cause for the Syrian Civil War. However, as Mahdi Karimi puts forward, "lack of free and fair elections, low level of rule of law, high level of corruption, lack of voice and accountability, exclusion of different interest groups, inequity and government ineffectiveness in Syria" resulted in the emergence of the Syrian

¹³³ Gause, F.G "America and the Regional Powers in a Transforming Middle East". Published electronically <http://www.bibme.org/citation-guide/apa/website/>

peaceful protests.¹³⁴ and made the Syrian society a receptive audience of region-wide uprisings.

Raymond Hinnebusch articulates that “uprisings made what had been two previous major players, Egypt and Syria, arenas of competition among the contending regional powers”.¹³⁵ Hence, Syria, once united under Hafez Assad a “pivotal Arab state...a regional player able to punch well above its weight” turned into “an arena for the struggle of external forces, all seeking to shift, through it, the regional balance of power in their favour”.¹³⁶ This proves that Syria “was similar enough to be caught up in events, but different enough to have quite different, far bloodier outcomes”.¹³⁷ The Syrian Civil War turned into a protracted civil war owing to a wide range of factors. Despite growing protests and overall rebellion against the Syrian government, Assad regime in Syria continued to hold power as a result of various reasons such as an inadequate and hesitant reaction to the regime's human rights violations from the international actors, the outside support for the regime mainly by Russia and Iran and fragmentation of the oppositional groups. Christopher Phillips attributes the escalation of the Syrian conflict and its transformation into a full-fledged civil war to “balanced interventions” and indicates that “both the regime and its opponents received external support from multiple sources but not sufficient for either to achieve military victory or force the other side to negotiate”.¹³⁸ Before mentioning the role of the external interventions and power dynamics, it will be appropriate the internal factors setting the background for the Syrian war such as the historical legacy, the state formation and structure of the regime.

¹³⁴ Karimi, Mahdi. "Poor Governance and Civil War in Syria". *Turkish Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 5, No.1, (2018): 49-71.

¹³⁵ Ibid

¹³⁶ Hinnebusch, Raymond. "Syria: From 'Authoritarian Upgrading' to Revolution". *International Affairs*, 88, No.1, (2012): 95-113.

¹³⁷ Phillips, Christopher. *The Battle For Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*, (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2016).

¹³⁸ Phillips, Ibid.

4.2.1 The Internal Factors

Historically, Syria remained within the Ottoman Empire borders for approximately 400 years. Then named as Bilad al-Sham, Syria was exposed to the Great Powers' orientalist politics after Ottoman Empire lost its control over the territory during the First World War. As a result of famous Sykes-Picot agreement between France and Britain and the following San Remo Conference in 1920, Syria was dominated by France as its mandate for nearly twenty-six years. Likewise other regional countries, Syria gained its independence in 1946 following the World War II which weakened both France as well as Britain's influence all over the world. Hence from the very beginning of its sovereignty, Syria was “born frustrated and revisionist”. Imperialist legacy promoted the division of the historic Bilad al-Sham into four national states, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine”. Furthermore, it led to the founding of Israel in Palestine. This situation, on the one hand, made Syria adhere to Pan-Arab subra-state identity and led to strong efforts and expectations for the establishment of a greater Arab state. On the other hand, it has been composed of various ethnic and religious sub-state identities and “divided on sharp class lines”.¹³⁹ Even from Ottoman and mandate periods onwards, Syrian territories hosted a mosaic of different identities all together. Modern Syria was established on this heterogeneous demographic structure. While the majority consists of Sunni Arabs (70%), there are various ethnic and sectarian groups such as Nusayris (Alawites 12%), Kurds (9%) Druze (12%), Greek Orthodox Christians (8%), Armenian Christians (2%), Ismailis (2%) Turkmens, Assyrians (1%). All together, Syria, as an artificial state, have “compete(d) for the loyalty of its citizens with sub- and suprapstate identities”.¹⁴⁰

Likewise Tajikistan, the population groups are fragmented regionally. While Sunni Arabs spread through the country, the Nusayris populated in Jabal Nusayriyyah, the western mountain region along the Mediterranean. The Kurds, who

¹³⁹ See Hinnebusch, Raymond. *The International Politics of the Middle East*, (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 2003).

¹⁴⁰ Hinnebusch, Raymond. “Syria: From ‘Authoritarian Upgrading’ to Revolution”. *International Affairs*, 88, No.1, (2012): 95-113.

are mainly Sunni, are concentrated in the northeast and northwest near the Turkish border. The Druze reside mostly in the south, near the Jordanian border and in the southwest along the Lebanese border and Israeli-annexed Golan Heights. As observed in Tajikistan, the geographical structure of Syria intensifies the social fragmentation. To highlight this reality, in *Sectarianism in the Middle East* it is stated that;

The Jabal Nusayriyyah mountain range served to geographically separate the Alawis from other sects and allowed them to maintain a homogeneous identity until modern times, leading historians to term them, like the Druze in Lebanon, a compact minority.¹⁴¹

Within this fragmented mosaic, the dominant group in the Syrian politics after its independence was the landholder urban Sunni class that had always been at the center of political structure since the Ottoman periods. In addition to sectarian differences, the fact that the peasantry was mostly composed of the minority groups such as Nusayris, Ismailis and Druze created a historical antagonism in the class dimension as well.¹⁴² While once the ruling elite represented by urban Sunni landholders, Syria witnessed “a revolution from above” by a highly radicalized army composed of “rural and plebeian”, nationalist social composition.¹⁴³

Within this social composition, the Baath (Renaissance) Party which was founded by Michel Aflak, a Greek Orthodox Christian and Salah al Din al Bitar, a Sunni Muslim in 1947 played a significant role in the emergence of modern Syria and achieved to appeal different interest groups thanks to its secular and Arab-nationalist ideology in addition to its socialist perspective towards the feudal system. John Galvani underlined Baath’s becoming a center of attraction for different groups by saying;

¹⁴¹ Robinson, Heather. Ben Connable, David E. Thaler. Ali G. Scotten. *Sectarianism in the Middle East: Implications for the United States*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2018.

¹⁴² Salık, Nuri. “Hafız Esad Rejimi’nin Ortaya Çıkışı”. *Ortadoğu Analiz*.7, no.66 (2015): 6-8. published electronically, http://orsam.org.tr/d_hbanaliz/2nurisalik.pdf (Date Accessed, 10 January 2019)

¹⁴³ Hinnebusch, Ibid.

The Baath's appeal to the rural communities, especially the minority communities, stemmed from its non-sectarian pan-Arabism, its (undefined) interest in social reform, its anti communism, and its role in aiding members of the rural communities to gain status within the military.¹⁴⁴

As indicated above, the rural minority groups such as Nusayris increased in number within the Syrian military and after the coups in 1949 and 1963, the existing Sunni officers began to lose their positions to junior Nusayri officers. As parallel to Nusayri's increasing influence within the military, Baathist army officers also gradually began to dominate the politics more than the civilian Baathists. Hafez Assad, one of the Nusayri army officer, was a member of the Baath Party supporters in the Syrian military that seized power with a coup d'état in 1963. From this period onwards, the Syrian politics witnessed an elimination of urban Sunni landholders while Hafez Assad gained power following several coup d'états. Finally, after Hafez Assad came to power with a coup in 1970 and became the first Nusayri president of Syria, he started a sudden political transformation and collected power in his hands by authorizing his family and his close circle for the top positions. On the one hand, in order to prevent any oppositional movement and a coup initiative, he began to assign Nusayris to critical high-rank entities. Hafez Assad, on the other hand, authorized some Sunni-elites both in the cabinet and army so as to avoid negative sentiments from the Sunni majority. Under Hafez Assad's leadership, Syria turned into a police and intelligence state. As William Kirtley suggests, "Hafez al-Assad developed the means to control and oppress his enemies...He used Military Intelligence Directorate, the Mukhabarat, to torture, kill, and imprison those who opposed his regime."¹⁴⁵ The Hama Massacre in 1982 significantly reveals the dimensions of how heavily Syrian president relied on his law enforcement officers. In a brutal fashion, Hafez Assad indiscriminately ordered the slaughtering of thousands of civilians after the Muslim Brotherhood and Syrian Sunnis had rebelled over his intervention into Lebanese Civil War to the detriment of fighting Muslim groups. Calling Hama Massacre as the "first round of Syria's Civil War", Glenn

¹⁴⁴ Galvani, John. "Syria and the Baath Party." *MERIP Reports*, no. 25 (1974): 3-16.

¹⁴⁵ Kirtley, William. William R. Curtis "Syria From Uprising to Civil War". *National Social Science Proceedings*, 53(2013): 59-73. electronically published
https://www.nssa.us/journals/pdf/NSS_Proceedings_2013_SF.pdf (Date Accessed 10 January 2019)

Robinson indicates that; "the regime learned from this experience that mass violence was the smart response to unrest — a lesson that was applied particularly brutally in 2011."¹⁴⁶ As understood from the Hama massacre, in spite of political and sectarian antagonism in the country, the oppressive and despotic practices of the regime achieved to repress the opposing groups for a long time. However, communities have a threshold of fear and when that threshold was surpassed; a window of opportunity for revolutions is opened. What happened in 2011 is partly about this window of opportunity that triggered by the success stories of Arab Uprisings. Although Bashar Assad came to power with a promising reformist outlook, it did not take long for him to apply his father's authoritarian methods to the politics.

Following his father's death in 2000, Bashar Assad became the president with a modernizer reputation. In his first year, he indeed followed a transparent politics and held a reformist attitude which was called as Damascus Spring. He ordered the release of 600 political prisoners. Hinnebusch entitles these efforts for improving the old administrative architecture as "authoritarian upgrading".¹⁴⁷ To this regard, instead of addressing the root problems of the state inherited from the "built-in vulnerabilities" such as the domination of Alawi political elite provoking discontent among the majority Sunni population, over-militarization in the expense of weak economic base and fiscal deficit mainly sustained by external rent. Bashar Assad adopted a series of techniques to "modernize authoritarianism" in Syria. The techniques of "authoritarian upgrading" range from the attempts to open the economy to the world market which later was hampered by the failure of the peace processs with Israel, a rapid reconstruction of the social base of the regime, use of foreign policy to promote nationalist legitimacy, some degree of political decompression, taking advantage from the fragmentation of the Islamic public sphere.¹⁴⁸ Nonetheless, this reformist environment called as Damascus Spring, did

¹⁴⁶ Robinson, Glenn. "Syria's Long Civil War". *Current History*. (2012): 331-336

¹⁴⁷ Hinnebusch, Raymond. "Syria: From 'Authoritarian Upgrading' to Revolution". *International Affairs*, 88, No.1, (2012): 95-113.

¹⁴⁸ Hinnebusch, Ibid.

not last long and in 2002 the oppositional groups began to be repressed again. The hesitation towards a quick and uncontrollable transformation may have affected Assad's U-turn. All in all, forty-eight years of one family rule that has used repressive state apparatus on the majority, the lack of freedom of expression, high unemployment rates, inequity, the problems regarding the rule of law, the existence of emergency law since 1963 set the background for the civil war that caused nearly 450.000 deaths, 5 million refugees and 6 million internally-displaced people. To conclude, Arab Uprisings functioned as a spark for peaceful demonstrations and the regime's uncompromising brutal repression instead of genuine democratic concessions and lastly the external interference made Syria surrender to the grimmest episode of its history in March 2011.

4.3 The Civil War: The Conflict Situation

In March 2011, the arrest of several youths having scrawled an anti-government graffiti "Freedom", "Down with the regime" (popular slogan of Arab Uprisings), "Your turn Doctor", in the southern city of Deraa fanned the flame of the conflicts. Deraa is significant in the sense that the conflicts derive from mostly economic and social pressures rather than sectarian problems, although the sectarian divisions have hardened as the war continues. Deraa is a rural province heavily impoverished by the drought between 2006-10 which caused migration of many farming families to the cities.

Mobilization of various internal groups was based more on where members lived and their relationship with the government than on religious affiliation. This is particularly the case given that the uprising began in the southern Syrian town of Deraa, a poor agricultural region of mixed sects that suffered the loss of government services under al-Assad's economic policies.¹⁴⁹

Upon the arrest of the youths, the crowd demanding their release was repelled by the security forces. The harsh repression and security forces' opening fire towards dozens made the protests spread throughout the country. On March 15, protesters with the demands for democratic reforms, the release of political prisoners, the lift of emergency law marched in the capital, Damascus. After two-weeks of protests, the

¹⁴⁹ Robinson, Heather. Ben Connable, David E. Thaler. Ali G. Scotten. *Sectarianism in the Middle East: Implications for the United States*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2018.

President Assad was blaming the foreign conspirators to challenge his regime in his first speech following incidents where there is no offering for reforms.¹⁵⁰ The return of the mutilated body of Hamza Al Khatib, a 13 years-old school boy in Deraa, to his family increased the tension and anger all over the country and the photo of his corpse which was distributed through media would become one of the most striking symbol of regime brutality. There was going to be hundreds of such photos as the war unfolded.

The civil uprising with peaceful demands devolved into an armed rebellion in July 2011 when an opposition militia was formed with the name, Free Syrian Army (FSA), by some defectors from the Syrian army. The international society (mainly the US, the EU, Arab League, Qatar, Turkey, Saudi Arabia) began to react to the Syrian government by imposing sanctions and recalling ambassadors from Syria forcing Bashar Assad into a diplomatic isolation. However, Bashar al Assad, with the support from the countries such as Russia, Iran and China, held the "foreign conspirators" responsible for the uprising and avoided stepping back. Christopher Phillips views the support of various actors for both the regime and the opposition as an important and central factor for the stalemate and escalation of the Syrian conflict. While explaining the systemic conditions in the region into which the Syrian conflict was born, he underlines the gap between the post-American Middle East conditions, weakening of the US unilateral power as a result of both the failures of the Iraqi intervention, Barrack Obama's preference for "offshore balancing" and the regional perception anticipating a determinant US action against the Syrian regime fostered by the US-led international operation to Libya. To complicate the situation further, despite its unwillingness for a direct intervention and lack of enough knowledge about the internal dynamics of Syria, the US adopted a hegemonic rhetoric calling Assad to step down which encourage the recruitments and determination of the opposition. By the way, while the other main external actors such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey alongside with the United Kingdom, France, UAE, were determining their positions and preferring to support the oppositional figures that

¹⁵⁰ Marsh, Katherine. Martin Chulov. "Assad blames conspirators for Syrian Protests." The Guardian, 30 March 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/30/syrian-protests-assad-blames-conspirators>

contributed their national and regional interests best; Russia, China and Iran were gradually deepening their support for Assad regime by criticizing the US-led international operations against the domestic affairs of other states. To summarize the power dynamics in Syria with Hinnebusch's words;

While the Uprising was essentially indigenous, external forces sought to use it to their advantage. Qatar's al-Jazeera amplified the Uprising while the Saudis funneled money and arms to tribes...The Assad regime increasingly relied on Iran for financial and counter-insurgency support, on Hizbollah fighters and Iraqi oil.¹⁵¹

As a result, by Autumn 2011, the armed clashes increased between the government troops, Free Syrian Army as well as local militias. In 2012, the United Nations (UN) organized Geneva Communique in order to create a road map for discussions to found a transitional government for Syria. By the time, a new umbrella group of Syrian oppositions was established under the name the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, which was recognized by the international community as a legitimate body of representation for Syrian public. In the field, the opposition began to force the government troops withdraw from significant territory while the Assad regime started to use chemical weapons against the rebels which would increasingly augment the death toll.

In 2013, jihadism alongside sectarianism and Kurdish nationalism came into forefront.¹⁵² the radical "Islamist" groups took a center stage to fill the power vacuum all over the country. While the Nusrah Front, an al-Qaeda affiliate, effectively operated alongside other opposition groups, a new terrorist entity was established by Abubakr al-Baghdadi called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS / DAESH). Between Iraq and Syria, the ISIS expanded its control area, centered around the city of al-Raqqah. What motivated the US-led international community to take a more active role and organize air strikes was this expansion of ISIS. Moreover, Russia, at the invitation of Bashar al-Assad, also carried out its first airstrikes in Syria in 2015

¹⁵¹ Hinnebusch, Raymond. "Syria: From 'Authoritarian Upgrading' to Revolution". *International Affairs*, 88, No.1, (2012): 95-113.

¹⁵² See Phillips, Christopher. *The Battle For Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*, (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2016)

with the claim to target ISIS. With the boost of Russian, Iranian, Lebanese Hezbollah support, Assad succeeded to take over the control of rebel-held areas such as Homs, Aleppo, Palmyra, Deraa, the southern border with Jordan and the Mediterranean coastline while the rebel groups composed of primarily the National Front for Liberation (part of Free Syrian Army) and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (Al Nusra Front) were narrowed to Idlib. By the way, with the support of US-led international powers, the Kurdish group known as YPG (People's Protection Unit or SDF/ Syrian Democratic Forces) controlled a long borderline in the north while the ISIS lost its large swath of territory and was stock in a desert area near Iraqi border.

All in all, today the Syrian civil war was no longer an armed conflict between Assad regime and opposition groups but it turned into a quagmire where various global as well as regional powers intervened and manipulated the power vacuum for their own benefit. There is no doubt that the interests of the EU, the United States, Russia, Iran and China clash with one another, which poses another stalemate against a peaceful political solution for the war. The efforts of all these external actors alongside the conflicting domestic groups deserve a meticulous exploration. Nonetheless, in order to comply with the scope of my analysis, I will convey the Iranian and Russian positions regarding the war. Therefore, in the next chapters, I will discuss initially the Russian and secondly Iranian foreign policy in 2000s and especially in regards to the Syrian Civil War.

4.4 Russia's Foreign Policy in 2000s and Syrian Civil War

Neorealism offers that "as nature abhors a vacuum, so international politic abhors unbalanced power. Faced by unbalanced power, some states try to increase their own strength, or they ally with others to bring the international distribution of power into balance".¹⁵³ While discussing the Russian foreign policy in 2000s, this well-known phrase that belongs to Kenneth Waltz needs to be born in mind. During the tenure of Russian President Vladimir Putin whose rule over the country has lasted –directly or indirectly- since 1999, Russian foreign policy proceeded in a way to

¹⁵³ Waltz, Kenneth. "NATO's Expansion A Realist View." *Contemporary Security Policy*, 21, No.2, (2000):23-38.

counter the unbalanced power, the United States and reconsolidate its own international position. Kenneth Waltz states that “for a country to choose not to become a great power is a structural anomaly.”¹⁵⁴ According to structural theory, “states strive to maintain their positions in the system. Thus, in their twilight years great powers try to arrest or reverse their decline”.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, a country like Russia which has a superpower background naturally desire to regain its status.

Moreover, the continuing threat perception on the US side against Russia and accordingly the policies such as democracy promotion, NATO enlargement as well as EU expansion ignited the already existing Russian aspirations for becoming an important polar within a multipolar world system. John Mearsheimer explains;

The United States, which has been unable to leave the Cold War behind, has treated Russia as a potential threat since the early 1990s and ignored its protests about NATO’s expansion and its objections to America’s plan to build missile defense systems in Eastern Europe.¹⁵⁶

To counter the US unipolarity, Russia has acted within the scope of its material power. While pursuing a more reconciliatory, pragmatic and cooperative foreign policy at the beginning of 2000s, Russian foreign policy has become more assertive, active and even aggressive and this conversion into aggressiveness followed an increasing pattern. Today, Russia expresses an overly-confident and unilateral policies not only within its "near abroad" as seen in Ukraine crisis but also in the Middle East primarily in Syria. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the United States were heavily intervening in other states’ affairs and fighting peripheral wars. As the Syrian case suggests firmly, some implications of the Cold War era such as peripheral wars began to emerge again. As is known, Neorealism stresses the importance of the material conditions of the states which strive for survival in a self-

¹⁵⁴ Waltz, Kenneth. "Structural Realism after The Cold War". *International Security*, 25, No.1, (Summer 2000):5-41

¹⁵⁵ Waltz, Kenneth. "The Emerging Structure of International Politics". *International Security*, 18, No.2, (Autumn, 1993):44-79.

¹⁵⁶ Mearsheimer, John. "Getting Ukraine Wrong". *The New York Times*. 13 March 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/14/opinion/getting-ukraine-wrong.html>

help world. Within the framework of Neorealist theory, Russia's "large population, vast resources and geographic presence in Europe and Asia compensate for its many weaknesses."¹⁵⁷ The changes in its policies throughout 2000s from a reconciliatory attitude towards a more assertive one confirm Waltz's suggestion that "profound change in a country's international situation produces radical change in its external behavior."¹⁵⁸ In this chapter, the correlation between the profound change in Russia's international situation and the changes in its external behavior will be examined alongside with the causes and effects of these changes. Within the Neorealist framework, Russian policies towards Syrian civil war will be analyzed.

As mentioned in detail in the chapter covering the Tajik Civil War, Russian foreign policy has been affected by various concepts ranging from pro-Westernism to Euroasianism which prevail one another according to leadership preferences, international and domestic developments. The post-Putin foreign policy of Russia could be roughly divided into two periods. Putin's conciliatory and cooperative attitude towards the US and Europe puts stamp to his first presidential years until nearly 2003, when Russia mainly applied its soft power in international affairs. The second period could be depicted as a more assertive, confident and reactionary foreign policy that uses hard power following the color revolutions in the former Soviet territories and growing Western enlargement towards not only the Middle East but also the Central Asia / Transcaucasia region which was regarded as a national threat for Moscow.

Putin has followed a pragmatist Eurasian foreign policy.¹⁵⁹ Likewise Euroasianist, Putin underlines that Russia is a Euroasianist power (neither European nor Asian) having a peculiar identity as well as strategic geopolitical importance and

¹⁵⁷ Waltz, Kenneth. "The Emerging Structure of International Politics". *International Security*, 18, No.2, (Autumn,1993):44-79.

¹⁵⁸ Waltz, Kenneth."Structural Realism after The Cold War". *International Security*, 25, No.1, (Summer 2000):5-41

¹⁵⁹ Sönmez, Sait."Moskova'nın Kutuplaşma Çabaları: Putin Dönemi Rus Dış Politikası." *Avrasya Etüdləri* 37, no.1 (2010): 37-76.

puts emphasis on multi-polarism. In both domestic and international platforms, he strongly opposes the idea that the US is a sole superpower dominating the world politics. In the Foreign Policy Doctrine released in 2000, it is emphasized that "[t]here is a growing trend towards the establishment of a unipolar structure of the world with economic and power domination of the United States."¹⁶⁰ In this strategic document, it is clearly stated that Moscow regards these unilateral actions of the United States as a destabilizing factor which provokes tensions and arm race and seeks ways to establish a multipolar international system. Moreover, Russian Federation's foreign policy, in this document, was based on "mutually advantageous pragmatism" and Russia was describes as "one of the largest Eurasian powers."

To attain the objectives in this doctrine such as establishing equal relations with the Western world and becoming one of the prestigious poles worldwide, Putin has developed the relations with the European states at the beginning of his presidency. He signed a number of trade and energy contracts including Nord Stream Energy project with Germany and other EU states. Moreover, he focused on Russia's relations with non-Western rising powers such as China, India, Brazil, South Africa as well as CIS countries and Middle Eastern states by giving weight to Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS. In this sense, Russia searches ways to "ally with others to bring the international distribution of power into balance".¹⁶¹ Furthermore, Moscow generally aims at becoming an independent polar in a multi-polar international system dominated by interest-based cooperation and rivalry.¹⁶²

Thomas Ambrossio views Putin's advocacy of multi-polar international system as a "defensive act rather than an offensive one" and argues that the Russian Federation (RF) felt threatened by unipolarity's supply of opportunities for the US

¹⁶⁰ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*. Moscow. 2000.

¹⁶¹ Waltz, Kenneth. "NATO's Expansion A Realist View." *Contemporary Security Policy*, 21, No.2, (2000):23-38.

¹⁶² Sönmez, Sait. "Moskova'nın Kutuplaşma Çabaları: Putin Dönemi Rus Dış Politikası." *Avrasya Etüdleri* 37, no.1 (2010): 37-76.

military, geopolitical and economic encroachment. In this regard, Moscow attempted to strengthen its position and protect its critical security interests especially in its "near abroad" consisting of Eastern Europe, the CIS countries and the South Caucasus. While defining security dilemma, Robert Jervis explains that "in order to protect themselves, states seek to control or at least to neutralize areas on their borders."¹⁶³ Russia views the near abroad as its sphere of influence and perceives any potential danger in this region as an existential threat to its security.

Yet again, although Putin's foreign policy recalls Euroasianism with its emphasis on near abroad and multi-polarity, it does not follow a hardline tone and possesses certain degree of pragmatism especially when his first years of presidency are considered. After the 9/11 terror attack, as the first international leader that held a condolatory phone conversation with his counterpart George W Bush, Putin offered help and cooperation to Washington in its war against extremism and terrorism. He proposed to provide Russian airspace for humanitarian deliveries and operations and supply intelligence information for the US' war against Al-Qaeda. According to Neorealism, states opt for competition over cooperation because of the self-help system and never-ending suspicion towards one another. Yet, notwithstanding the barriers to cooperation, Neorealism also puts forward that "states do cooperate in a realist world...balance of power logic often causes states to form alliances and cooperate against common enemies...Rivals as well as allies cooperate".¹⁶⁴ The rise of radicalism in Afghanistan near its borders is a destabilizing factor for Russia given its extensive Muslim population. From its experience of invasion in Afghanistan as well as of fighting against the Chechen insurgency, Russia is well aware that fighting against extremism is hard and costly which requires cooperation with the US against this common enemy. In this sense, Russia acted as a rational actor trying to preserve its interests with the strategy of cooperation.

¹⁶³ Jervis, Robert. "Cooperation Under Security Dilemma". *World Politics*, 30, No.2, (January 1978):167-218.

¹⁶⁴ Mearsheimer, John. "The False Promise of International Institutions." *International Security*, 19, No.3, (Winter 1994-95):5-49

However Moscow's cooperative approach began to be replaced by a more aggressive and reactionary after 2003 upon the US invasion of Iraq. A number of factors contributed to Russian policy change after this invasion. As is known, Putin took over from his predecessor Yeltsin a chaotic country dealing with economic burdens on the verge of bankruptcy with its debt to International Monetary Fund (IMF). Post-Putin Russia has passed through a rapid economic recovery and growth which led to a decrease in economic dependency and thus replacement of underdog position in terms of foreign policy. Neorealism asserts that “countries with great power economies have become great powers, whether or not reluctantly”.¹⁶⁵ The end of the Cold War with economic decline of the USSR proved that Moscow needs to aim at an enduring economic growth in order to increase its international capabilities. According to Kenneth Waltz, “Great power status cannot be maintained without a certain economic capability”.¹⁶⁶ All in all, Russian economy has witnessed a sustainable growth trend and successful integration into the global economy which has turned Russia into a focal point in regards to foreign investment. As appropriately suggested, “there is no aspect of contemporary Russia that has changed more rapidly and unexpectedly than its economic situation”.¹⁶⁷

To achieve economic goals, Putin administration motivated the exports of energy resources and steamed up the military-industrial complex. Russia's \$9.889 GDP per capita before Putin was almost tripled by 2017 and reached \$27.900. While the rates of unemployment and inflation fell, the increasing monthly wages and pensions contributed to the recovery of life quality of Russian citizens. Post-Putin Russian economy has greatly benefitted from the instabilities in the energy regions as well as the rise of oil prices. Thus, Putin administration achieved to increase oil and gas exports to the existing markets and find new markets. Therefore, the shrinking of

¹⁶⁵ Waltz, Kenneth. “Structural Realism after the Cold War”. *International Security*, 25, No.1, (Summer 2000):5-41

¹⁶⁶ Waltz, Kenneth. “The Emerging Structure of International Politics.” *International Security*, 18, No.2, (Autumn,1993):44-79.

¹⁶⁷ “Economic Change in Russia”. CSIS. published electronically, <https://www.csis.org/programs/russia-and-eurasia-program/archives/economic-change-russia> (Date accessed 10 January 2019)

public debt and increase of foreign reserves helped Russia to have a successful pass through the economic crisis in 2008 and the recession of 2014-16 resulted from the sanctions and fall in oil prices. This economic recovery not only helped Putin to consolidate his grip on power by facilitating much more public support but it also helped to lift Russia's prestige in the international arena, which was one of his key objectives.

Alongside with economic independency and prosperity, Putin's successful attempt to eliminate the Oligarch's grip over the Russian politics as well as his decision to divide eighty-nine regions of the country into seven federal districts headed by a presidential representative strengthened his hands in the domestic politics. The central control over the domestic politics enabled Putin to have a room for maneuver in terms of foreign politics.

In addition to the economic growth, the NATO's eastern enlargement contributed heavily to the change of Moscow's external behavior towards a more aggressive direction. Waltz argues that; the NATO enlargement into the USSR's old arena "weakens those Russians most inclined towards liberal democracy and a market economy. It strengthens Russians of opposite inclination....It pushes Russia towards China instead of drawing Russia towards Europe and America."¹⁶⁸ Therefore, while asserting his power within the country with appropriate economy policies, Putin was uncomfortable with the international developments resulted from NATO's eastern expansion into the former Soviet territories.

Starting from 1999 when NATO forces conducted air strikes against Serbia because of Kosovo crisis, Russia has clearly expressed its uneasiness for NATO's unilateral actions without consulting UN Security Council's decisions. In 2000 Foreign Concept of Russia it is stated that;

NATO's present-day political and military guidelines do not coincide with security interests of the Russian Federation and occasionally directly contradict them. This primarily concerns the provisions of NATO's new strategic concept, which do not exclude the conduct of use-of-force operations...without the sanction of the UN

¹⁶⁸ Waltz, Kenneth. "NATO's Expansion A Realist View." *Contemporary Security Policy*, 21, No.2, (2000):23-38.

Security Council. Russia retains its negative attitude towards the expansion of NATO.¹⁶⁹

Russian administration has always perceived NATO actions as provocations that damage the mutual trust. In years, Russian reactions against NATO get hardened and Putin begin to consult an increasingly hard power tools in order to secure its interests throughout the Soviet territories. For example, Moscow decided to cut the natural gas transmission to Ukraine in 2006 upon the Orange Revolution that led Ukraine to improve its relations with the US, EU and NATO. Likewise, Russia was uncomfortable with Georgia's application for NATO membership and the Rose Revolution in 2003 that brought a Western-supported administration led by Mikheil Saakasvili into power by toppling down long-term Russian ally President Eduard Shevarnadze. When Georgia intervened in South Ossetia in order to protect the central control over this region, Russia conducted a military intervention against Georgian army in 2008 and became one of very few countries that recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia as sovereign states. This has not been the sole example of Russian military expansion as in 2014 upon the replacement of pro-Russian President Victor Yanukovych by pro-Western president Petro Poroshenko, Russian army occupied and annexed Crimea.

Neorealism assumes that, “because there is no world government to protect states from one another, major powers are acutely sensitive to threats-especially near their borders- and they sometimes act ruthlessly to address potential dangers. International law and human rights concerns take a back seat when vital security issues are at stake”.¹⁷⁰ In line with this assumption, the Russian military expansion seems understandable and could be analyzed within the framework of a not only an aggressive offense but also a defensive action against the NATO's increasing influence throughout the Soviet territories. US unilateral interventions in the region with the excuse of democracy promotion as well as war on terror as viewed in Iraqi case strengthened Moscow's threat perception against the US. As is known, the US

¹⁶⁹ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*. Moscow. 2000.

¹⁷⁰ Mearsheimer, John. “Getting Ukraine Wrong”. *The New York Times*. 13 March 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/14/opinion/getting-ukraine-wrong.html>

unilaterally decided to conduct a multinational operation against Iraq in spite of the opposition of the United Nations Security Council members such as Russia, France and China. All in all, Kremlin perceived the US pre-emptive actions and its attempts to promote Western values with overlooking the UN sanctions as well as the "color revolutions" after which leaders hostile to Russian influence came to power as threat to its special interests. At the Munich Conference on Security Policy in 2007, Putin criticized the US and unipolar world system by saying; "today we are witnessing an almost uncontained hyper use of force – military force –in international relations, force that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts."¹⁷¹ Moscow points out the United Nations as the sole international decision maker.

In terms of Russian outlook towards the Middle East after 2010s, three lenses of Russian foreign policy come into forefront, as Christopher Phillips argues. According to the first one, the domestic security lens, Russia is anxious about any spillover effect or establishment of ties between the radical Islamists in the Middle East and the secessionists in the North Caucasus, as a result of its conflicting relations with the Chechen insurgents. Secondly, the regional economic lens developed especially after its economic upheaval forces the Kremlin to prioritize its expanded trade relations with the regional states. Lastly, Russia views the Middle East from a geopolitical/geostrategic lens which compels Moscow to gain a zero-sum perspective. In this sense, Russia regards the US' gains in the region as its losses and vice versa. Phillips points out that;

In Putin's view of the world, denying the US in Syria was an important motivation for backing Assad. As one insider remarked privately, 'the key word for Moscow is not "Assad" but "intervention". Some suspected Putin would have no problem with an internal coup against Assad, as long as it was not interpreted as a western victory.'¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Putin, Vladimir. "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy," 10 February 2007, Munich, President of Russia Official Web Portal, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2007/02/10/0138_type82912type82914type82917type84779_118135.shtml.

¹⁷² Phillips, Christopher. *The Battle For Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*, (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2016)

Hence, the US relative retreat from the Middle East open the way for Russia to present itself as a great power and a third force to the regional states. To this regard, the Kremlin interpreted the Arab Uprisings and the Syrian conflict from a perspective that had been heavily influenced by its threat perception inherited from the color revolutions and its opposition to the US-led Western interference in domestic affairs of other states. As Alexey Malashenko points out;

The Kremlin at first interpreted the Arab Uprisings's events as the result of planned Western intervention specifically designed to decrease Moscow's hold on the region. Many in Russia saw in the protests an echo of the 'color revolutions'...that were believed to have been encouraged by Western powers.¹⁷³

In addition to the linkage between the color revolutions and the Arab Uprisings in the Russian psyche, the domestic political factors contributed to Russian critical perspective towards Arab Uprisings. Russia's negative stance against the Western media rhetoric that supports the democratic transition by public movements in the Arab world is quite understandable considering the protests in Russian cities primarily Moscow and St. Petersburg against Putin and Medvedev following the presidential elections in 2012.

Likewise the rest of the world, Russia was not able to foresee the emergence of Arab Uprisings and determine a consistent policy towards the popular unrests in the Middle East. Although the Kremlin initially welcomed the demands of Arab population for political reforms, its attitude rapidly got critical due to the spillover of the protests to the states such as Libya and Syria that Russia had developed deep political and economic ties. In 2000s following Putin's presidency, Russia began to pursue a more active role in the Middle East by establishing commercial relations and high-level diplomatic contacts. While Moscow's influence has been rising up and there has been discussions on its return to the Middle East, Arab Uprisings caught Russia off guard. In consequence, Russia followed a cautious and wait-and-see policy towards the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. Upon Tunisian Revolution, in Davos World Economic Forum, Medvedev stated that:

¹⁷³ Malashenko, Alexey. "Russia and the Arab Uprisings". *Carnegie Moscow Center*, October 2013, published electronically, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/russia_arab_spring2013.pdf (Date Accessed 10 January 2019)

What happened in Tunisia, I think, is quite a substantial lesson to learn for any authorities. The authorities must not simply sit in their convenient chairs but develop themselves together with the society. When the authorities don't catch up with the development of the society, and don't meet the aspiration of the people, the outcome is very sad.¹⁷⁴

While preserving its cautious attitude, Russia was uncomfortable with the rise of public movements and the rise of political Islam considering a spillover effect among its own Muslim population. Yet, Russia remained passive during the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. Russia's pragmatic and realist policy towards Tunisia was mostly resulted from its limited trade and political relations. Although abstaining from vetoing the UNSC resolution that impose no-flight zone in Libya that allowed the NATO military intervention against Muammer al Qaddafi, Russia reacted more assertively than the revolutions in the former two. As Roland Dannreuther suggests, "the Russian reaction rapidly became more critical as a result of Western military intervention into Libya."¹⁷⁵ Like Bashar al Assad, Qaddafi was a Kremlin ally and Russian companies had been conducting commercial projects in Libya. Establishing a similarity between the NATO intervention into Libya and "crusades", Putin (then the Prime Minister) harshly criticized the attempts to intervene into the domestic politics of a sovereign state and vowed to prevent "Libyan scenario" to be repeated in Syria.¹⁷⁶

The Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warns that "Some leaders of the coalition forces, and later the NATO secretary-general, called the Libyan operation a 'model' for the future. As for Russia, we will not allow anything like this to happen again in the future."¹⁷⁷ While the victory of the Libyan opposition with the help of

¹⁷⁴ Freeland, Chrystia. "In Egypt and Tunisia, Lessons for Auctocrats Everywhere." *The New York Times*, 3 February 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/04/world/middleeast/04iht-letter04.html>

¹⁷⁵ Dannreuther, Roland. "Russia and the Arab Uprisings: Supporting the Counter Revolution." *Journal of European Integration* 37, No.1 (2015): 77-94

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. "Sergey Lavrov's Remarks and Answers to Media Questions at Joint Press Conference with UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah Al Nahyan", 2011.

the Western states cost one of Moscow's allies and damaged its leverage in the Middle East, the ongoing political disarray in post-Qaddafi Libya strengthened Russian rhetoric and led to hesitation in the Western side about the necessities of such military actions. The Russian role in Syria, therefore, became much more assertive in the face of hesitant Western world.

Unlike the Libyan case, in order to support Bashar Assad, Putin applied its veto power in the UNSC where he often points out as the sole international decision-taking mechanism. Russia's multi-dimensional support for Syrian regime that begins with diplomatic and bureaucratic assistance and continues with military-intelligence coordination as well as direct involvement to the conflict in September 2015 has based on various reasons. First and foremost, Damascus has been a loyal ally of Moscow and a client of its products during the Cold War when the strategic relations between the USSR and Syria against the Western bloc including Turkey and Israel in the region established a significant connection between the two. During the Cold War, the USSR supported Syria in the Suez Crisis in 1956. Moreover, the USSR gained a strategically-located naval base in Tartus in 1971 by the Mediterranean. Russia-Syria relations remained contact after the Cold War as well. In 2005, Russia wrote off 73% of Soviet-era debt of Syria. The Cold War historical legacy also pushed Syria to get involved among very few states that supported Russia during its fight against Georgia in 2008. Therefore, by taking side with Syrian regime, Russia not only did what a strategic alliance necessitates but also it gave a strong message to the world that it is a reliable ally and foul-weather friend.

Moscow's support for Bashar Assad serves also its interests about the Mediterranean. As is known, Tartus Naval Base is the sole Russian naval base outside of the former-Soviet territories. The base remained dormant during 1990s while Moscow was passing through an economic and political turmoil. Nevertheless, with economic upheaval and political empowerment in the post-Putin period, it is clear that Tartus will be of great significance in terms of Russian ambitions for becoming a global power. Indeed, Moscow's decision to modernize the base signals that Russia will continue to increase its effectiveness in the Mediterranean. In addition to Tartus, Russia and the Syrian regime signed a treaty in August 2015

which authorized Russia to turn Latakia/Hmeimim Air Base into a military air base indefinitely. The base also serves as an intelligence-gathering unit as Russia established in Latakia the biggest electronic intelligence facility outside of its Near Abroad.¹⁷⁸ Thus, supporting Assad and preventing any power transition in Syria is of vital importance for Russia to consolidate its existence in the Mediterranean and highlight itself as a global power.

Russia's interests in Syria also stem from its desire to balance the US power. With its military intervention in Syria, Russia carried its competition against Washington outside of the Near Abroad and showed its firm reaction against the US global hegemony and its insistence for a unipolar international system. According to Michael Kofman and Matthew Rojansky, "the cornerstone of Russian policy in Syria became preventing the United States from carrying out a Libya like intervention to overthrow Assad."¹⁷⁹ Thus, Syria symbolizes a lucrative front for Russia's power struggle against the West. The launch of rocket attacks from the Russian military vessels on the Mediterranean and the Caspian Sea clearly proves that Russia seeks to advertise its military capabilities as a great power. By supporting Assad with arms deal and direct intervention, Moscow has strengthened its military-industrial complex and find a real testing ground for its weaponry which eventually contributed to the modernization activities for its military equipment. During a conference on the results of the special operation in Syria on 30th January 2018, President Putin states that "215 advanced types of weapons and most types of hardware are already being used by the troops, and in general they reaffirmed their high performance" and continues "[t]he use of our weapons in Syria convincingly showed that in terms of combat equipment the Russian Army is one of the world's best".¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Gülşen, Halit. "Rusya'nın Suriye Müdahalesi: Kazanımlar, Kayıplar ve Riskler." *ORSAM*, 15 March 2017, published electronically, http://orsam.org.tr//d_hbanaliz/8_halitgulsen.pdf

¹⁷⁹ Kofman, Michael. Matthew Rojansky. "What Kind of Victory for Russia in Syria?" *Military Review*, March-April 2018, published electronically, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/Rojansky-Victory-for-Russia.pdf>

Lastly, while composing its Syrian policies, Russia aims at preventing the ISIS to become a real threat for its foreign and domestic politics. Whether a pretext for its military activities or not, the existence of the ISIS and growing threat of extremism find an extensive ground in Russia's official papers. In the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, it is indicated that "The global terrorist threat has reached a new high with the emergence of the Islamic State international terrorist organization and similar groups that have descended to an unprecedented level of cruelty in their violence."¹⁸¹ However, the targets of the Russian airstrikes have not been limited with the ISIS but included other much moderate oppositional groups.

As mentioned above, Russia's motivation to intervene the Syrian crisis by supporting Assad was based on various reasons. Up until 2018, Moscow used its veto power for the 12th time at the UNSC to prevent action directed at its Syrian ally. The draft resolutions that Russia vetoed range from condemnation and measures against Assad's government to sanction threats, from Aleppo truce to the investigation of chemical weapons.¹⁸² Moreover, Moscow supplied intelligence, military-technical assistance and weapons for Assad. With the invitation from the Syrian regime, Russia started airstrikes against the oppositional groups on 30th September 2015. Benefitting from the inability and inefficiency of Europe and the US-dominated Geneva process for supplying a well-formed and sustainable peace for Syria, Russia initiated Astana talks together with two important regional actors Turkey and Iran in late 2016. Astana process was successfully attached to the general UN peace process for Syria. By playing an active role in the Syrian conflict, Russia terminated its political isolation from the international arena which had resulted from the Ukraine crisis. High-level military talks between Moscow and Washington which had been

¹⁸⁰ President of Russia. *Military-practical Conference on the Results of the Special Operation in Syria*. Moscow, 30 January 2018 electronically published <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56750> (Date Accessed 10 January 2019)

¹⁸¹ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*. Moscow. 2000.

¹⁸² "Russia's 12 UN Vetoes on Syria". RTE, 11 April 2018, <https://www.rte.ie/news/world/2018/0411/953637-russia-syria-un-veto/>

suspended after the annexation of Crimea restarted following its military intervention in Syria. Thus, Russia proved that it is a significant global power in the international arena and is capable enough to change the balances in Syria. Russian political initiatives maintaining multidimensional talks gained recognition among the Syrian opposition groups as well. Among the military and security accomplishments, Russian navy gained a permanent existence on the Mediterranean. In addition, it deployed its warplanes at Hmeymim Air Base indefinitely. A few months after its military intervention, Assad succeeded to re-control the territories under the influence of the oppositional groups. Among them, the full control of the Syrian regime on Aleppo is regarded as an important success for Russia. It is uncertain that whether Assad will retain his power in the long run or not; however, Russia seems to assure its own interests in the Middle East in the near future. Furthermore, Moscow counteracted dozens of Caucasus-origin terrorist members through military operations conducted outside of the former Soviet territories.

All in all, in the short term it seems that the success in the ground boosts Russian aspirations for becoming a leading world power. "Russia may not have come to Syria with hopes of regaining power and status in the Middle East at the top of its agenda, but regional aspirations grew with each success on the battlefield."¹⁸³ In the long term, by his direct intervention into the Syrian conflict, Putin seems to guarantee- at least in the Syrian case-"his desire to stop all sitting leaders including himself- from being driven out of office by people power"¹⁸⁴

The Syrian Civil War continues to cover an extensive place in the Russian foreign policy agenda. If there is one more country that is occupied with this war more than Russia, for sure it is Iran. Unlike the Tajikistan Civil War, the Syrian Conflict attracted the full attention and pivotal consideration of Tehran. In the next chapter, I will examine the Iranian foreign policy during 2000s and its policies regarding the Syrian Civil War.

¹⁸³ Kofman, Michael. Matthew Rojansky. "What Kind of Victory for Russia in Syria?" *Military Review*, March-April 2018, published electronically, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/Rojansky-Victory-for-Russia.pdf>

¹⁸⁴ Leonard, Mark. "Russia's Great Game in Syria". *New Statesman*. 9-15 October 2015

4.5 Iran's Foreign Policy in 2000s and Syrian Civil War

As opposed to Russia which has being ruled by one-man, Putin, over 20 years by now, Iranian post of presidency has welcomed different actors from various political factions- in 1980s, the radical revolutionists led by Khomeini, in 1990s the pragmatists led by Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, in 90s and early 2000s the moderates led by Mohammad Khatami, since 2005s the hardliner conservatives led by Mahmoud Ahmedinejad and finally since 2013 the reformists led by Hassan Rouhani.¹⁸⁵ Therefore, there has been no sole center in the process of creating the foreign policy. The existence of various power factions as well as political parties illustrates that Tehran's foreign policy agenda is not determined by a single political body and there is not a single unit determining a particular tendency or motivation. This factionalism is of course an obligation for a democratically-ruled state. What I just want to point out is that while mentioning the Iranian foreign policy since 2000s, it is important not to overlook the handovers of government and accordingly changes of agenda priorities in different periods. However, it is also a solid fact that not every changes in the domestic policies reflect on foreign policies in a parallel way. Neorealism views states as black boxes and tends to not integrate domestic political variables while assessing the states' external behaviors. Lately, there are some arguments favoring the integration of domestic variables to generate consistent theories of foreign policy.¹⁸⁶ Yet, the widely-accepted Neorealist assumptions outline that the "international political theory does not include factors at the level of states".¹⁸⁷ The Structural Theory explains "how variations in conditions external to states push and pull them in various directions."¹⁸⁸ In this sense, it will not be wrong

¹⁸⁵ Rizvi, Mahtab Alam. "Velayet-e-Faqih (Supreme Leader) and Iranian Foreign Policy: An Historical Analysis." *Strategic Analysis*, 36, no.1 (2012): 112-127.

¹⁸⁶ For examle; B.I Finel's functional realism. Finel, BI. "Black Box State Level Variables and Progressivity in Realist Research Programs". *Security Studies*, 11, No.2, (Winter 2001-2002):187-227

¹⁸⁷ Waltz, Kenneth. "International Politics is Not Foreign Policy". *Security Studies*, 6, No.1, (Autumn 1996):54-57.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

to argue that the external behavior of Tehran has mostly developed independently from the factional changes in the domestic political arena.

As is known, Mohammed Khatami came to power in the late 90s and early 2000s by winning approximately 70 per cent of the votes. He started a term of political liberalization by highlighting the importance of the rule of law, tolerance for diversities, special care for women and youth rights and dialogue among civilizations. In spite of this mode of moderation, the continuation of uranium-enrichment and intermediate range-missile programs as well as the support given to Hezbollah and Hamas displays the aforementioned unparalleled relationship between the changes of domestic policies and foreign policies. As Fred Halliday pointed out, Khatami was not a Mao in China waiting for the US President Richard Nixon.¹⁸⁹ All in all the considerable moderation at the beginning of 1990s remained short to eliminate the threat perception towards Iran particularly from the United States.

The statements about Iran's aggressive policies increased when the hardliner conservative President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad came to power. Ahmedinejad pushed ahead Iran's nuclear program despite the international sanctions posed by the UNSC, the EU and the US and openly criticized the US and Israel. With his presidency, the security agencies primarily the Revolutionary Guards got strengthened. Yet again, the economic conditions and popular discontent especially during his second term constrained the capacity of the aggressiveness of the Iranian foreign policy. The ongoing economic dislocation and his victory from a disputed election led to an extensive oppositional protest called as Green Movement in 2009. All in all as Mark Gasiorowski states, even during Ahmedinejad's tenure, "clearly Iran [was] not lurching back toward the radicalism of the 1980s." Gasiorowski views the escalatory hostility between Iran and the West during this process as an example of security dilemma.¹⁹⁰ Therefore, even Iran continues its aggressive policies such as nuclear program and the support for radical groups, the scope of these policies will be

¹⁸⁹ Halliday, Fred. "Iran and the Middle East: Foreign Policy and Domestic Change". *Middle East Report*, No.220,(Autumn 2001):42-47.

¹⁹⁰ Gasiorowski, Mark. "The New Aggressiveness in Iran's Foreign Policy". *Middle East Policy Council*, 14, no.2 (2007) published electronically, <https://www.mepc.org/journal/new-aggressiveness-irans-foreign-policy>, (Date Accessed 25 December 2018)

limited which is another example for the unparalleled relationship between the domestic changes and its foreign policy reflections.

After eight years of Ahmedinejad's presidency, in 2013, reformist conservative Hassan Rouhani came to power with his emphasis on moderation and common sense. Iran's growing international isolation as well as economic crisis alongside with Rouhani's service as Iran's chief negotiator on the nuclear issue has determined the economic rehabilitation, Iran's financial integration to the international community and resolution of the nuclear dispute as the main foreign policy priorities during this period. Indeed, Iran and the world six powers called as P5+1 (Permanent members of the UNSC plus Germany) reached a final agreement on 14 July 2015. Nevertheless, nearly four years after the resolution, it will not be wrong to state that in addition to the economic vision that could not be accomplished, the other factors creating issue of trust between Iran and the West are far from being handled. Shaul Bakhash accordingly highlights that;

...other sources of tension between Iran and the West remained to be addressed. Iran did not alter its official position that the state of Israel was illegitimate and should not exist. Iran continued to support and arm Hezbollah in Lebanon and groups opposed to Israel in the Gaza Strip. The United States continued to designate Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism. Relations with the Arab Gulf states, led by Saudi Arabia, worsened.¹⁹¹

Hence, Rouhani's election as a pragmatic president "represented a nuancing of Iran's regional policy rather than a transformation, and its immediate impact on Syria was minimal". As Christopher Phillips narrates, "soon after his inauguration in August 2013 Rouhani reiterated his commitment to the alliance, stating it 'will not be shaken by any force in the world'".¹⁹²

Unlike the other democracies, the accumulation of the ultimate authority in the hands of the Supreme Leader according to the Iranian constitution strengthens the condition of continuity over the condition of change in Tehran's foreign policy. The

¹⁹¹ Bakhash, Shaul. "The Seven Presidents". *United States Institute of Peace*, August 2015, published electronically, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/seven-presidents> (Date Accessed 10 January 2019)

¹⁹² Phillips, Christopher. *The Battle For Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*, (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2016).

existence of the Supreme Leader weakens the power of the presidency post and constraints its capacity. All in all, the confrontations between the presidency post and the Supreme Leader has resulted with the victory of the latter up until now.¹⁹³ Moreover, certain fundamental rules which were brought by the revolution determine the limits of the Iranian foreign policy. Composed mainly by Ayatollah Khomeini, these are anti-imperialism, pan-Islamism, revolutionary ideology and values. Furthermore; based on the past experiences, Tehran possesses historically deep-rooted foreign policy motives such as the fear of encirclement, desire to sustain stability along its borders and aspiration for becoming a regional power and obtaining a significant international role.

The existence of the aforementioned fundamentals as opposed to the existence of the structural, international, economic constraints has created a dualism in the Iranian foreign policy tradition. On the one hand, there is these ideological considerations resulted from the revolutionary mode and historical experiences, while on the other hand the rule of expediency (*maslahat* in Persian) which brings pragmatism and a sort of flexibility to its foreign policy.¹⁹⁴ As I mentioned in the chapter dealing with the Tajik Civil War, in the face of the Russian influence over the Central Asia and Transcaucasia, the Iranian foreign policy steps of 1990s were much more cautious, timid and coherent with *realpolitik* calculations. However, in 2000s in the Middle East, Iranian policy-makers have pursued a much more assertive, challenging and active foreign policy which can be best observable in the Syrian case. Anoushiravan Ehteshami articulates that “Iran is now fully engaged in the international system and is playing the more assertive role expected of a regional middle power in the Middle East and North Africa”.¹⁹⁵ Likewise Russia, today we can talk about a much active and highly opportunist Iran which is in a more powerful

¹⁹³ Bakhsh, Shaul.

¹⁹⁴ Sinkaya, Bayram. "Orta Doğu'da Bölgesel bir Güç Olarak İran". *Ortadoğu Analiz* 8, no.73 (2016): 28-31.

¹⁹⁵ Ehteshami, Anoushiravan. "The Foreign Policy of Iran" in Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (eds), *The Foreign Policies of the Middle East States*, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), pp. 283-310.

position in the Middle East as a result of its well-assessments of the international and regional conjuncture. There are series of international, regional as well as domestic factors that have brought Iran in this current position such as the unexpected leakage of Iranian influence into the territories of its immediate neighbors shattered by the US' invasion in Iraq and Afghanistan, the resolution of the Nuclear Issue, the deposition of a few Western-ally presidents with the Arab Uprisings, the empowerment of Hezbollah in Lebanon and the late developments for the benefit of Assad in the Syrian Civil War.

As it was touched upon in the Russian Foreign Policy chapter, the most significant regional affairs at the beginning of the millennium were the US' invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq as a result of 9/11. The US' readiness for a war in the Middle East and denouncement of Iran, Iraq and North Korea (DPRK) as representatives of the "axis of evil" compelled Iran follow more aggressive policies. Moreover, with these invasions, the United States, which had already got military existence and ally-states in the Persian Gulf, has deployed its army power in two immediate neighbors of Iran at its east and west borders. As Neorealism asserts, states are always sensitive to potential threats near their home territory.¹⁹⁶ Sensing the fact that it could be the next target of a US-led operation because of its image as a part of the axis of evil, Iran's self-perception as a state in an unsafe environment intensified.

Yet, ironically enough, Iran had possessed "overlapping interests with the US and NATO"¹⁹⁷ and viewed Saddam Hussein of Iraq and Taliban in Afghanistan as an alarming threat for its own stability. Via the US' military operations, Hussein and Taliban, the two of Iran's enemies were toppled down which diminished significant regional constraints over Iran. The failures of the US politics in order to establish an envisaged democracy model and growing power vacuum here consolidated Iran's hand and strengthened the position of politicians friendly for Tehran in both countries. Associating Iran's growing power in these states only with the US failures

¹⁹⁶¹⁹⁶ Mearsheimer, John. "Why Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault". *Foreign Affairs*, 93, No. 5, (September-October 2014): 77-89.

¹⁹⁷ Perthes, Volker. "Ambition and Fear: Iran's Foreign Policy and Nuclear Programme." *Survival* 52, no. 3 (2010): 95-114.

would be a restrictive analysis. Alongside with the fact that Iraq has a Shia majority population; Tehran's assertive policies via its sophisticated unit of the Iran's Revolutionary Guards known as Quds Force have had a dramatic contribution. Following the US invasion, the shadowy commander of the Quds Forces, Qassem Soleimani supported a number of Shia and Sunni armed groups against the US forces. Today, Hashd al-Shabi in Iraq is only one of the dozens of militia groups trained and equipped by this Iranian special operation unit.¹⁹⁸ At the end of the day, as Kayhan Barzegar puts forward; "establishing a friendly coalition with Iraq [has relieved] Iran's military and diplomatic burden in favor of economic development."¹⁹⁹

Another factor that has relieved Iran's burden and made Tehran closer for its aspirations to become a regional power in 2000s is the resolution of the Nuclear Issue in 2015. Iran's nuclear activities date back to 1950s when Iran under the Shah rule conducted nuclear projects with the US and European incentives. Although the nuclear efforts were halted following the revolution and the war with Iraq, during the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani, the program became operational again. In the late 1980s and 1990s, Iran pursued the nuclear program with the assistance from Russia and China. To complete the reactor in Bushehr, Russia and Iran signed a protocol in 1995. Tehran's secretly developing a large uranium-enrichment plant led to UNSC economic sanctions in 2002. In spite of international criticisms, Iran declared that it would push ahead its nuclear fuel enrichment program during Ahmedinejad's presidency in 2006. The resolution of the nuclear issue and succeeding the removal of sanctions became the central foreign policy goal of Rouhani government. Following an intense diplomatic traffic, Iran and P5+1 countries signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in July, 2015 which envisaged limiting and inspecting Tehran's nuclear capacity in return for sanctions relief. In spite of its shortcomings, the nuclear deal is significant in the sense that it has reduced Iran's isolation from the international arena and opened the way for foreign investments

¹⁹⁸ Abbas, Ziya. Mehmet Şahin. "İran'ın Ortadoğu'daki Eli Kasım Süleymani". *Ortadoğu Analiz* 9, no.82 (2017): 10-13.

¹⁹⁹ Barzegar, Kayhan. "Iran's Foreign Policy in Post Invasion Iraq." *Middle East Policy* 15, no.4 (2008): 47-58.

and economic activities. The High Representative of the EU for foreign affairs and security policies, Federica Mogherini points out that "[a]fter more than 30 years of a diplomatic ice age, the EU and Iran are discussing cooperation on matters as diverse as the economy, protection of the environment, migration, and culture - and the list could continue."²⁰⁰ In 2018, unilaterally ceasing from the deal and planning to re-impose the sanctions, the US President Donald Trump overshadowed the success of the JCPOA. Yet, the other members of the P5+1 still continue their stance behind it.

While Iran was searching a way forward for the nuclear negotiations, the Arab Uprisings has already begun to shake off the Middle East. During the colored revolutions were breaking out in the Russia's Near Abroad, Iranian posture towards the protests was generally framed by its own experience in 2009, the Green Movement, one of the biggest popular challenge since 1979. Therefore, very similar to the Russian position, Tehran perceived the revolutions as a "Western induced" attempt to topple the governments opposing the Western hegemony. Iranian leadership showed the same stance towards the Green Movement at home and framed it as illegitimate attempt by outside forces. "Both the Iranian elites and Russian elites seemed to convey a sense that a 'spillover' would occur if there were not necessary precautions put into place".²⁰¹ However, Iran welcomed the Arab Uprisings with an unprecedented enthusiasm by labeling it as an "Islamic awakening wave" resulted from the Iranian revolution in 1979. Khamanei stated that "Islamic awakenings in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and elsewhere were inspired by Iran's own Islamic Revolution and that they also represented the gradual realization of the late Imam Khomeini's prophecy."²⁰² Thus, Iran viewed the toppling-down of the Western-friendly authoritarian regimes in the Middle East as an opportunity and

²⁰⁰ Mogherini, Federica. "The Iran Nuclear Deal is a Success and the Whole World is Safer for It." *The Guardian*, 17 January 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/17/iran-nuclear-deal>

²⁰¹ Assadi, Rostam. "The Rhetoric of Iran and Russia Towards the Colored Revolutions". *The Meridian*, 14 January 2015, published electronically, <https://lcmeridianjournal.com/2015/01/14/the-rhetoric-of-iran-and-russia-towards-the-colored-revolutions/> (Date Accessed 10 January 2019)

²⁰² Parchami, Ali. "The Arab Uprisings: The View From Tehran." *Contemporary Politics* 18, no.1 (2012): 35-52.

supported the process. Indeed, Arab Uprisings does enable Iran to increase its regional influence. For example, although Ansar Allah (Houthi) movement originated mainly from the local dynamics and opposition towards the Yemeni government under Ali Abdallah Saleh's rule, regional states such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt or United Arab Emirates have been blaming Iran to trigger and support the Houthis' insurgency. The blaming states viewed Iran's adoption of a Shia rhetoric in the regional affairs and the Houthis' affiliation to the Zaydi branch of Shia Islam as a connection between the two. Although this view is restrictive and ignores the local elements of the movement, it is not unreasonable to state that Iran attempts to control the movement and set the game in Yemen for its own behalf. That's why Iranian leaders hold several meetings with the Houthi representatives and attempt to associate the movement with Hezbollah's movement in Lebanon.²⁰³ In short, Arab Uprisings opened a window for Iran to take more regional steps in order to consolidate its power. While Iran has supported the public movements in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen and seen them as legitimate and democratic, it presented a clear stance behind the autocratic status quo when the protests spilled over Syria. So like Russia, Tehran acted selective in terms of its reaction towards the uprisings.

It is not shocking that Iran sided with Bashar Assad from the inception of the revolt as their 40 years-old partnership is taken into consideration. Iran considers this long-term alliance which is not so common in the Middle East as a diplomatic achievement. Despite the ideological differences between secular Baath regime and Iranian Islamic Republic the partnership between the two states proved to be durable and intact and the two states have so far displayed overlapping and complementary interests in the region. Syria became only major Arab state that supported Tehran in its war against an Arab state, Iraq under Saddam Hussein in the 1980s.

The threat perception towards the United States and Israel is another motivation source for their cooperation. Upon Israeli invasion of the south of Lebanon, both states moved together for their common vision for the future of

²⁰³ Sinkaya, Bayram. "İran-Yemen İlişkileri ve Ensarullah Hareketi." *Ortadoğu Analiz* 7, no.67 (2014): 60-62.

Lebanon and resistance against Israel and Western intrusion into the Middle East. Iran calls this as the "resistance axis". The political rapprochement between Iran and post-Invasion Iraq has further triggered discussions about the formation of a Shia Crescent from Iran, Iraq to Hezbollah in Lebanon with the support of Assad in Syria. All in all, "the axis that links Tehran, Damascus, Lebanese Hezbollah together allowed Iran to achieve a strategic depth in the Levant and the Eastern Mediterranean to spread its influence, to strengthen its position in the region and to gain more maneuver especially against the West."²⁰⁴

Moreover, Iran supports Hezbollah through Syria as Sina Azodi and Arman Mahmoudian state; "Syria is Iran's land bridge to Lebanon and serves as Hezbollah's lifeline"²⁰⁵ As is known, Hezbollah was formed by the advocates of hard power towards Israel at the beginning of 1980s with the direct supportive involvement of Iran. In years, Hezbollah not only expanded its social base among the Shia community but also became an important actor in the Lebanese politics and popular resistance group even among the Sunni dissidents towards Israel. The Israeli withdrawal from the southern Lebanon and the 2006 war in which Hezbollah fired thousands of missiles into Israel consolidated Hezbollah's power and served as a front and a line of defense for Iran against any potential existential threat from Israel. Alongside these security concerns, supporting Assad serves Iran's strategic interests as well. A potential overthrow of Assad by "a Gulf-supported Sunni-led successor" or a radical terrorist group such as al-Nusra or the ISIS seeing Iran as a natural enemy would be a huge blow for Iran's regional position. Moreover, "to abandon Syria now would undermine a great deal of Iran's credibility as a revolutionary and regional power and potentially cost Tehran its only committed ally in the Arab world."²⁰⁶ Therefore, despite economic burdens or more pragmatic administration,

²⁰⁴ Djalili, Mohammad-Reza, and Thierry Kellner. "Iran's Syria policy in the wake of the 'Arab Uprisings'." *Turkish Review* 4, no. 4 (2014): 396-405.

²⁰⁵ Azodi, Sina. Arman Mahmoudian. "Iran's Alliance with Russia in Syria: Marriage of Convenience or Strategic Partnership." *The Atlantic Council*, 19 September 2018, published electronically, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/iran-s-alliance-with-russia-in-syria-marriage-of-convenience-or-strategic-partnership> (Date Accessed 24 December 2018)

Iran has remained committed for the survival of Assad and its Syrian policy has taken side in the "constants list" of the Iranian foreign policy agenda. Syrian case stood as a significant example for Iran's not avoiding from using hard power in the regional power struggle. From the very beginning of the Syrian conflict, Iran sent a number of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) advisers to help the regime with military, logistical and counter-insurgency tactics. Iran displays an active role in the war field with tens of thousands of Iranian military personnel and approximately 60.000 Shia militias composed of Lebanese, Iraqis, Pakistanis and Afghans to compensate the regime's manpower. Moreover, Qasem Solaimani, the head of the Quds Force, the elite division of the IRGC, "helped create the National Defence Force (NDF), a paramilitary body estimated to have 50.000 fighters in 2013 and aiming to reach 100.000 to supplement and support the beleaguered military".²⁰⁷ Likewise Russian support, the involvement of Iran and Hezbollah into the Syrian conflict has shifted the balance on behalf of Bashar Assad. In fact, US Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis indicates that "absent Iran's help, I don't believe Assad would have been in power the last six months".²⁰⁸ In short, Iran spent lots of blood and treasure for Assad's survival and seems to continue this support until Assad consolidates his power.

The Syrian crisis and the common position of Moscow and Tehran beside Assad give birth to the questions whether there is a strategic partnership between the two. Their mutually inclusive approaches towards each other in the Tajik Civil War are observable maybe more vividly in the Syrian case as well. According to Neorealism, "alliances have no meaning apart from the adversary threat to which they are a response."²⁰⁹ Both states share a common threat perception from the

²⁰⁶ Terrill, W. Andrew. "Iran's Strategy for Saving Asad." *The Middle East Journal* 69, no. 2 (2015): 222-36.

²⁰⁷ Phillips, Christopher. *The Battle For Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*, (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2016).

²⁰⁸ Djalili, Mohammad-Reza, and Thierry Kellner. "Iran's Syria policy in the wake of the 'Arab Uprisingss'." *Turkish Review* 4, no. 4 (2014): 396-405.

Western-supported public movements and view the increasing US existence in the Middle East as an obstacle to their global and regional aspirations. Therefore, the Syrian card and their successful campaigns over there could be used as a matter of bargain and is highly important in order to deter their potential enemies. All in all, the military, political and diplomatic cooperation and coordination between Iran and Russia seems as one of the most remarkable developments in the post-Arab Uprisings Middle East.²¹⁰

In the international platforms on the Syrian Civil War, Russia pushes ahead for more diplomatic visibility and voice for Iran as aforementioned, the two alongside with Turkey initiated the Astana Peace Process. Despite this fruitful cooperation and coordination around the similar and overlapping interests in Syria, the phrase "strategic relationship" seems too wide in defining the Tehran-Moscow axis. As Sina Azodi and Arman Mahmoudian indicate, "Iran's cooperation with Russia is a temporary alliance with limited common goals, not a long-term strategic partnership."²¹¹ It is uncertain that whether the long-term visions of the two about the future of Syria conform to each other or not. While Tehran is full-fledged committed to the maintenance of Assad's power, Moscow presents a much flexible approach towards alternative figures and does not regard Assad as a red line in their Syrian policies.²¹² In its quest for regaining great power status, Moscow possesses more cards in its hands and has better relations with the wider Arab world and Israel than Iran has. Neorealism contends that "state behavior is fundamentally conditioned by the distribution and changes in the distribution of material power resources is

²⁰⁹ Waltz, Kenneth. "NATO's Expansion A Realist View." *Contemporary Security Policy*, 21, No.2, (2000):23-38.

²¹⁰ Sinkaya, Bayram. "Yeni Ortadoğu Jeopolitiğinde İran-Rusya Ekseni". *ORSAM*, 18 January 2016, published electronically <http://orsam.org.tr/tr/yeni-ortadogu-jeopolitiginde-iran-rusya-ekseni/>

²¹¹ Azodi, Sina.

²¹² Saradzhyan, Simon. "Russia's Interest in Syria is not Assad." *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, 21 October 2015, published electronically, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/russias-interest-syria-not-assad> (Date accessed 10 January 2019)

intuitively appealing: the strong should be more capable than the weak.”²¹³ From this perspective, Russia which possesses relatively more power resources than Iran could influence the strategic opportunities available for itself and can “simply redefine the rules of the game internationally in self-interested ways.”²¹⁴ Unlike Russia, Iran is insecure and “can less afford to see allies destroyed.”²¹⁵ As is known, the history of the US’ intervention into weak states with the excuse of democracy promotion is long. During Iraq Invasion in 2003, Washington made clear that it “intended to use the threat or application of military force to topple the regimes in Iran and Syria and eventually to transform the entire region into a sea of democracies.”²¹⁶ Moreover, a potential regime change of Damascus in favor of other regional powers such as Saudi Arabia could put Iran in a more disadvantageous and insecure position in the region and dramatically decrease its strategic depth against Israel. While Syria was experiencing a civil war with the massive exploitation of the external forces including the US and other regional states, Iran is acutely sensitive and fearful that the next target could be itself. As a result, differently from Moscow, Tehran chains itself unconditionally to its ally, Assad and sees his survival as indispensable to the maintenance of the balance.²¹⁷

In addition to split in opinion about Assad’s future, the existence of tens of thousands of Iranian-backed militias in Syria remains as another significant puzzle for Russia to resolve and direct its foreign policy steps in the case of a potential resolution of the crisis. It is a question mark whether a Syria heavily dominated by

²¹³ Finel, BI. “Black Box State Level Variables and Progressivity in Realist Research Programs”. *Security Studies*, 11, No.2, (Winter 2001-2002):187-227

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Evera, Stephen Van. “Offense, Defense and The Causes of War.” *International Security*. 22, No.4, (Spring 1998):5-43.

²¹⁶ Mearsheimer, John. “Hans Morgenthau and Iraq War Realism vs Neo Conservatism.” *Open Democracy*, published electronically: <http://mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/pdfs/A0037.pdf> (Date accessed 20 March 2019)

²¹⁷ Christensen, Thomas. Jack Snyder. “Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity”. *International Organization*, 44, No.2, (Spring 1990):137-168.

Iranian influence is desirable for Russia which has so far pursued a balanced policy in its relations with Iran and Israel. As Christopher Phillips explains, “Russia did not simply align with the anti-US ‘resistance axis’ of Iran and Syria, but rather courted both US enemies and allies, promoting itself as a third force in the region”.²¹⁸ In this sense, Russia does not refrain from assuring Israel against Iran’s permanent presence in Syria and maintain coordination with Tel Aviv about the developments in Syria.²¹⁹ The existence of hundreds of thousands Russian-speaking citizens in Israel creates a special bond between these two states and naturally expands Russia’s influence in this tiny yet powerful country. Besides, there are nearly one million Jews living in Russia. It is significant that most of the oligarchs in Russia are ethnically Jews.²²⁰ The distortion of relations with Israel not only harms Moscow’s international position but it could also trigger a domestic disturbance for Kremlin, which would be undesirable for a rational actor trying to protect its national interests while interacting with other states.

For Iran, on the other hand, its increasing military cost in the face of Russia’s benefitting from the political outcomes in the international arena stands as a source of concern albeit not highlighted in this current conjuncture.²²¹ Nevertheless, so far both Tehran and Moscow enjoy their partnership in Syria that based on common interests and concerns as observed in Tajik case, which confirms Kenneth Waltz’s statement that “alliances are made by states that have some but not all of their interests in common.”²²² Yet, unlike Iran’s refrainment from meddling with the Tajik

²¹⁸ Phillips, Christopher. *The Battle For Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*, (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2016).

²¹⁹ “Netanyahu, Putin To Meet To Discuss Iran’s Presence in Syria”. *RFE/RL*. 05 February 2019 <https://www.rferl.org/a/netanyahu-putin-to-meet-to-discuss-iran-s-presence-in-syria/29753264.html> (Date Accessed 20 March 2019)

²²⁰ “Jews in Russia”. *Facts and Details*. http://factsanddetails.com/russia/Minorities/sub9_3b/entry-5096.html (Date accessed 20 March 2019)

²²¹ Ersoy, Eyüp. “İran ve Suriye İç Savaşı Koalisyon Siyaseti ve Artan Maliyetler.” *ORSAM*, 01 January 2016, published electronically http://orsam.org.tr/d_hbanaliz/12eyupersoy.pdf

case as partially but heavily result of the Russia factor; Tehran openly displays a muscle show in Syria and the whole region. The co-existence of a more or less similar Syria agenda between Moscow and Tehran contributes further to the assertiveness of the latter's regional policies. All in all in 2000s, Iran increased its grip on the Middle East region thanks to the global developments such as the resolution of the nuclear crisis and regional developments such as favorable atmosphere in post-US invasion Iraq and Afghanistan, the empowerment of Hezbollah's reputation against Israel, Iran's relative stability on the face of Arab Uprisings. However, the latest developments after the advent of Donald Trump administration such as the US' unilateral withdrawal from JCPOA, portrayal of Iran as the biggest supporter of terrorism and Washington's support for anti-Iran allies such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt pushes Iran to pursue more assertive policies as observed in its activities in Syria. These additional structural constraints also made Iran more dependent to the alliance with Russia. All in all, as Mearsheimer highlights, "when one state puts its fist in another state's face, the target usually does not throw its hands in the air and surrender. Instead, it looks for ways to defend itself; it balances against the threatening state."²²³

The cooperation between Russia and Iran in the Middle East contributes Iran's consolidation its status as a regional power and creates more room for maneuver against its adversaries. Therefore, parallel to the upheaval of regional status as well as its desire to counterbalance, Tehran began to pursue a foreign policy that applies more hard power in its struggle of influence in the region. In order to fill the power vacuum in the post-Arab Uprisings Middle East, Iran intervenes into the regional politics through military interventions and through establishing patronage relations with the non-state actors. Currently, its Syrian policy is the most vivid example of Iran's consulting hard power and aggressive policies in the Middle East.

²²² Waltz, Kenneth. "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory". *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. 18, No.4, (spring 1988): 615-628.

²²³ Mearsheimer, John. "Hans Morgenthau and Iraq War Realism vs Neo Conservatism." *Open Democracy*, published electronically: <http://mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/pdfs/A0037.pdf> (Date accessed 20 March 2019)

CHAPTER 5

IRAN BETWEEN THE MIDDLE EAST AND CENTRAL ASIA/TRANSCAUCASIA: “RUSSIA FACTOR”

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, Tajik Civil War and Syrian Civil War were examined separately with extensive references to Iranian foreign policy approaches towards the two. Both Tajik and Syrian Civil Wars -in addition to the other civil wars that the world history has witnessed so far - approve that the civil wars are increasingly prone to the external countries' manipulations. As seen, in the face of both civil wars, Iran could stay idle in neither to the West (Syria) nor to the East (or North East/Tajikistan) and utilized “appropriate” tools from its foreign policy toolbox. The differences of Iranian reactions towards the two cases give significant clues about the essence of Tehran's foreign policy projects in the Middle East and Central Asia/Transcaucasia (hereafter CA/TC). While Iran pursues an interventionist, assertive and even aggressive policies in the Middle East through its military presence and alliances with paramilitary organizations as well as militias as observed in the Syrian Civil War; Tehran's policy in Central Asia/Transcaucasia which is under mainly Russian influence has been non-interventionist, timid and conciliatory. On the basis of Iranian reactions towards the Tajik and Syrian cases; it is possible to make some broader inferences about the nature Iranian foreign policy projects towards the Middle East and Central Asia/Transcaucasia regions. In this chapter, a comparative approach will be developed on Tehran's approaches in both regions. Within the scope of Neorealism, similarities and contrasts as well as the factors leading to them will be laid out. Firstly, a comprehensive assessment about the opportunities and restraints of the both regions for Tehran will be discussed and secondly, the results observed in Iranian foreign policy will be examined. Lastly, the

importance of “Russia factor” and the nature of Iran-Russia relations will be assessed.

5.2 Iran’s Geographic Position: Opportunities and Constraints

Raymond Hinnebusch argues that “it is a state’s *geopolitical position* that specifically defines the threats and opportunities it faces”.²²⁴ Iran has a unique geographic position between Central Asia/Transcaucasia and the Middle East. As a transit country, it forms a bridge between landlocked Central Asia and the Persian Gulf. It sits at the crossroads of Asia which poses both opportunities and challenges for Tehran. Thanks to its geographical position, Iran is viewed as a “natural regional power”²²⁵ and “the only country which truly enjoys the advantages of geopolitics.”²²⁶ Edmund Herzig points out that;

Iran’s geographical position, size, economic stature and military muscle give it the potential to play a leading or pivotal role in a number of regional configurations: the Persian Gulf, Central Asia and the Caspian Basin, among others.²²⁷

As the 18th largest country by area, Iran holds a significant political and cultural sphere of influence thanks to its population amounted to approximately 82 million as well as its gifted geographic position with access to high seas. Described as a “simultaneously a Middle Eastern, Caucasian, Central Asian and Caspian state”²²⁸,

²²⁴ Hinnebusch, Raymond. *The International Politics of the Middle East*, (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 2003).

²²⁵ Dannreuther, Roland. “Bridging the Gulf? Iran, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf”. *The Review of International Affairs*, 2, No.4, (Summer, 2003):32-46.

²²⁶ Ehtashami, Anoushiravan “Geopolitics Beckons: Hydrocarbons and the Politics of the Persian Gulf”, in Ali Mohammadi, Ehtashami Anoushiravan (ed.) , *Iran and Eurasia* (London: Garnet Publishing Ltd, 2001): 93-110.

²²⁷ Herzig, Edmund. “Regionalism, Iran and Central Asia”. *International Affairs*, 80, No.3 (2004):503-517.

²²⁸ Belobrov, Y.Y. A.G. Volodin, N.I. Kozyrev, Y.V. Lankin, V.I. Sazhin, V.I. Yurtaev. (2014) *New Agenda in Russian-Iranian Relations* (Report No XIV). Retrieved from RIAC website: <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/activity/workingpapers/modern-russian-iranian-relations-challenges-and-opportunities/>

Iran could be categorized as a potential regional hegemon in Neorealist terms with its strategic demographic and military power. Moreover, its geographic position is very close to “over half of the world’s known energy reserves both in the form of petroleum and natural gas”.²²⁹ In between two energy-rich regions, its gateway position provides a pivotal position for Tehran and regional leverage in order to influence the developments in multiple regions. However; it also poses specific challenges as Iran faces a number of regional security crises at the same time. As Hanna Freij states;

The 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War, the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the resulting 1991 Gulf War, the collapse of the former Soviet Union, and the emergence of independent states in former Soviet Central Asia have brought about a number of foreign policy opportunities and security threats for Iranian policymakers.²³⁰

All in all, to the West and South, there lies the Persian Gulf where Iran has been isolated by the US and Saudi Arabia-led GCC countries since 1979. The eight year war with Iraq here had a huge impact on Iran’s national security policy. Supported regionally only by Syria and Libya, Iran’s experience of invasion and its struggle for regime survival in the Iran-Iraq War proved Tehran that self-reliance is the primary condition for protecting itself from the invasions and attacks.²³¹ Iran is the most populous state in the Gulf and occasionally pursues more pragmatic and warm ties with countries such as Qatar and Oman. Nonetheless the US’ military existence in the Gulf and Iraq, the aspirations of Saudi Arabia to be a regional hegemon as well as the military reliance of the GCC on Washington restraints Iran’s capabilities to break its isolation in this region.

To the East, the rise of Taliban in Afghanistan with an ongoing civil conflicts as well as the existence of Al-Qaeda in Pakistan constantly dealing with Kashmir Crisis and nuclear proliferation issue intensifies Tehran’s threat perception here as

²²⁹ Kasghari, Tamim. “Understanding Iran: Between Central Asia and the Gulf Cooperation Council”. *Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse*, 3, No.4, (2011). <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=505>

²³⁰ Freij, Hanna Yousif. “State Interests vs. The Umma: Iranian Policy in Central Asia. *Middle East Journal*, 50, No.1, (Winter, 1996): 71-83.

²³¹ Johnston, William Jerry. *From Revolution to Realpolitik: Iran’s Foreign Policy in Central Asia and the South Caucasus since 1991*. Diss. Florida State University, 2007.

well. To the North, the USSR was sharing a long border with Iran until its demise. After 1991, eight new neighbors (Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Armenia are on its immediate borderline) encircled Iran from the North. After the demise of the USSR, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Transcaucasia and the Tajik Civil War in Central Asia were regarded as major threats for Iran's security and contributes Tehran's perception that it is encircled by a variety of conflicts and crises.²³² While assessing Iran's reactions towards the Tajik and Syrian Civil War and its foreign policy projects towards Central Asia/Transcaucasia and the Middle East, all these regional opportunities and challenges should be considered carefully. In the next chapters, these opportunities and challenges firstly in the Middle East and then in Central Asia/Transcaucasia will be examined comparatively and the results in the form of Iranian foreign policy will be handled within a Neorealist framework.

5.3 Iran and the Middle East

5.3.1 Historical Legacy

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 which was carried out with the slogan "Neither the East nor the West" not only changed Tehran's socio-political system but it also deeply affected the Middle East and set the rules of the game in this region. As Giorgio Cafiero points out; "geopolitically the Iranian Revolution did more to transform the Middle East than any other event in the second half of the 20th century."²³³ During the Pahlavi era, Iran was one of the US' strong feet in the Persian Gulf. Defined as "Twin Pillars Strategy", Washington was relying on its friendly relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia to counter the pro-Moscow and Baathist countries in the region. Accordingly, Tehran was the protector of the US interests as well as the "police" of the Gulf thanks to its military capabilities and high population vis a vis the poor military power and relatively low population rates of the other

²³² Halliday, Fred. "Iran and the Middle East: Foreign Policy and Domestic Change". *Middle East Report*, No.220,(Autumn 2001):42-47.

²³³ Cafiero, Giorgio. "Iran and the Gulf States 40 Years after the 1979 Revolution". *Middle East Institute*, 8 February 2019, published electronically, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/iran-and-gulf-states-40-years-after-1979-revolution> (Date Accessed 24 May 2019)

Gulf states. Thus, first of all the Revolution changed the nature of the US-Iran relations and its position in the Gulf irreversibly. “The revolution’s catapulting to power of utterly un-Westernised elites transformed Iran from main surrogate of the US in the Gulf to its main challenger”.²³⁴ All in all, “the effects of the Iranian Revolution resonated throughout the Persian Gulf.”²³⁵

The regime change in Iran and the new mission to defend the mostazafin (oppressed) led to a constant anxiety in the Gulf States whose political leaders searched a patron to ensure to prevent a potential harm of the Islamic regime on their populations. In order to counter the regional threats of the Islamic State, the US-allied Gulf monarchies such as Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait and Oman re-designed their security strategies and established the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981. Meanwhile, the repercussions of Tehran’s regime change were felt most bitterly in the Iraq-Iran border. With the support of the other Gulf States, Iraq maintained an eight-year war against Iran. This experience proved Tehran that it is isolated and encircled with enemies in the Middle East except the support given by Libya and Syria. As Johnston suggests, “Post-Revolutionary Iran’s greatest national security policy influences came from its involvement in the Iran-Iraq War.”²³⁶ The one explicit assumption of Neorealism is that states operate in a self-help system and therefore searches ways for survival. The Iran-Iraq War which sapped Tehran’s energy in the initial years of the Revolution intensified Tehran’s perception that the anarchic regional system in the Persian Gulf is a self-help arena and thus it needs to prioritize its security interests, maximize its self-sufficiency through domestic arms production and create a diplomatically-secure environment in order to break its isolation in the Gulf. Hence, the war with Iraq also contributed to a detente in its relations with the USSR.

²³⁴ Hinnebusch, Raymond. *The International Politics of the Middle East*, (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 2003).

²³⁵ Ibid

²³⁶ Johnston, William Jerry. *From Revolution to Realpolitik: Iran’s Foreign Policy in Central Asia and the South Caucasus since 1991*. Diss. Florida State University, 2007.

Following the end of the Iran-Iraq War, during the 1990s, the situation in the Middle East did not prove promising for Iran even though Tehran's diplomatic overtures led by President Rafsanjani and Khatami. The Iranian-initiated rapprochement is a result of Tehran's nation-state reflex following its understanding that an alienated Iran means more US presence in the Gulf. Roland Dannreuther interprets the Iranian rapprochement policy to the Gulf states as "an excellent example of the shift in Iranian policy towards greater pragmatism and moderation."²³⁷ However, the rapprochement did not last long. The security threat to Tehran in the Middle East intensified as Washington's containment policies during Clinton's presidency and the War on Terror concept after 9/11 directly targeted Iran as a rogue state and axis of evil like Syria in the region. Although Iran had opposed Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq, indicating an overlapping of Iran-US interests; the Bush administration did not soften its position towards Tehran. Following the break-up of the USSR and the Gulf War, Washington became a real preeminent power in the region. In this context, in 2000s when the US consolidated its regional existence through Iraq and Afghanistan invasions, Tehran's threat perception culminated. The US-led regime changes in Iraq and Afghanistan and later on the Arab Uprisings which lead to a continuing civil war in Libya and Syria with a great deal of external involvement alarmed Iran that it could be the next target of the US' War on Terror and democracy promotion policies. As Ali Reza Nader indicates, "The Iranian regime, which has always viewed the United States as the primary threat to its existence, perceived itself to be the next possible target for US regime change".²³⁸

5.3.2 Regional Constraints

As touched upon in the previous chapter, one of the most constraining factors for Tehran in the Middle East is the US existence. In spite of the nuclear talks, the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal and growing anti-Iranian rhetoric used by

²³⁷ Dannreuther, Roland. "Bridging the Gulf? Iran, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf". *The Review of International Affairs*, 2, No.4, (Summer, 2003):32-46.

²³⁸ Nader, Ali Reza. Stephen Larrabee. "Iran's Geopolitics". *Turkish-Iranian Relations in a Changing Middle East*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2013.

Trump administration show Tehran that a possible softening of the US-Iran relations and thus the enhancement of Iran's international status is quite a hard work. The United States attributes the reasons of its presence in the Gulf to the need to secure its immense investments in the energy sectors and the survival of its allies – mainly Israel. Therefore, while defining its regional priorities, Washington highlights the necessity to counter Iran's revanchist attitude based on its revolutionary rhetoric. Anoushiravan Ehtashami indicates that “the US drive to isolate Iraq and marginalize Iran has been the defining feature of political life in the Persian Gulf in the 1990s.”²³⁹ Washington perceives Tehran as a destabilizing force and a mortal threat to its allies and military forces in the region. As a result, the reinforcement of US naval presence in this region brought about direct or indirect confrontations with Iranian forces, showing Tehran's weakness in the face of the US military. During 1990s, the collapse of the USSR deprived Tehran of its major counterbalance against unipolar pre-eminence of the United States.²⁴⁰ As a result, encirclement by US- allied Gulf monarchies in the with Washington's military presence in Iraq in addition to the presence of a NATO state, Turkey in the West limit Iran's regional and military capabilities and its influence on the southern neighbors to a great extent. Moreover, the US-led international embargo has fatally undermined Tehran's economy and trade ability to attract external investors. All in all, “the main obstacle in the relationship between Iran and the GCC is the United States that is quite hard lined in its policy toward Iran.”²⁴¹ The situation is far from improving even today. The nuclear deal of 2015 leaves its place to a much higher tension between the two states which shows the lack of a genuine mutual understanding and trust in their relations. After Washington re-imposed the sanctions, Iran, adopting a defiant posture, announced that it will stop complying with some parts of the JCPOA. Considering

²³⁹ Ehtashami, Anoushiravan “Geopolitics Beckons: Hydrocarbons and the Politics of the Persian Gulf”, in Ali Mohammadi, Ehtashami Anoushiravan (ed.) , *Iran and Eurasia* (London: Garnet Publishing Ltd, 2001): 93-110.

²⁴⁰ Herzig, Edmund. “Regionalism, Iran and Central Asia”. *International Affairs*, 80, No.3 (2004): 503-517.

²⁴¹ Kasghari, , Tamim. “Understanding Iran: Between Central Asia and the Gulf Cooperation Council”. *Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse*, 3, No.4, (2011). <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=505>

the latest developments on the nuclear withdrawal, Tehran's relations with Washington will remain as the main constraint upon its status in the Middle East.

In addition to its deteriorated relations with the extra-regional hegemon, Iranian interests directly contradict with the interests of the regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Israel and the UAE in their competition to influence the regional developments for their own benefits. Raymond Hinnebusch links the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia partly to their distinct experiences of state formation and states that;

Iran's revolutionary Islam, cast by Khomeini into an expression of revolt against monarchy and Western dominance, was the opposite of the Saudis' conservative establishment Islam. Arguably, these diametrically opposed versions of Islam were expressive of the two countries' opposing experiences of the West: while Saudi Arabia never experienced colonialism and actually achieved independence with Western support, Iranians perceived the West to have overthrown their nationalist leader, Muhammad Mossadeq, in favour of the last Shah.²⁴²

Both Riyadh and Tehran rely on religious rhetoric for consolidating their regimes' legitimacy and define themselves as the protectors of the Islamic world. Riyadh is the chief political rival of Tehran in geopolitical competition as well. Both states promote their own view of Islam and claim to represent the Muslim world. In this sense, Saudi Arabia does not take a pragmatic approach but rather perceives Iran as its ideological opponent and blame Tehran for galvanizing the Shia minority groups in the region. "The Al-Saud family treats Iran as an ideological enemy preaching the Shi'ite heresy, whose spread in the region must be stopped at any cost."²⁴³ Following the Arab Uprisings, the two try to twist the regional developments for maximizing their influence in the Middle East, which led to a "latent war for control over the entire sub region."²⁴⁴ Saudi Arabia seems to overcome the repercussions of Arab

²⁴² Hinnebusch, Raymond. *The International Politics of the Middle East*, (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 2003).

²⁴³ Belobrov, Y.Y. A.G. Volodin, N.I. Kozyrev, Y.V. Lankin, V.I. Sazhin, V.I. Yurtaev. (2014) *New Agenda in Russian-Iranian Relations* (Report No XIV). Retrieved from RIAC website: <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/activity/workingpapers/modern-russian-iranian-relations-challenges-and-opportunities/>

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

Uprisings and emerges victorious in multiple fronts such as Egypt and Libya and its influence is growing in countries such as Tunisia, Lebanon and Sudan. In the face of growing Saudi influence throughout the Middle East, Iran is trying to protect its political activity and tightly holding its cards in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen.

Thirdly, like Saudi Arabia, Israel remains a tough opponent of Iran in the Middle East. Both states utter threats towards each other. In this regard, Israel is the most disturbed state from the growing Iranian presence in Syria alongside Hezbollah. Therefore, it harshly criticizes any possible détente in the US-Iran relations. Upon the US' decision to withdraw its troops from the Syrian Civil War, Tel Aviv continually draws attention to the negative effects of a potential withdrawal and the possibility of Tehran's power consolidation in Syria in the case of Washington's retreat from the Middle East. That's why; Israel had previously been discontent with the "pivot to Pacific" policy of Obama administration. It welcomed Trump administration' anti-Iranian stance with enthusiasm. Therefore, while assessing the state of play in the US-Iran relations, the leverage of Israel on the US administrations should be examined carefully. The hawkish position of the current government is partly a result of Israel's constant pressure on the Trump administration to take a hardened stance against Tehran. The US announcement of deploying an aircraft carrier to the region comes after the visit of Israel delegation headed by the national security adviser Meir Ben Shabbat to Washington where the Israeli intelligence sources informed the US authorities about an alleged Iranian plot to conduct attacks in the Gulf.²⁴⁵

Fourthly, the weakness of regionalism in the Middle East is another factor constraining Iran. As is known, regionalism emerges out of cooperation and coordination between states on political, security, economic, institutional, energy or defense areas. Many scholars define the Middle East as a region expressing a weak regionalism due to the very limited numbers of cooperation organizations and the scope of their success. Elizabeth Monier indicates that "the dominance of a discourse of 'Arabness' reduces the region's flexibility to adapt and develop regional

²⁴⁵ Hacoheh, Hagay. "Iranian Plot on US Possibly Thwarted Due to Israeli Intelligence Report". *Jerusalem Post*. 7 May 2019. <https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Israel-passed-US-intelligence-on-an-Iranian-plot-report-588979>

institutions in several ways and particularly vis-à-vis the non-Arab communities.”²⁴⁶ The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) seems relatively durable and successful. However, it is not possible for Iran to be a member of the GCC as the main logic of its establishment revolves around a common threat perception shared by its members against Iranian influence in the Gulf after 1979. Moreover, Iran is disturbed by the involvement of the extra-regional powers mainly the US into the policy affairs of the regional groupings and calls for a new regional structure based on self-reliance. However, the security of the GCC members heavily depends on the US and its arms sales. All in all, the Middle East is not a fertile area for Iran to show its diplomatic and pragmatic capabilities via becoming a member of cooperation organizations. Edmund Herzig states that;

Even leaving aside issues particular to Iran, the Middle East as a whole is generally seen as being exceptionally resistant to regionalism, and the few regional initiatives that have been launched there generally exclude Iran (and Turkey), so that studies of Middle Eastern regionalism often deal exclusively with Arab regionalism, or with attempts to link Arab states with Israel in the context of the Middle East peace process.²⁴⁷

In addition to the weakness of regionalism and the anti-Iranian stance of the existing organizations, the geopolitical and economic location of Iran in the Middle East is not so permissive for Tehran to foster its economic activities. The states in the Gulf have a direct access to open seas and they do not need a transit country such as Iran in order to export their energy products to the world markets.

All in all, while Iran was enjoying an influential status once as a US-ally and the “police” of the Persian Gulf, it is now mostly isolated and approached by suspicion and even enmity by the states of the region. Despite having extensive resource wealth, a population with strong national identity and its rich culture with a natural potential of becoming a regional hegemon, Iran’s power is not at its ultimate level. Roland Dannreuther links this weakness to partly the legacy of Iranian Revolution which alienated both Tehran’s neighboring states as well as the major

²⁴⁶ Monier, Elizabeth. “The Arabness of Middle East Regionalism the Arab Spring for Discursive Hegemony between Egypt, Iran and Turkey”. *Contemporary Politics*, 20, No.4, (2014):421-434.

²⁴⁷ Herzig, Edmund. “Regionalism, Iran and Central Asia”. *International Affairs*, 80, No.3 (2004):503-517.

external power in the region, Washington.²⁴⁸ Therefore, partly as a result of the revolutionary legacy and the fierce rhetoric in the initial years of the Islamic Republic and partly the conditions peculiar to the Middle East such as the weakness of regionalism and the existence of extra-regional and regional powerful states that perceive Tehran as an existential threat, Iran faces a number of regional constraints in the Middle East.

5.3.3 Regional Opportunities

While taking into consideration the regional constraints, it will not be true to define the Middle East as Iran's complete misfortune. Indeed, the latest developments especially in 2000s provide Tehran a number of opportunities to strengthen its regional position. The political influence and leverage of Tehran in the Middle East began to increase following the downthrown of Saddam Hussein regime and the subsequent weakening of Iraqi state in 2003. Moreover, the US occupation of Afghanistan which brought about the defeat of Taliban enables Iran to overcome an unfettered enemy without jeopardizing its own security interests. As Gülriz Şen indicates, the US interventions into Iraq and Afghanistan ironically change the geopolitical equilibrium in favor of Tehran by eliminating the most important enemies with whom Iran had tackled for years.²⁴⁹ In this sense, Iran succeeded to raise its influence by giving shape to the course of the regional conflicts and by benefitting from the political vacuum and the post-American structure in the Middle East.

Tehran has also raised its reputation and its soft power throughout the "Arab Street" by developing an anti-US, anti-Israel and anti-imperialist rhetoric regarding the deadlock of Israel-Palestine conflict. Iran supported Hamas and Hezbollah in

²⁴⁸ Dannreuther, Roland. "Bridging the Gulf? Iran, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf". *The Review of International Affairs*, 2, No.4, (Summer, 2003):32-46.

²⁴⁹ Şen, Gülriz. "İran ve "Arap Baharı": Bağlam Söylem ve Siyaset". *Ortadoğu Etütleri*,3,No.2, (Ocak 2012): 98 (95-118).

their decisive fight against Israel. This support ran counter to the silence of most Arab countries towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.²⁵⁰

The results of the Arab Uprisings in addition to Assad's preservation his strength in the face of weakening Syrian opposition seem as another regional opportunity for Iran to embolden its status. The public movements in Bahrain, Kuwait and Yemen played havoc with Saudi Arabia rather than Iran. The growing leverage of Houthis in Yemen and the discontent of the Shia minority in Bahrain against the Manama regime supported by Saudi Arabia opens Iran rooms of maneuver to increase its influence throughout the Persian Gulf.

In addition to aforementioned opportunities, Russia's decision to increase its influence over the Middle East could serve Iranian interests to counterbalance the US' unilateral actions. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, upon consolidating its power domestically and internationally, Russia began to take a firm stance against the alleged Western-led regime changes under the disguise of color revolutions in its "near abroad" and likewise voice its opposition to any similar actions in the Middle East after the Arab Uprisings. Russia firmly reacted against the US-led NATO intervention into Libya and the overthrow of Muammar Kaddafi and the ongoing civil war in Syria against the rule of Bashar Assad which undermined the status of two major allies of Russia in the Middle East. The power vacuum in the region not only leads the regional powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia to increase their influence but it also invites Russia to secure its regional interests in the face of already-consolidated US' power in the Middle East. The cases such as Libya and Syria show that the interests of Tehran and Moscow overlap and revolve around their common desire to oppose a possible US hegemony over the region. Therefore, at least in the short run, it seems that "the return of Russia to the Middle East" could be categorized as an opportunity for Iran.

5.3.4 Results

By taking into consideration the regional constraints and opportunities, Iran aims at prioritizing its state survival in an anarchic international system. Therefore,

²⁵⁰ Şen, Gülriz. "İran ve "Arap Baharı": Bağlam Söylem ve Siyaset". *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, 3, No. 2, (Ocak 2012): 98 (95-118).

even though its assertive, aggressive and interventionist policies in the Middle East are interpreted as an indicative of Tehran's ideologically-driven foreign policy, Iran's regional activities show that it is moving by making realpolitik calculations according to its national security interests. According to Neorealism, "over the long run, the state's foreign policy can not transcend the limits and opportunities thrown up by the international environment"²⁵¹ Therefore, as a result of its material capabilities such as a strong military, high population, a rich cultural civilization, Iran tries to carve out a sphere of influence for itself in the Middle East. To this end, it possesses a number of territorial claims over the Gulf region, leads some proxy wars with other regional and extra-regional powers, and periodically pursues policies regarding nuclear enrichment. Moreover it establishes ties with some states and non-state actors around a goal to resist common adversaries and commands a dozen of IRGC-sponsored paramilitary forces composed of different nationalities such as Afghans, Iraqis, Lebanese and Pakistanis, involves militarily into the prominent regional conflicts as seen in the Syrian case.

The most commonly-held Neorealist assumption indicates that states act within the boundaries of the international structure and they calculate costs and benefits of their foreign policies. The regional developments such as its lengthy war with Iraq, the subsequent Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the growing political and military existence of the United States in the Gulf as a result of 9/11, the Iraq and Afghanistan invasions and Iran's becoming a next-door neighbor of Washington who perceives Tehran a part of axis of evil all gave a shape to the Iranian foreign policy and its relations with the regional countries. Kenneth Waltz points out that;

Competition and conflict among states stem directly from the twin facts of life under conditions of anarchy: States in an anarchic order must provide for their own security, and threats or seeming threats to their security abound. Preoccupation with identifying dangers and countering them become a way of life. Relations remain tense; the actors are usually suspicious and often hostile even though by nature they may not be given to suspicion and hostility.²⁵²

²⁵¹ Finel, Bl. "Black Box State Level Variables and Progressivity in Realist Research Programs". *Security Studies*, 11, No.2, (Winter 2001-2002):187-227.

²⁵² Hamilton, Eric. "Scarce Differences Towards a Material and Sytemic Foundation for Offensive and Defensive Realism". *Security Studies*, 22, No.3, (2013):436-465.

The Iran-Iraq War and its heavy social, economic casualties prompted Tehran to revise its revolutionary agenda and prioritize its security interests. The war was partly a result of territorial dispute between the parties regarding the banks of Shatt al-Arab river. The war revealed the fact that the regional countries especially in the Gulf perceived Iran's revolutionary legacy as a major threat to their regimes. Both Iran and its regional rivals preoccupy with identifying dangers and potential dangers from each other. The tense relations especially in the initial years of the revolution result in a never-ending suspicion between the parties which prevents a genuine rapprochement despite a few initiatives towards that. In addition to the territorial disputes with Iraq, Iran deals with a few significant clashes with Saudi Arabia, as well. the Hajj incident in 1987 bolstered the already existing suspicion between the two. The incidents took place when the Iranian pilgrims held anti-US and anti-Israeli demonstrations in Mecca and 275 Iranian were killed after the clashes with the Saudi Arabian police force. The incident severed the parties' diplomatic relations. Similar to Saudi-Iranian relations, Iran and the UAE have not been able to resolve their territorial disputes over the islands Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs and their relations remain tense today. Tehran shows a "revanchist stance" towards these islands. Iran seized the islands during the Pahlavi era in 1971 since Britain left there. The unchanged stance regarding Abu Musa and the two Tunbs indicates that Tehran expresses some continuation of foreign policy especially in its security policies despite the revolutionary breaking point in 1979. Iran also has a historical claim over Bahrain, where a Sunni pro-Saudi regime rules a Shia minority. So the Gulf has been witnessing a number of territorial disputes between Iran and several Arab Kingdoms, which fuel the hostility between the parties. The decades-old territorial disputes between the parties in the Gulf proves rightfulness of Robert Jervis' quotation below;

In order to protect themselves, states seek to control, or at least to neutralize, areas on their borders. But attempts to establish buffer zones can alarm others who have stakes there, who fear that undesirable precedents will be set, or who believe that their own vulnerability will be increased.²⁵³

²⁵³ Jervis, Robert. "Cooperation Under Security Dilemma". *World Politics*, 30, No.2, (January 1978):167-218.

In addition to territorial disputes, Iran conducts several proxy wars with regional powers such as Israel, Saudi Arabia and extra-regional power, the United States. One of the most successful proxy of Iran is Hezbollah in Lebanon. Hezbollah's pushing the Israeli occupation forces out of the Southern Lebanon was seen as a great strategic victory for Iran. In addition to Hezbollah, Iran trains and equips various militia groups in places full of power vacuums such as Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan and Syria via the Islamic Revolutionary Guards (IRGC). Iran pursues a highly active foreign policy in the region via using IRGC forces and especially its elite unit Quds Forces headed by Qasem Solaimani. Thus, Washington designated the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization in April 2019. Like its military activities, Iran's alliances with states such as Syria and Iraq as well as non-state actors primarily Hezbollah and other local militia groups stood as a part of its interventionist policies in the Middle East.

All the factors above from the territorial disputes to the nuclear enrichment policies are indicative of the scope of Iran's assertive policies in the Middle East. Some scholars view Tehran's regional alliance from Iraq to Syria and Lebanon as a show of its Shia Crescent policy and interpret Iran's Middle East policy within an ideological framework. According to this interpretation, Iran pursues mostly messianic and irrational policies in order to form a Shia hegemony throughout the region. Likewise, its nuclear enrichment policies occasionally make Tehran be viewed as a destabilizing state in the region especially by Washington and Tel Aviv. In various events, Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu perceive Tehran's enrichment program as a major threat to regional stability and pledge that they will not allow Iran to obtain nuclear weapons.²⁵⁴ Interpreting the policies as ideological brings about some shortcomings. First of all, it will be wrong or at least incomplete to assess Iran-Syria relations from an ideological viewpoint. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, The Syrian President Bashar Assad and his inner circle belong to Alawite (Nusayri) minority group. Although Alawism is viewed as an offshoot of mainstream Shia Islam by some, it will be wrong to establish an organic relation

²⁵⁴ See <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-5506297,00.html>
<https://www.tv7israelnews.com/u-s-to-implement-new-round-of-sanctions-against-iran/>

between Shia denomination in Iran and Alawite doctrine. Alawism follows a distinctive religious tradition and most of their worshipping methods are peculiar and dissimilar to both Sunni and Shia methods. Furthermore, historically, “Twelver Shi’ite heresiographers...regarded the Alawis as ghulat, “those who exceed” all bounds in their deification of Ali. The Alawites, in turn, held Twelver Shi’ites to be muqassira, “those who fall short” of fathoming Ali’s divinity”.²⁵⁵ Thus, Syria-Iran alliance endures for years not because of a Shia solidarity but “because it had been defensive in nature which aimed at neutralizing Iraqi and Israeli capabilities and preventing US involvement in the Middle East.”²⁵⁶ Similarly, in the case of Iraq and Yemen, Iran is not ideologically driven but it tries to exploit the power vacuum there like other regional countries. Therefore, as Anoushiravan Ehteshami points out, “despite its revolutionary zeal and a reputation for non-conformity and defiance since the revolution, it can be argued that revolutionary Iran has always been a ‘rational actor’ in the classic realist mold”.²⁵⁷ In this sense, sometimes ideological rhetoric could serve its realpolitik policies. For example, the power of political Islam on influencing the masses in the Middle East is immense, which means that there will be several regional buyers of Iranian religious rhetoric. Hence, Iran’s advocacy of Islamic uprisings may be welcomed by “sympathetic ears”²⁵⁸ in the Middle East. John Mearsheimer underlines that “although states almost always use idealistic rhetoric to justify their actions, this can not disguise the fact that their motives are usually selfish and usually based on calculations about the balance of power.

²⁵⁵ Kramer, Martin. “Syria’s Alawis and Shi’ism”. *Shi’ism Resistance, and Revolution*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1987, published electronically, <http://martinkramer.org/sandbox/reader/archives/syria-alawis-and-shiism/> (Date Accessed 24 May 2019)

²⁵⁶ Berni, Hazal Muslu. “Iran’s Security Dilemma in the Middle East: A Neorealist Approach to Iran’s Foreign Policy in Syria”. *İran Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 1, No.2, (2018):115-139.

²⁵⁷ Ehteshami, Anoushiravan. “The Foreign Policy of Iran” in Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (eds), *The Foreign Policies of the Middle East States*, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), pp. 283-310.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

Morality is the product of power.”²⁵⁹ Iran is not and will not be the sole country using ideological rhetoric in order to justify its foreign policy steps. The United States justifies its interventions in the Middle East with the rhetoric of “war on terror” and mission of making the region a sea of democracy.

All in all, explaining Iran-Syria relations from the framework of Neorealism will be more satisfactory than ideological explanations. By calculating the costs and benefits, Iran acts as a rational nation-state and tries to maximize its regional influence. The heightened tension between Iran and its adversaries in the Middle East is an example of security dilemma in which “one state’s gain in security often inadvertently threatens other.”²⁶⁰ Thus, the Gulf countries as well as Israel aimed at preventing Iran from becoming a hegemon and thus desire to limit its advantages in the regional system. To this end, they use the tool of balancing and rely on the US’ dominant world power by inviting Washington to the region as an extra-regional hegemon. The growing US presence in the region and the subsequent events from the Gulf War to the Iraqi Invasion and lastly the Syrian Civil War express the US’ uncontested power in the Middle East. Waltz puts forward that,

Aside from specific threats it may pose, unbalanced power leaves weaker states feeling uneasy and gives them reason to strengthen their positions. The United States has a long history of intervening in weak states, often with the intention of bringing democracy to them.”²⁶¹

Following the 9/11, the US named Iraq, Iran, North Korea as axis of evil in the red category and Cuba, Syria and Libya in the orange category. Witnessing the invasion of Iraq and the turmoil in Libya and Syria with an extensive US involvement, it is more than natural for Iran to worry about its own security and survival. The fear of the possibility to become the next target of Washington leads Iran to balance against it through using all its regional assets and alliances. The fear of an external

²⁵⁹ Mearsheimer, John. “EH Carr vs Idealism: The Battle Rages On”. *International Relations*, 19, No.2, (2005):139-152.

²⁶⁰ Jervis, Robert. “Cooperation Under Security Dilemma”. *World Politics*, 30, No.2, (January 1978):167-218.

²⁶¹ Waltz, Kenneth. “NATO’s Expansion A Realist View.” *Contemporary Security Policy*, 21, No.2, (2000):23-38.

interference has always been an active motif in the background that affects the Iranian foreign policy like other countries having passed through the age of imperialism. Hinnebusch properly points out this reality with the sentences below;

The West's restored ability to intervene militarily and impose economic sanctions and loan conditionality has revived key features of the age of imperialism at the expense of regional autonomy. No analysis of the international politics of the region can be convincing that does not take account of the profound impact of the ongoing struggle for regional autonomy from external control.²⁶²

All in all, The US-led Western interventions in the Middle East and the following regime changes paves way for other anti-US states to search for balance of power. "In international politics, overwhelming power repels and leads others to try to balance against it".²⁶³ In this regard, for Iran, "balancing is a strategy of survival, a way of attempting to maintain [its] autonomous way."²⁶⁴

Tehran's nuclear enrichment policy which is another representative of its assertive policies is also a part of its balancing strategy. The main adversaries of Iran in the Middle East, the United States and Israel both possess nuclear weapons, which eliminates the importance of conventional weapons to balance their military might. Both Washington and Tel Aviv want to preserve the nuclear status quo and their position as the sole nuclear powers in the Middle East. Actually, the imbalances in army power in the Middle East are unique, as Waltz states "in no other region of the world does a lone, unchecked nuclear state (Israel) exist." He is even surprised by the fact that it has taken a long time for a "potential balancer to emerge" against Israel.²⁶⁵ The nuclear imbalance increases Iran's vulnerability and uselessness of its conventional weapons in the face of a potential direct attack. In this context, in the

²⁶² Hinnebusch, Raymond. *The International Politics of the Middle East*, (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 2003).

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Waltz, Kenneth. "Structural Realism after The Cold War". *International Security*, 25, No.1, (Summer 2000):5-41.

²⁶⁵ Waltz, Kenneth. "Why Iran Should Get the Bomb Nuclear Balancing Would Mean Stability". *Foreign Affairs*, 91, No.4, (July-August 2012):2-5.

middle of growing threats and war of words, it is highly predictable that Tehran will not surrender and bandwagon the US power. Instead, it ambitiously tries to immunize itself by obtaining a nuclear deterrent in a self-help world with heightened suspicion about the possible actions of its adversaries.

All in all, from the Neorealist viewpoint, it could be put forward that Tehran expresses a policy of chain-ganging in its relations with the Middle Eastern allies. While assessing the alliance patterns in multipolarity, Thomas Christensen explains that;

In multipolarity...states are said to be structurally prone to either of two opposite errors that destabilize the balancing system. On the one hand, they may chain themselves unconditionally to reckless allies whose survival is seen to be indispensable to the maintenance of the balance.²⁶⁶

Accordingly, Iran chains its own security unconditionally to Syria and perceives its survival as indispensable to the maintenance of the balance against Israel, the US, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Actually, “Iran’s policy in Syria was driven by a combination of domestic and external concerns”. Therefore, “despite accusations from its regional enemies, notably Saudi Arabia, that its agenda was expansionist, Tehran viewed the conflict primarily through a defensive lens”²⁶⁷, as suggested by Christopher Phillips. Hence, Iran’s interventionist and aggressive policies regarding the Syrian civil war stem from a chain-ganging policy. It should be bear in mind that for insecure states, it is not easy to witness the destruction of its allies. The challenge Assad faced in Syria alarmed Iran because it is Tehran’s most important ally to support the post-revolutionary policies in the Middle East. Through Assad regime, Iran could extend its influence towards Lebanon, the next door of Israel. Its alliance with Syria and Hezbollah as well as Hamas is the most significant card in its anti-Israeli and anti-Western politics. As Gülriz Şen indicates, upon a possible military intervention towards its nuclear program, Iran presents a regional crisis that it could provoke through Hamas and Hezbollah as a deterring factor.

²⁶⁶ Christensen, Thomas. Jack Snyder. “Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity”. *International Organization*, 44, No.2, (Spring 1990):137-168.

²⁶⁷ Phillips, Christopher. *The Battle For Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*, (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2016)

Assad regime is the first line of defense in its fight against the US and Israel and if the Syrian regime does not maintain its commitment to Iran, the second line of defense composed of Hamas and Hezbollah is doomed to collapse.²⁶⁸

In short, Iran chains its survival to the survival of its regional allies as a part of its balancing strategy against its regional adversaries. In this strategy, it prioritizes its security interests rather than the ideological stance of the Islamic revolution. It exploits the regional opportunities emerging out of power vacuums and it calculates the costs of regional constraints. Most of the time, its ideological rhetoric evolving around religious fervor serves its nation-state interests thanks to the power of political Islam in the Middle East. All in all, Tehran expresses interventionist and assertive policies in the Middle East as observed from its territorial disputes, proxy wars, relations with paramilitary and militia groups, military existence besides friendly regimes and nuclear program. The isolating efforts of its regional adversaries and the growing distrust between them and thus Tehran's balancing policies stand as the major explanatory factor for its aggressive policies. The one-sided withdrawal of the US from the JCPOA further fuels the existing distrust and suspicion between them. Tehran interprets the regional uprisings especially the one in Syria as a Western plot and fears from becoming the next target. Hence, in a self-help international system it expresses a chain-ganging policy as an alliance pattern and ties its own regime survival to the survival of its allies.

5.4 Iran and Central Asia/Transcaucasia

5.4.1 Historical Legacy

Historically known as Turkistan (the land of Turks), Central Asia is today composed of five former Soviet republics: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The region covers a vast area from Russia in the north to Afghanistan and Iran in the south, China in the east to the Caspian Sea in the west. Consisting of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, Transcaucasia refers to the southern border of the USSR and locates between Turkey in the west, Caspian Sea in the east, Russia in the north and Iran in the south. In addition to bordering the Caspian Sea,

²⁶⁸ Şen, Gülriz. "İran ve "Arap Baharı": Bağlam Söylem ve Siyaset". *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, 3, No. 2, (Ocak 2012): 107 (95-118).

Central Asia and Transcaucasia (CA/TC) similarly possess a common legacy left from the USSR. Both Central Asia and Transcaucasia comprise “a vast borderland between Russia and the Middle East”²⁶⁹. During the 19th century, this area witnessed a competition of influence between Russia from the north and Britain from the south (India). Yet, in contrast to the Middle East, the CA/TC was mostly kept out of the scope of Great Power politics. Furthermore, after the Bolshevik Revolution, the USSR became the uncontested power in the region and ruled over this vast area and created several artificial republics there. That’s why, in terms of imperialist legacy, Central Asia/Transcaucasia is similar to the Middle East. While the Soviet rule put its stamp to the demarcation of the CA/TC states’ borders, the Franco-British joint project mainly demarked the borders of the Middle East. While comparing the imperialist heritage of these two regions Raymond Hinnebusch and Sally Cummings hypothesize that;

Real sovereignty is constrained in both regions owing to the imperial inheritance and the persisting residues of empire, with the real consequences including weak stateness (internal sovereignty) and dependencies constraining international autonomy (weak external sovereignty).²⁷⁰

As a result of this imperialist legacy, Tajikistan and Syria, while located in two different regions, display some socio-economic and demographical similarities, although the degree of stability and the multitude of power dynamics notably differ from each other. For instance, both Syria and Tajikistan are deprived of some territories that they claim owning. While Tajikistan “lost” Bukhara and Samarkand to Uzbekistan, the Greater Syria (Bilad al-Sham) was gradually split into Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and Palestine beginning from the WWI. Accordingly, the border disputes have prevailed throughout both counties’ history. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have very recently accomplished to soften their decades-old demarcation crisis with the visa deal. However, the situation is more dramatic in Syria. Daniel Pipes states that;

²⁶⁹ Demir, İdris. “Iran in Central Asia:1990-2000.” *Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, No.19, (Mayıs 2009):91-102.

²⁷⁰ Cummings, Sally, and Raymond Hinnebusch. “Introduction” in Hinnebusch, Raymond, and Sally Cummings. (eds). *Sovereignty After Empire Comparing the Middle East and Central Asia*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

On first entering Syria, the observant traveler will probably be startled to go through passport control and notice a military map of Syria on the wall, for this map contains several anomalies. It shows the Golan Heights under Syrian control, though they have been occupied by Israel since 1967. Syria's boundaries with Lebanon and Jordan appear not as international borders but as something called "regional" borders. Israel does not even exist; instead, there is a state called Palestine. And Palestine is separated from Syria by a line designated a "temporary" border". Finally, the province of Hatay, a part of Turkey since 1939, appears to be included in Syria; only on close inspection can one see the "temporary" border between it and Syria.²⁷¹

In short, partly due to the imperialist legacy, both states have domestic vulnerabilities in terms of the demographic disputes because of the heterogeneity of their population.²⁷²

During the Soviet rule, the CA/TC was mostly out of Tehran's political radar. Sebastien Petrouse and Sadykzhan Ibraimov underline this situation by saying "despite centuries of cultural, commercial and political interchange, Central Asia is a region that contemporary Iran has largely ignored"²⁷³. Iran was defining the Soviet regime in its north as the "Lesser Satan" and thus their diplomatic relations were at the minimum level in the initial years of the Iranian revolution despite being more neutral relative to the US-Iran relations. However, Iran-Iraq War and Tehran's anti-US campaign (especially Hostage Crisis with Washington) compelled Iran to recalibrate its relations with the USSR because mainly of its urgent need for arms against potential threats to its security in the Gulf. As Johnston explains, "a softening of relations with the USSR was another security policy developed as a result of the Iran-Iraq War...Iran's lengthy war with Iraq brought a tempering of this ideological stance to the forefront of security policy".²⁷⁴ All in all, on the eve of the Soviet

²⁷¹ Pipes, Daniel. "Introduction: A Neglected Topic from Greater Syria: The History of an Ambition". Published electronically, <https://www.danielpipes.org/books/greaterchap.php> (Date Accessed 24 May 2019)

²⁷² For further information about the demographic disputes of Syria and Tajikistan see the previous chapters

²⁷³ Petrouse, Sebastien. Ibraimov Sadykzhan. "Iran's Central Asia Temptations". *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, 10, (2011): 87-101.

²⁷⁴ Johnston, William Jerry. *From Revolution to Realpolitik: Iran's Foreign Policy in Central Asia and the South Caucasus since 1991*. Diss. Florida State University, 2007.

collapse, Moscow-Tehran relations were relatively warm. During the tensest years before the demise (1988-1991), Iran was expressing its support for the USSR for its dealings with civil unrest and ethnic strife in many fronts.

The collapse of the USSR which created a vast buffer zone with the emergence of new states brought about different international adjustments of power in the region. While once not an area of priority for Iranian foreign policy, the authorities in Tehran began to re-configure their relations with the newly-emerged CA/TC states and the significance of the region gradually grew. In consequence of the rapid progress of Turkey's and the US' influence in the region, Iranian concerns increased, and the area gained more visibility in the Iranian agenda. Moreover, the emergence of new states in its northern vicinity was significant for Iran to improve its international political status as well as economic well-being which was greatly damaged by the developments and constraints in the Middle East. To sum up, as Roland Dannreuther points out;

The breakup of the Soviet Union and the creation of the new states in the Caucasus and Central Asia occurred at the point when Iran's revolutionary ardor is already in decline. Iran had just suffered 8 years of war with Iraq, the founder of the revolution had passed away, and the overwhelming need was to deal with domestic demands for economic reconstruction and political regeneration.²⁷⁵

5.4.2 Regional Constraints

With the demise of the USSR, Iran began to share its borders with very young nation-states gaining their independence from decades-long Soviet rule over them. Out of the blue, Iran was encircled with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan while once there was only the Soviet Union. This regional transformation was possessing several constraints and opportunities at the same time and force Iranian authorities to develop appropriate foreign policy to deal with it. From the Soviet legacy to the US penetration into the region which accompany the already constraining conditions of the region such as the Caspian Sea Dispute, Central Asia/Transcaucasia holds several regional constraints for Tehran.

²⁷⁵ Dannreuther, Roland. "Bridging the Gulf? Iran, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf". *The Review of International Affairs*, 2, No.4, (Summer, 2003):32-46.

Firstly, approximately seven decades-long Soviet rule over the CA/TC had a huge impact on the socio-cultural trends in the region. Although the people of the region are mostly Muslim, the religious institutions were weakened because of the intense control of the socialist Soviet rule. Thus, the Islamic identity in the region is distinctively secular and blocks off the external manipulations. Unlike the Middle East where political Islam is one of the best tools of mobilization upon the populations and a means of legitimation for the regimes, neither the populations nor the regimes in Central Asia and Transcaucasia prioritize political Islam while specifying their identities. This condition directly affects the potential of Iran's revolutionary Islamist brand and accordingly the threat perception it arouses. Ali Reza Nader points out that; "the competition beyond the Middle East is not as intense and consequential. Iran has maintained a relatively low profile in Central Asia and the Caucasus, its brand of revolutionary Islam has constrained its ability to influence here."²⁷⁶ Therefore, Iranian authorities act with the awareness that "its ideological model was unattractive to the majority of the Central Asian leaders were secular in orientation and whose Muslim populations followed Sunni rather than Shia traditions."²⁷⁷ All in all, the legacy of Islamic Revolution remain short to counter the secular legacy of the Soviet socialist rule.

Besides, regardless of the Soviet demise, Russia accomplished to preserve its upper-hand throughout the region. After a short period of uncertainty in the Russian foreign policy, Russia re-asserts its "big brother" status especially with the rise of Euroasianism and does not allow the emergence of a new external power.²⁷⁸ Today, Russia stands as the most well-equipped and capable military power in Central Asia/Transcaucasia. Hence, "Russia's influence and activities...eclipse Iran's and

²⁷⁶ Nader, Ali Reza. Stephen Larrabee. "Iran's Geopolitics". *Turkish-Iranian Relations in a Changing Middle East*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2013.

²⁷⁷ Dannreuther, Roland. "Bridging the Gulf? Iran, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf". *The Review of International Affairs*, 2, No.4, (Summer, 2003):32-46.

²⁷⁸ For further information see the Chapter Russia and Central Asia/Transcaucasia

Turkey's sense of competition.”²⁷⁹ Furthermore, Iran's lack of enough capital to assert its influence throughout the region disables its capabilities in the face of Russia. By the time of the Soviet demise, Iran was suffering from a growing economic shortage as a result of its war with Iraq and international pressures. Roland Dannreuther states that “neither Iran nor Turkey had sufficient capital and economic and political incentives to make a significant impact on the region.”²⁸⁰ Yet again, despite of its shrinking economy, Iran conducts some investment activities in the region. For example, as Tajikistan exports electricity to Iran, Tehran invests into its power industry. Over the long run, however, Iranian economic disabilities in the face of Russian influence continue to eclipse Tehran's influence in CA/TC.

The delimitation problem of the Caspian Sea is another constraining factor for Iran in CA/TC. Iran and the other littoral states (Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) could not reach a consensus on the demarcation of the Caspian Sea. The parties disagree whether the Caspian Sea is a lake or sea. Although it is technically a lake, it has 371.000 km² surface area which is bigger than countries such as the United Kingdom, Japan, Italy or Germany. This paradox leads to “lake or sea argument” which problematizes the distribution of the vast natural resources beneath its water. Because of its experience as an undermined actor in the regional grouping of the Persian Gulf, Tehran prioritizes its political, economic and security interests in the Caspian Sea. According to Edmund Herzig,

Tehran has been sensitive (doubtless with its Persian Gulf/GCC experience in mind) to the danger of being excluded from a future Caspian Sea regional grouping, to the risks of a possible future militarization of the Caspian and to the danger of hostile foreign penetration into the region.²⁸¹

Before the emergence of the new littoral states, Iran and the USSR regarded the Caspian as a lake with a neat border between them. The newly emerged littoral

²⁷⁹ Nader, Ali Reza. Stephen Larrabee. “Iran's Geopolitics”. *Turkish-Iranian Relations in a Changing Middle East*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2013.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Herzig, Edmund. “Regionalism, Iran and Central Asia”. *International Affairs*, 80, No.3 (2004): 503-517.

states classify the Caspian as sea with territorial zones for each states and neutral areas. Upon the demarcation of the Caspian according to international maritime rules (sea argument), the majority of the existing natural energy resources would be in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan territories, which put Iran and Russia into a disadvantageous position with smaller portions. Therefore, Iran proposes a division of the Caspian as a lake which would give each coastal state equally 20 % share. The legal status of the Caspian was open to discussion between these five littoral states since 1996 and there was not a full-fledged agreement that satisfies all parties. Finally, the littoral states have signed an agreement in Aktau, Kazakhstan August 2018. The deal attributes the Caspian Sea a special legal status viewing it a closed body of water and do not allow any external military forces other than the ones of the coastal countries. However, the issue of delimitation will be open to further discussions in the near future. The exclusion of any external military forces prevents a future military cooperation between the littoral states and the extra-regional hegemons and thus favors Iran's security interests and Russian military upper-hand in the region against China or the United States. However, the August 2018 deal about the legal status of the Caspian Sea should not be viewed as the end but the beginning for further regulations as there could emerge some new problems based on differences of interpretation. For the time being, the exclusion of a potential US military power from the Caspian could be viewed a significant success and relief for Iran especially the increasing tension in the Gulf and around the Strait of Hormouz is taken into consideration. Yet, even after the deal, Iran is in the "most disadvantageous" position and needs to conduct some bilateral negotiations with Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan in order to upgrade its status.²⁸²

There is another issue in Central Asia and Transcaucasia which keeps the constant attention of Iranian foreign policy makers maybe more than any other regional constraints mentioned above. The US and NATO enlargement into this region disturbs not only Russia but also Iran, which is already aware of the outcomes of such an enlargement from its experience in the Gulf. Although CA/TC is

²⁸² Legucka, Agnieszka. "Establishing the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea". *The Polish Institute of International Affairs*, 27 August 2018, published electronically, http://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=24739 (Date Accessed 24 May 2019)

geographically distant to Washington who does not have much historical contacts there, the regional countries most of the time welcome the US involvement into the region in order to reduce their dependence on Russia. With the demise of the USSR, Washington increased its political and economic activities in CA/TC. As is known, after the Soviet withdrawal, Kazakhstan was left with a large and insecure nuclear arsenal. Driven by the security concerns, the US took part in the dismantlement of this nuclear arsenal. After 9/11, the US-Russia cooperation against the threat of terrorism enabled the US to develop security cooperation with the CA/TC countries, as well. All the Central Asian countries supported the US-led military operations against the terrorist targets in Afghanistan. Washington has several military political and economic interests towards CA/TC. Firstly, it has a desire to control the passageways of the energy resources and preventing Russia and China from becoming superpowers by exploiting the regional resources. The United States, secondly, strives for consolidating its military power in the region so that it could more easily respond a potential threat and rise of terrorism like seen in Afghanistan. By consolidating its military might, the United States also aims at encircling Iran from the north and narrowing down Tehran's living space. Therefore, in the event that Washington becomes an uncontested power in Central Asia and Transcaucasia, Iran, already constrained in the Gulf would completely fail to maintain its survival.

In spite of Washington's attempts to fill the power vacuum in CA/TC after the Soviet demise, during 2000s, Russia began to reassert its status in CA/TC and partly due to its growing influence, the US military presence in the region has gradually declined. Yet, the US generally pursues friendly relations with the regional countries and possesses significant investments there. American involvement in the Caspian region weakens Iran's energy cards there and hampers its position as a potential transit zone.²⁸³ The US presence also limits Iran's influence in the Transcaucasia. Both Central Asian and Transcaucasian states face strong pressure from the United States which does not want Iran to be a regional power. Countries such as Georgia and Azerbaijan, which possess warm relations with Washington have usually tense or at least less-friendly relations with Tehran. All in all, as S.V.

²⁸³ Wastnidge, Edward. "Central Asia in the Iranian Geopolitical Imagination". *Cambridge Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 2017, 1: #1YRJ04, <https://doi.org/10.22261/1YRJ04>

Demidenko points out; “Armenia is believed to be its (Tehran) stronghold in the region, whereas Georgia and Azerbaijan, which are harnessed to American interests, take a guarded attitude to their southern neighbor.”²⁸⁴

With or without the US involvement, Azerbaijan-Iran relations all by itself have remained as a constraining factor so far. Security risks and threat perceptions prevail both countries’ mutual viewpoints. Despite the occasional periods of cooperation around common values, neither Baku nor Tehran accomplish to overcome suspicion towards each other. As Neorealism contends, the newly-independent small countries are over-sensitive towards security threats on their borders. Therefore, upon its independence, Azerbaijan framed the Iranian regime exportation activities alongside the Armenian assaults as one of the major threats towards its sovereignty. Iran, on the other hand, is worried about the secessionist and nationalist movements of its Azeri minority group (the largest minority group in Iran with roughly 18 million) living mainly near Azeri border, an enclave mostly called by some nationalist Azeris as “Southern Azerbaijan”. Azerbaijan’s close relations with the US and Israel constraint Tehran’s influence and increase its threat perception towards Azerbaijan. Moreover, Tehran would be more uncomfortable with an economically-powerful Azerbaijan in its north. Johnston explains that,

An economically successful Azerbaijan on the other side of a border with an economically floundering Iran does little to allay Iran’s sensitivities. Iran fears that if Azerbaijan were to reap a great deal of economic success from its Caspian Sea oil fields, the separatist tendencies of its Azeri population in northwestern Iran would surface and tear apart the multicultural Islamic Republic.²⁸⁵

In short, the regional constraints in CA/TC for Iran mainly evolves around the Soviet legacy of secular interpretation of Islam which hinders the charm of Iran’s revolutionary Islamic model, the presence of Russia as the regional hegemon, the

²⁸⁴ Demidenko, S.V. *Iran’s Regional Policy and Russian Interests*. (2014) *New Agenda in Russian-Iranian Relations* (Report No XIV). Retrieved from RIAC website: <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/activity/workingpapers/modern-russian-iranian-relations-challenges-and-opportunities/>

²⁸⁵ Johnston, William Jerry. *From Revolution to Realpolitik: Iran’s Foreign Policy in Central Asia and the South Caucasus since 1991*. Diss. Florida State University, 2007.

Caspian dispute, the US enlargement into the region and its close relations with the regional countries and lastly its crinkled relations with Azerbaijan.

5.4.3 Regional Opportunities

Alongside several constraints, the emergence of eight new former Soviet states in the north also brought along several opportunities for Tehran which had felt itself in the middle of a geographic clamp because of the severe developments in its south. In contrast to the Middle East, the Central Asia and Transcaucasia presents diplomatic, economic, geopolitical, social and cultural opportunities in for Tehran to break its international isolation and protect its state interests. All in all, as Roland Dannreuther states, “unlike the Gulf region, the new Caucasian and Central Asian states did not have the memory of over a decade of fiery rhetoric and constant attempts at destabilization”.²⁸⁶ Yet, it is necessary to underline that CA/TC states were not completely welcoming about the Islamic Republic and they were quite suspicious about its true approach to the region. However, in contrast to the Middle East and especially the Gulf region, the CA/TC has presented much more opportunities for Iran’s foreign policy projects.

First and foremost, the geographic location and its geographic proximity to CA/TC states supply a pivotal role for Iran. Unlike the Gulf states, the countries in CA/TC are landlocked which naturally turn Iran into a gateway and a bridge between them and the world oceans so thus the world markets. Mohammad Farhad Atai indicates that “with 2000 miles of shore on the Persian Gulf, Iran is the shortest and the most economical route for transportation of oil and gas from the Central Asia-Caspian region to Japan and the Far East”.²⁸⁷ Thanks to this advantage, it is easy for Tehran to enter this resource-rich region as an appealing economic partner. Considering the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the turmoil in Afghanistan and the desire of CA/TC states to break away from or at least reduce their dependency on Russia, Tehran supplies not only the shortest but also the most

²⁸⁶ Dannreuther, Roland. “Bridging the Gulf? Iran, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf”. *The Review of International Affairs*, 2, No.4, (Summer, 2003):32-46.

²⁸⁷ Atai, Mohammad Farhad “Iran and the Newly Independent States of Central Asia,” in Ali Mohammadi, Anoushiravan Ehteshami (eds.), *Iran and Eurasia* (Ithaca Press: South Street, 2000).

secure routes for hydrocarbons, oil and gas products of energy-rich states such as Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. The projects of road and railway networks could not accomplish to reach the desired level due to the lack of enough material support. Yet, there are numerous projects carrying the potential to make Iran a transit zone in the long run. In terms of CA/TC and Iran distinctively, there exists a mutual economic dependency. At the initial years of the Soviet collapse, CA/TC states were underdeveloped despite their vast energy resources. For CA/TC states especially who desire to diversify their partners in a way to decrease the Russian factor, Iran offers an excellent option to upgrade their trade capacity of energy resources.

Secondly, as mentioned in the previous chapters, the lack of enough attempts of regionalism and anti-Iranian attitude of the existing organizations in the Middle East was constraining Tehran's political and economic capabilities there. With the emergence of new states in its north and the lack of rivalry and hostility between them and Tehran, Iran finds a unique opportunity to carry out its desire for cooperation against the security threats. Edward Wastnidge indicates that "the lack of regionalism in the Middle East facilitates a greater desire on Iran's part to move towards a regional order/grouping with Central Asia".²⁸⁸ Therefore, although Iran could not effectively improve its multilateral relations with the Gulf states, it gained influence in the CA/TC through regional organizations such as Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization SCO. Originally, the ECO was established in 1985 with the joint initiative of Iran, Turkey and Pakistan. Following the Soviet demise, it was expanded and included newly emerged Central Asian states plus Azerbaijan and Afghanistan. Despite being an economic organization, the ECO is perceived by Iran as a tool for political stability and good-neighborly relations with CA/TC. Johnston states that; "economic cooperation is a priority in Iranian foreign relations with regard to Central Asia and the Caucasus precisely because it is the most effective means by which Iran can

²⁸⁸ Wastnidge, Edward. "Central Asia in the Iranian Geopolitical Imagination". *Cambridge Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 2017, 1: #1YRJ04, <https://doi.org/10.22261/1YRJ04>

exercise regional influence”.²⁸⁹ The SCO is a more powerful and active organization than the ECO and Iran wants to transform its observer status to a full member one, viewing the SCO as “a useful bulwark against American intentions in the region.”²⁹⁰ Therefore, becoming a full-member enables Tehran a significant geostrategic leverage in its attempts to counterweight the US’ constraining policies. Moreover, becoming a full member of SCO will make Iran an organizational ally of Russia and China, the two powerful members of the United Nations Security Council, which would strengthen Tehran’s hand to counterbalance threat posed by the US and its allies. Moreover, these both regional hegemonies are willing to take Iranian security concerns more seriously and approach Iran more friendly than the United States. For example, China’s One Belt One Road project (also known as the new Silk Road) envisages empowering Iran’s gateway status and economic dynamism. Consequently, “China and Iran have developed a broad and deep relationship centered on China’s energy needs and Iran’s abundant resources, as well as significant non-energy economic ties including arms sales and defense cooperation”²⁹¹. To sum up, in contrast to the Middle East, the CA/TC presents more options for Tehran in terms of regionalism and economic partnership. The favorable attitudes of China and Russia for Tehran’s involvement into the regional developments are another opportunity in contrast to the US’ containment policies in the Gulf.

Thirdly, unlike the Gulf region where the predominantly Arab monarchies target Iran as the actual concern for their security, the common security concerns such as extremism, terrorism human and drug trafficking, the instability in Afghanistan have compelled the states in Central Asia and Transcaucasia to cooperate with Iran. The pivotal position and geographic location of Tehran in a region open to various security threats from the NATO’s eastern enlargement to

²⁸⁹ Johnston, William Jerry. *From Revolution to Realpolitik: Iran’s Foreign Policy in Central Asia and the South Caucasus since 1991*. Diss. Florida State University, 2007.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Jin, Wang. “Selective Engagement: China’s Middle East Policy after the Arab Spring”. *Strategic Assessment*, 19, No.2, (July, 2016): 105-117.

instability in the Caucasus and the turmoil in Afghanistan and rise of radicalism around Central Asia as well as ethnic insurgencies make Iran directly a privileged party to whom the regional states are obliged to discuss the foreign policy issues.

Lastly, Iran's cultural ties with CA/TC states decrease the threat perception towards it. To give a simple but interesting example, Nowruz, the day which is accepted as the New Year is celebrated by both the Turkic nations in CA/TC and the Persian nations as in Iran. In addition, Tehran shares the same language with Tajikistan. As Kasghari suggests,

Iran has a further link in Central Asia that it does not possess in the Gulf States, which is a country that shares its language in the form of Tajikistan. The presence of Tajikistan has allowed for Iran to gain an almost instantaneous foothold in the region that it otherwise lacks in the gulf allowing for a firmer cultural link within the region.²⁹²

To sum up, CA/TC region is a fertile ground for Tehran to develop its multilateral ties and has full of opportunities ranging from economic, political, security to cultural senses. To exploit these opportunities, Iran has always followed a highly prudent and cautious foreign policy towards the region.

5.4.4 Results

Neorealism assumes that the primary desire of the states is self-preservation. Geographically and politically being a significant party of two distinct regional systems, the Middle East and Central Asia/Transcaucasia, Iran preeminently tries to exploit the benefits it possesses by calculating the costs with the ultimate aim of maintaining its state's self-preservation. The foreign policy steps of Iran in CA/TC differ from the ones it pursues in the Middle East. As observed from the case of Tajik Civil War, Iran opts for following conciliatory and non-involvement policies in CA/TC. In this sense, the examples similar to Tajik case could be multiplied. Despite the inflammatory religious rhetoric of the Islamic Revolution, Iran did not support "the obvious Islamic candidate"²⁹³ in none of the regional conflicts ranging from

²⁹² Kasghari, Tamim. "Understanding Iran: Between Central Asia and the Gulf Cooperation Council". *Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse*, 3, No.4, (2011). <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=505>

Nagorno-Karabakh crisis to Chechen insurgency against Russia and ethnic clashes between China and Uyghur Muslims. Unlike its assertive involvement into crises in Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, Lebanon and Iraq through military and paramilitary means by establishing tight alliances, Tehran adopts a calculated, prudent and conciliatory foreign policy with a truly pragmatic nature. Therefore, Iran's revisionist attitude in the Middle East seems contradictory to its pro-status quo policies in Central Asia/Transcaucasia.

While maintaining individual bilateral relations with the newly-emerged states in CA/TC, Iran makes sure that it never takes a step that could be perceived as aggressive by neither Russia nor the other regional states. In this regard, while mostly blamed by the United States or regional hegemons such as Saudi Arabia or Israel as the destabilizer in the Middle East, Iran has never been a destabilizing actor in CA/TC since the Soviet Demise. In this region, it prioritizes establishing sustainable economic relations with the CA/TC countries, acts in order to strengthen the regionalist agenda and helps to mediate the abovementioned regional conflicts for a peaceful solution or keeps out of the conflicts by perceiving them as domestic issues. Consequently, while pursuing a balancing strategy via expressing "chain-ganging" alliance patterns in the Middle East, Tehran shows a loose type of bandwagoning strategy towards Russia and pursues "buck-passing" policies in CA/TC as seen in the Tajik case.

As mentioned in the previous chapters²⁹⁴, Tajikistan constitutes a good opportunity for Tehran in CA/TC by means of its cultural and linguistic ties. Thanks to these commonalities, Tajikistan is a potential candidate to be "the Syria of Central Asia/Transcaucasia" for Tehran's foreign policy projects. As is known, after the Soviet demise, Iran, likewise Turkey and the US, engaged in a competition to assert its influence by exploiting the power vacuum in the region. Tajik Civil War erupted in 1992 when Tehran was endeavoring to reconsolidate its economic and military power which was greatly damaged by its war with Iraq. In this regard, Tajik Civil

²⁹³ Halliday, Fred. "Iran and the Middle East: Foreign Policy and Domestic Change". *Middle East Report*, No.220,(Autumn 2001):42-47.

²⁹⁴ For further information see the Chapter "Tajik Civil War and Iran"

War was seen as an undesirable source of instability which would further threaten Tehran's security and economic interests during its efforts to mend the bilateral ties with Russia and searching for economic opportunities with the new republics in the former Soviet territory. Accordingly, Tehran followed a non-involvement policy in Tajik case despite initial low-key support for the opposition composed mainly of IRPT (Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan). Mohammad Farhad Atai suggests that "with little insight into the nature of the developments in Central Asia, the Islamic Republic of Iran offered verbal support to trends and groups that were not necessarily in harmony with Iran's interests".²⁹⁵ Moreover he continues regarding the Tajik case that "it later turned out that the main support for the 'Islamic regime' came from the Saudi government, whereas Iran's involvement with that regime did not go beyond verbal support".²⁹⁶ In short, Iran corresponded to the Tajik Civil War cautiously and pursued a constructive attitude by setting the conditions for peace negotiations alongside with Russia.²⁹⁷ Johnston indicates that "Iran reacted to the threat posed by the Tajikistani Civil War not with increased revolutionary Islamic rhetoric, but with the calculated pragmatism characterized by Iran's security policy after the Iran-Iraq War".²⁹⁸

Iran's potential for regime exportation or ability to carve out a sphere of influence from the chaos in Tajikistan was greatly restrained due to Russian influence in Tajikistan, the secular legacy throughout the region, Iran's lack of enough material capital and its growing vulnerabilities due to the hostile attitude in the Persian Gulf. Hence, "any tacit support for the Islamists would run quite contrary to Iran's security policy."²⁹⁹ According to Neorealist explanation, "because power is

²⁹⁵ Atai, Mohammad Farhad "Iran and the Newly Independent States of Central Asia," in Ali Mohammadi, Anoushiravan Ehteshami (eds.), *Iran and Eurasia* (Ithaca Press: South Street, 2000).

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ See Dannreuther, Sadykzhan, Başaran.

²⁹⁸ Johnston, William Jerry. *From Revolution to Realpolitik: Iran's Foreign Policy in Central Asia and the South Caucasus since 1991*. Diss. Florida State University, 2007.

a possibly useful means, sensible statesmen try to have an appropriate amount of it. In crucial situations, however, the ultimate concern of states is not for power but for security”.³⁰⁰ Being aware of the magnitude of the costs of a possible aggressive policy against the interests of Russia and the other regional countries, Iran perceived Tajik Civil War not a means of accumulating power and influence over the region but a potential source of instability that needs to be eliminated through a peaceful approach. Accordingly, Tehran used a pragmatist card emerging out of a realpolitik need to sustain peace throughout the region. In this sense, Iran refrained from antagonizing Russia, its main arm supplier, in order to support Muslim counterparts in Dushanbe. As Johnston concludes, “Russia, as a regional power, poses a more significant existential threat to the Islamic Republic if it opposes Russian policy than any secular regime in Tajikistan”.³⁰¹ Tajik Civil War was not the first case that Iran expresses its conciliatory non-involvement policy and seems that it will not be the last. Iran reacted similarly to other regional conflicts.

One of the most chronic conflicts in CA/TC is Nagorno-Karabakh crisis between Azerbaijan and Armenia both of which share their borders with Iran. Unlike the Tajik Civil War, the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh is not confined a single state but it is an inter-states affair with a variety of regional repercussions. The conflict is mainly the result of incorrect decision of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin to allocate ethnic Armenian groups to Nagorno-Karabakh, an enclave of Soviet Azerbaijan. The seeds of the modern conflict date back to pre-Soviet collapse years, roughly around 1988 when fighting broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan to obtain the control over the region. Iran interpreted the conflict as a domestic issue of the USSR and cautiously kept aloof from the crisis. With the Soviet demise, the conflict became more concerning for Tehran due to its massive Azeri population and a potential refugee crisis. Like Tajik Case, Tehran expressed a muted stance towards the conflict

²⁹⁹ Ibid

³⁰⁰ Waltz, Kenneth. “The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory”. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. 18, No.4, (spring 1988): 615-628.

³⁰¹ Johnston, William Jerry. *From Revolution to Realpolitik: Iran’s Foreign Policy in Central Asia and the South Caucasus since 1991*. Diss. Florida State University, 2007.

and pursued mainly a non-involvement policy with the innate desire that neither parties win too much. In fact, Tehran does not refrain from establishing close relations with Christian Armenia although the majority of Azeri population is Shia Muslim. Nader points out that;

Religious and cultural affinity would have suggested that Iran would side with Azerbaijan. However, geostrategic considerations have driven Iran to support Armenia to keep Azerbaijan weak and ensure that Baku would not be in a position to stir up trouble among Iran's Azeri population.³⁰²

All in all, at the expense of sacrificing a potential Shia solidarity with resource-rich Azerbaijan, Iran ironically prefers Armenia as its "stronghold in the region".³⁰³ The restraints over Armenian economy with the blockades from Turkey and Azerbaijan and the continuing conflicts between Georgia and Abkhazia which obstructs the effective trading with Russia push resource-poor Yerevan to conduct close relations with Tehran which in a way strengthen Iran's hands against the nexus of Azerbaijan-Turkey.

By helping the mediatory efforts between Armenia and Azerbaijan and urging negotiations between them, Iran tries to contain any potential threats to its own security. Neorealists tend to believe that "the most powerful political ideology on the face of the earth is nationalism".³⁰⁴ Hence, although the Azeri minority groups in Iran are mostly well-integrated to the Iranian state and society, Tehran is fully aware that a wealth Azerbaijan with an upper-hand in its conflict against Armenia and close ties with Israel and the US could trigger nationalist and separatist tendencies among its Azeri population. Moreover, for Tehran, a powerful Azerbaijan means further threat to its territorial integrity. Iran has already had some territorial disputes with

³⁰² Nader, Ali Reza. Stephen Larrabee. "Iran's Geopolitics". *Turkish-Iranian Relations in a Changing Middle East*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2013.

³⁰³ Belobrov, Y.Y. A.G. Volodin, N.I. Kozyrev, Y.V. Lankin, V.I. Sazhin, V.I. Yurtaev. (2014) *New Agenda in Russian-Iranian Relations* (Report No XIV). Retrieved from RIAC website: <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/activity/workingpapers/modern-russian-iranian-relations-challenges-and-opportunities/>

³⁰⁴ Mearsheimer, John. "Hans Morgenthau and Iraq War Realism vs Neo Conservatism." *Open Democracy*, published electronically: <http://mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/pdfs/A0037.pdf> (Date accessed 20 March 2019)

Azerbaijan over the Alborz/Alove oil fields and in the Caspian Sea. Among these tense relations, the arms deal between Israel and Azerbaijan stands as another source of worry for Tehran. Iran interprets the efforts of Azerbaijan to develop its military capabilities through a partnership with Israel as a potential threat from Israel. Although Baku aimed at strengthening its army against Yerevan rather than Tehran, Iran fears from Azerbaijan's transformation into an Israeli card via a vis the Hezbollah card in its hands. In short, Tehran prioritizes its security interests towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict likewise the Tajik Civil War and pursues a "policy of restraint that focuses on reducing and containing new threats and vulnerabilities arising from the dramatic changes in the region".³⁰⁵ As Freij indicates, "the strategic interests and political sovereignty concerns of the Iranian state have superseded the evangelical goals of the Islamist elements in the Iranian leadership".³⁰⁶

Unsurprisingly, Iran abandons its rhetoric that supports the mostazafin and adopts a turning a blind eye policy towards the ethnic conflicts between Muslim Chechens against Russia and Muslim Uighurs against China. While handling the Chechen Insurgency, Tehran has always highlighted that the issue is a matter of Russia's internal affairs and made clear that Russia had the right to protect its territorial integrity.³⁰⁷ For Russia, Chechnya which is located in the north Caucasus is a significant route to its near abroad and any rock on this route is viewed intolerable. A possibility of uncontrollable chaos in this region could negatively affect Russia's influence throughout CA/TC. That's why; Russia fiercely dedicates all its efforts to suppress freedom movements in Chechnya. Tehran's assertive policies in the conflicts of the Middle East lead people presume that Iran indeed could be a key actor and has a considerable capacity for stirring up tension in issues such as Chechen insurgency by exploiting the ideological and religious aspirations. However, Iran acts in the opposite direction and abstains from intervening into the

³⁰⁵ Freij, Hanna Yousif. "State Interests vs. The Umma: Iranian Policy in Central Asia. *Middle East Journal*, 50, No.1, (Winter, 1996): 71-83.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Dannreuther, Roland. "Bridging the Gulf? Iran, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf". *The Review of International Affairs*, 2, No.4, (Summer, 2003): 32-46.

conflict. In order to attract attention to this dilemma of Iranian foreign policy, Johnston underlines that;

Russia's war with Chechnya in the North Caucasus presented an ideological conflict of interests for the Iranians. The model of revolutionary Islam calls for the support of oppressed Islamic peoples throughout the world; however, the realpolitik necessities of the Iranian state recognize the military superiority of Russia. Russia is also a major trading partner with Iran, and Iran must keep this relationship in tact; any criticism of its handling of the Chechen rebellion must be kept diluted, and open support for the Chechens avoided.³⁰⁸

This dilemma prevails in its dealing with China-Uighur conflict in Xinjiang province. Chinese government has been systematically repressing the Muslim Uighur Turks via detaining approximately one million people in camps. Despite the accumulating criticism from the human right organizations and the United Nations, the international community generally turns a blind eye towards China's growing totalitarianism. In spite of being a Muslim country with the claim to be the key actor of the Islam world, Iran does not make an exception for Xinjiang conflict and takes a posture similar to the aforementioned cases. Its silence and refusal to condemn China is subjected to heavy criticism by its adversaries. Lastly Mike Pompeo, the US Secretary of State, stated that "Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei fancies himself the leader of the Islamic world, but his regime has been totally silent as China- the top buyer of Iran's oil- has persecuted and detained hundreds of thousands of its Muslim citizens".³⁰⁹

Yet, despite criticisms from the US, Iran will not risk its national interests in order to support ethnic, religious or ideological struggles against Russia or China, both of whom are key allies that have a significant leverage against Washington in the international arena and the UN Security Council. Iran, which has been already constrained by the US and its allies in the Middle East, could not afford to open new fronts of competition and turn Russia and China into adversaries unless they present a direct security threat towards Tehran. Kenneth Waltz explains that;

³⁰⁸ Johnston, William Jerry. *From Revolution to Realpolitik: Iran's Foreign Policy in Central Asia and the South Caucasus since 1991*. Diss. Florida State University, 2007.

³⁰⁹ Tweed, David. "Pompeo Hits Iran's Leader for Silence on China's Detained Muslims". *Bloomberg*. 14 September 2018. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-09-14/pompeo-hits-iran-leader-for-silence-on-china-s-detained-muslims>

Despite a widespread belief to the contrary, Iranian policy is made not by “mad mullahs” but by perfectly sane ayatollahs who want to survive just like any other leaders. Although Iran’s leaders indulge in inflammatory and hateful rhetoric, they show no propensity for self-destruction.³¹⁰

Iran channels a great deal of its energy to its rivalry with the US and its allies in the Middle East in a way to counterbalance their adversary efforts that directly threatens Iranian security and influence throughout the region. Creating new enemies in Central Asia/Transcaucasia other than durable alliances would greatly undermine Iranian security which could bring along a self-destruction of its regime. A stable CA/TC region with full of economic opportunities rather than conflicts would be much more desirable for Tehran. According to Neorealism, states are forced not only to compete but also to cooperate with the desire of avoiding losses and gaining military advantages. While assertively competing against Washington, Riyadh and Tel Aviv in the Middle East, Tehran opts for cooperating with Moscow and Beijing in Central Asia/Transcaucasia. Thomas Christensen states that;

The essentially rational actors posited by Structural Realism will under certain conditions be able to use cooperative or other unthreatening military policies to improve understanding of their motives. For states motivated primarily by security, such opportunities will be especially attractive when cooperative policies can also enhance their military capabilities.³¹¹

Iran as a security seeker state endeavors to enhance its military capabilities against its adversaries near its southern and western border. Two of these adversaries -the US and Israel- possess nuclear weapons and their excessive powers require and even “beg” to be counterbalanced. Therefore, Russia and China as nuclear powers constitute the best options for Iran to enhance its military capabilities. Moreover, most of their interests both in the Middle East and Central Asia/Transcaucasia overlap with those of Tehran. According to Neorealist assumptions, “alliances are made by states that have some but not all of their interests in common. The common interest is ordinarily a negative one: fear of other states”.³¹² Russia and Iran find a

³¹⁰ Waltz, Kenneth. “Why Iran Should Get the Bomb Nuclear Balancing Would Mean Stability”. *Foreign Affairs*, 91, No.4, (July-August 2012):2-5.

³¹¹ Christensen, Thomas. Jack Snyder. “Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity”. *International Organization*, 44, No.2, (Spring 1990):137-168.

³¹² Waltz, Kenneth. “The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory”. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. 18, No.4, (spring 1988): 615-628.

common ground of cooperation in their struggle against the US-led unipolar world system. Antagonizing Russia in CA/TC, therefore, would not serve to Iranian security interests.

Waltz argues that the international structure determines which state behaviors will be rewarded and punished. This is called as “the process of selection”. Secondly, what types of foreign policy seem prudent for actors of the international system is determined, which is called as “the process of socialization”.³¹³ Iran’s long-enduring alliance with Syria, its growing influence over Iraqi politics, ties with Hezbollah and its noteworthy network with paramilitary and militia groups from various nations prove that Iran’s assertive policies in the Middle East are rewarded and strengthen its hand. Therefore, Iran follows assertive and aggressive policies in the Middle East by adopting a balancing strategy and “chain-ganging” alliance pattern. Such aggressive policies- hypothetically speaking- would be most probably punished in Central Asia and Transcaucasia as a result of the general socio-political structure and Russian domination in the region. Therefore, even though Russia was a potential threat and furthermore a historical enemy of Tehran, Iran does not apply balancing strategy against Russia. A Neorealist concept, “bandwagoning” could help explaining Iran’s strategy in CA/TC. As is known, states develop several strategies for survival. Balancing is one of them as explained in the previous chapters, bandwagoning is another strategy.

Bandwagoning refers to aligning with a stronger and adversarial power. Bandwagoning may sometimes be “a less demanding and a more rewarding strategy than balancing, requiring less effort and extracting lower costs while promising concrete rewards.”³¹⁴ The weaker states generally have “insufficient resources for balancing and little room for maneuver.” Therefore, the states may have “jump on the wagon only later to wish they could fall off.”³¹⁵ Iran expresses a weak form of

³¹³ Christensen, Thomas. Jack Snyder. “Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity”. *International Organization*, 44, No.2, (Spring 1990):137-168.

³¹⁴ Waltz, Kenneth. “Structural Realism after The Cold War”. *International Security*, 25, No.1, (Summer 2000):5-41

bandwagoning in its relations with Russia. It refrains from criticizing Russia's assertive, interventionist policies in Central Asia and Transcaucasia as seen in the Tajik case as well as other regional conflicts that Russia directly involves in. Tehran recognizes Russian claims over its "near abroad" and adopts conciliatory policies by enhancing its pragmatic streak and developing friendly economic ties with the regional countries. An Iranian expert, Fred Halliday narrates, calls Iran's policies in CA/TC as "*siasat-i dast-igol*" (policy of the bunch of flowers): whoever turned up at Tehran's airport on an official visit would be welcomed".³¹⁶ Therefore, it refrains from forming tight alliances which could trigger suspicion and hostile attitude by the regional states primarily Russia towards itself. In this sense, in contrast to its "chain-ganging" alliance pattern in the Middle East, Tehran pursues a "buck-passing" alliance pattern in CA/TC. "Buck passing" refers to "counting on third parties to bear the costs of stopping a rising hegemon"³¹⁷ Accordingly, Iran counts on Russia in CA/TC, where the US tries to increase its influence through fostering friendly ties with the regional states and NATO enlargement. Therefore, Iran seems more prudent and criticizing less the close relations of the regional states with the US or Israel as it is fully cognizant that Russia is more capable and equipped than itself while fighting against the US threat in Central Asia/Transcaucasia. Thus, it keeps aloof from the regional conflicts and passes the buck to Moscow vis a vis the security threats in CA/TC. While approaching the cases such as Tajik Civil War, Nagorno-Karabakh or Chechen Insurgency, Tehran jumps to Moscow's wagon.

5.5 The Role of "Russia Factor" on Iran's Foreign Policies

In the previous chapters, the differences of Iranian foreign policy projects towards Central Asia/ Transcaucasia and the Middle East regions were laid out with an overview of the opportunities and constraints posed by each region for Iran and

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Halliday, Fred. "Iran and the Middle East: Foreign Policy and Domestic Change". *Middle East Report*, No.220,(Autumn 2001):42-47.

³¹⁷ Christensen, Thomas. Jack Snyder. "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity". *International Organization*, 44, No.2, (Spring 1990):137-168.

giving references to Iranian approach towards the regional developments. While assessing Iran's distinct approaches to each region which mostly seem contradictory, it will not be wrong to argue that Russia factor is a significant determinant for Iranian foreign policy. By using the term "Russia factor", I mean not only the existence of Russia in Central Asia and Transcaucasia as a hegemonic regional power and expanded influence in its "near abroad" but also the Russian policies towards the Middle East that directly or indirectly favors Iran's position as a significant regional actor. Despite being historical rivals and enemies, Moscow and Tehran maintain tactically and strategically cooperative relations today, which even leads to some arguments on whether their relations could be called as a strategic alliance or not. All in all, Moscow-Tehran relations cannot be correctly assessed by calculating solely the bilateral issues between them. Rather, several external factors have decisive influence over the nature of their relations. Although the developments in two different regional systems greatly help the emergence of more rooms of cooperation between Tehran and Moscow, the nature of their relations could not be considered free from significant obstacles, as well.

Historically, the relations between Russia and Iran have always been unpredictable and unstable. Traditionally, it will not be wrong to state that they are old enemies. During the 19th century, Russia defeated Iran in two series of war and forced it to sign the treaties of Golestan in 1813 and Turkmenchai in 1828. Russia continued to put pressure on Iran during both the first and second world wars and showed attempts of invasion from the North, which were eventually ceased by British counterweight from the South.³¹⁸ Therefore, in the traditional perception of Tehran, Moscow represents a significant external threat against its security and survival. Neither Bolshevik Revolution in Russia nor the Iranian Revolution could be capable enough to challenge this historically-rooted threat perception. During the Pahlavi era, the USSR and communism were perceived as the major threat against Iranian security as a result of both the historical experience and Iran's alliance with the United States. With the Iranian Revolution, Russia was generally called as "little satan" and represented the East in the slogan "Neither the West nor the East". While

³¹⁸ Hunter, Shireen. "Iran and Transcaucasia in the Post-Soviet Era," in David Menashri (ed.), *Central Asia meets the Middle East* (Frank Cass Publishers: London, 1998).

viewed and treated as “little satan” at the initial years of the Iranian revolution, Tehran’s political approaches towards Moscow gained a much more positive outlook in the late 1980s due to Tehran’s growing military needs international isolationism and highly-strained relations with the US. Hence, Iranian foreign policy towards Moscow exposed to several changes and turns while the threat perceptions have never reduced to trivial levels. Nikolay Kozhanov indicates that;

It is hard to find another country whose relations with Moscow have experienced such a huge number of drastic twists and turns in as short a period of time as has been the case with Iran. Between 1991 and 2011, periods of active political dialogue between Russia and Iran were often swiftly interrupted by long pauses, during which Moscow and Tehran would actively exchange accusations about failing to meet treaty commitments or failing to keep promises.³¹⁹

Especially after 2012 following Putin’s presidency, Tehran-Moscow relations began to develop further. The foreign policy agenda between the two countries witnesses growing desire for dialogue and cooperation in political and economic sectors. While explaining the shift from a historical rivalry to an expanding partnership, the nature of Moscow-Tehran relations should be carefully examined. Due to their geographical proximity, both states possess intricate and complex relations with “intersecting interests on different issues.”³²⁰ The events in the Middle East, Central Asia and Transcaucasia, common interests and challenges have a significant impact on Iran-Russia relations. While criticizing the reductionist approaches of the Western analysts, Kozhanov highlights that the Russo-Iranian dialogue could not be limited to Moscow’s role over Iran’s nuclear program and their arms deals. As he explains, the nuclear issue and arms sales covers a very small piece of a quite elaborate mutual interactions between these actors.³²¹ Apart from their common oppositional stance against the US’ unilateral actions, the common challenges on their vicinities such as the threat of terrorism, extremism, drug and

³¹⁹ Kozhanov, Nikolay. “Russia’s Relations with Iran Dialogue without Commitments”. *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, June 2012, published electronically, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/russian-relations-with-iran-dialogue-without-commitments> (Date Accessed 31 May 2019)

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid.

human trafficking, migration problem, ethnic and religious tension, inevitably force these two influential neighbors to establish a sustainable dialogue and productive interactions.

Neorealism prioritizes the role of the international structure on the states' relations and objects to an explanation purely focused on a bilateral format. Thus, "Russian-Iranian relations are not limited to the bilateral format; they are also greatly influenced by a number of external, often decisive factors."³²² The turbulent atmosphere in the Middle East, beginning from the US' invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan till the Arab Uprisings and lastly the Syrian Civil War, prompted Russia and Iran to foster their efforts towards cooperation. Both countries are not content with the US involvement and influence in the region and worried about the outcomes of Arab Uprisings and their regional repercussions. For Iran, its similar views with Russia about the regional issues serve to "its quest for dominance in the turbulent Middle East."³²³ Moscow expresses an inclusive approach for Tehran, defends inviting the Iranian authorities to the ongoing discussions about the regional conflicts and treats Tehran as an important actor in the regional affairs as opposed to the West's exclusionary attitude. With this purpose, Putin states that he views Iran as an "old traditional partner" and the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov calls it as a "natural ally of Russia in the struggle against religious extremists in the Middle East".³²⁴

On the side of Tehran, the unresolved deep-rooted problems and the failures of the nuclear deal with the United States and the inability of the European Union to comply with the deal in the face of Washington's growing pressures disillusiones

³²² Belobrov, Y.Y. A.G. Volodin, N.I. Kozyrev, Y.V. Lankin, V.I. Sazhin, V.I. Yurtaev. (2014) *New Agenda in Russian-Iranian Relations* (Report No XIV). Retrieved from RIAC website: <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/activity/workingpapers/modern-russian-iranian-relations-challenges-and-opportunities/>

³²³ Kozhanov, Nikolay. "Understanding the Revitalization of Russian Iranian Relations". *Carnegie Moscow Center*, 2015, published electronically, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_Kozhanov_web_Eng.pdf (Date Accessed 31 May 2019)

³²⁴ Ibid

Tehran and promotes its efforts to engage with Russia more actively. All in all, as Clement Therme suggests, “in the context of a more confrontational US policy toward Iran under President Donald Trump, Iran is likely to further increase its economic cooperation with non-Western countries such as Russia and China”.³²⁵ Consequently, Iran’s anti-Americanism, which turns into a systematic feature of Iran’s foreign policy, promotes Moscow’s interests and consequently empowers Russia’s hands in the Middle East. The Arab Uprisings and Western intervention into the crises of Russia’s traditional allies such as Libya and Syria downsized Moscow’s political and economic existence in the Middle East. As Kozhanov points out, “Moscow was frustrated by the fact that its generally pro-Western position in the Libyan conflict in 2011 received no positive feedback either in Washington or Brussels”.³²⁶ Amid the events of Arab Uprising, the loss of a friendly regime in Libya, the US stronghold in the Gulf and the political uncertainty in Syria; Tehran serves as one of the last anchorage in the Middle East for Moscow. Furthermore, the Ukraine crisis and the Western sanctions imposed on Moscow have driven the Russian authorities to strengthen its position in the Middle East and its ties with Iran to compensate the negative effects of its tension with Washington and the EU and curtail potential security threats. As a part of the disappointment over the inability to “bridge the divide with the West”, Russian authorities believed more on the necessity to develop relations with the Middle Eastern states and accordingly Iran. Russia, who already endeavors to prove itself as one of the top global leaders in a multipolar international system, tries to multiply its activities in the Middle East. So it is not a coincidence that the Kremlin held a decision to intensify its contacts with Tehran by 2012. All in all, Iran has an expanding influence throughout Lebanon, Iraq and Syria and succeeds remaining as an important actor in the Gulf despite long-standing sanctions, which makes it a favorable partner for Russia to have a card in the Middle East against the Western influence in its near abroad.

³²⁵ Therme, Clement. “Iran and Russia in the Middle East: Toward a Regional Alliance?”. *The Middle East Journal*, 72, No.4, (Autumn 2018): 1-16. Published electronically <http://0-muse.jhu.edu.library.metu.edu.tr/article/710915>

³²⁶ Ibid

While strengthening its dialogue with Tehran, Moscow is highly careful about its relations with other regional actors such as the Gulf states and Israel. In this sense, “Russia does not see positive relations with both Israel and Iran as antithetical. Rather its regional strategy is premised on concurrently fostering beneficial ties with the two strongest powers in the region.”³²⁷ On the one hand, this realpolitik calculation limits its contacts with Tehran to the level of “watchful partnership”³²⁸ and prevents the transformation of their relations into a strategic alliance. On the other hand, Russia’s conduct of a well-calculated pragmatic partnership with Iran did not jeopardize its friendly relations neither with Israel nor the Gulf. Ephraim Kam explains that;

The improvement of Russia-Iran relations has a positive aspect for Israel, though overshadowed by the negative implications. Due to Russia’s perception of global considerations, the importance of its relations with the United States, and the talks it has held with Israel and moderate Arab countries, Russia could play a moderating role regarding Iran.³²⁹

Israel, in need to diversify its diplomatic relations as much as possible owing to its lack of strategic depth in a hostile environment, views Russia a channel of communication to transmit messages to Iran.

At the end of the day, the Russia-Iran partnership fosters mutually beneficial outcomes for both actors in the Middle East. Russia’s growing presence in the Middle East provides Iran a chance to counterbalance the US’ long-standing hegemony and opens rooms for Tehran to follow more assertive policies in the region. Like Tehran, Moscow has a long-term interest in countering the US influence. To prevent the US to create a regional structure that fully complies with its

³²⁷ Krasna, Joshua. “Moscow on the Mediterranean: Russia and Israel’s Relationship”. *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, June 2018.

³²⁸ A phrase coined by a Russian expert on Iran Vladimir Sazhin which means “Although positive dialogue between Iran and Russia was in Moscow’s interests, the Russian government carefully watched the development of relations in order to prevent them from exceeding a level that would endanger Moscow’s dialogue with other countries.” See Kozhanov, Nikolay. “Understanding the Revitalization of Russian Iranian Relations”. *Carnegie Moscow Center*, 2015, published electronically, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_Kozhanov_web_Eng.pdf (Date Accessed 31 May 2019)

³²⁹ Kam, Ephraim. “Will Russia and Iran Walk Hand in Hand?”. *Strategic Assessment*, 19, No.2, (July, 2016): 105-117.

own interests and protect its influence in Syria and elsewhere, Russia prefers to turn a blind eye to Tehran's military activities alongside with the paramilitary groups on the ground in Syria and its growing influence there, at least in the short term. In short, the "Russia factor" contributes to Iran's balancing strategy against the United States and the US-allies and its interventionist policies in the Middle East.

"Russia factor" comes into forefront in Iranian foreign policy when it comes to Central Asia and Transcaucasia region, as well. According to Neorealist theory, one of the most determinative and significant factors which defines whether a state is powerful or not is that state's capacity of military power. Today, in terms of military capacity, Russia is globally among the top-level powers alongside with the United States and China.³³⁰ Consequently, Iran regards its northern neighbor as the natural leader of Central Asia and Transcaucasia. Like their approaches towards the Middle East, Iranian interests in CA/TC express a high conformity with Russian interests. Due to the powerful presence of Russia in CA/TC, Iran pursues a strategy of bandwagoning while dealing with the conflicts in CA/TC and refrains from antagonizing Moscow over the regional affairs.

As mentioned before, dating from 1993, Russia designated Central Asia/Transcaucasia as its vital sphere of interest for sustaining its survival by naming the region as its near abroad. Via strengthening its economy and military power after 2000s, Moscow consolidated its presence in CA/TC and effectively fought against several threats ranging from the NATO's eastern enlargement to radical Islam as well as organized crime activities. Its aim to become a regional hegemon and capability to turn the course of the regional events for its own benefits stand as the prominent factor that has limited the US' capability to fill the power vacuum in CA/TC as an extra-regional hegemon as opposed to what happened in the Middle East beforehand. Like Moscow, Tehran is greatly alert to the possibility of the US' penetration into Central Asia/Transcaucasia. As Roland Dannreuther indicates, "for Tehran, a continuing Russian engagement in Central Asia is the best protection

³³⁰ Güneş, Ergin. "Tehdit Algılamaları Ekseninde Rusya'nın Yakın Dönem Kafkasya ve Orta Doğu Politikası". *Akdeniz İİBF Dergisi*, No. 27, (2013): 176-203.

against the expansion of US, Turkish and Western power and influence”.³³¹ Iran perceives the potential of the US presence in its northern neighborhood as a major source of security threat; therefore, it keeps an eye on its security needs and opts for keeping CA/TC unthreatened and calm at the expense of accumulating its power to the utmost level. An influential Iranian politician, Ali Akbar Velayeti remarks that Iran shapes its policy in the region with a view to avoiding a ‘clash with Moscow and continues that “instability could pave the way for American influence in Central Asia”.³³² Iran designs its foreign policy in CA/TC with the recognition that Russia is able to maintain the stability more than itself. As Johnston explains, “Iran’s realizations that Russia is the true source of regional authority and power, as well as its importance in supplying arms and technology to the Islamic Republic play an integral role in Iranian foreign policy in Central Asia and the South Caucasus”.³³³ On the Russian side, the good neighborly relations with Iran serve to its hegemonic interests and control over CA/TC. In addition to economic gains owing to their trading activities in civilian, military, technology sectors, Russia benefits from Iran’s balanced and pro-Russian stance in the face of regional challenges. Russia finds a willing actor that opposes any kind of foreign presence in the Caspian Sea region. Hence, “as Iran benefits from Russian border security guarantees, Russia benefits from cultural influence and stability by Iran to Central Asia”.³³⁴

To sum up, as opposed to its revisionist and interventionist policies in the Middle East, Tehran sees the preservation of the status quo and thus the stability in Central Asia and Transcaucasia more valuable which makes it prefer to “play

³³¹ Dannreuther, Roland. “Bridging the Gulf? Iran, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf”. *The Review of International Affairs*, 2, No.4, (Summer, 2003):32-46.

³³² Menashri, David. “Iran and Central Asia: Radical Regime, Pragmatic Politics,” in David Menashri (ed.), *Central Asia meets the Middle East* (Frank Cass Publishers: London,1998).

³³³ Johnston, William Jerry. *From Revolution to Realpolitik: Iran’s Foreign Policy in Central Asia and the South Caucasus since 1991*. Diss. Florida State University, 2007.

³³⁴ Ibid.

second-fiddle to its giant neighbor to the north.”³³⁵ Efegil highlights this preference with the sentences below;

Iran preferred to see Russian troops and border guards on the other side of its entire northern border. It regarded Russia as a strategic ally against Turkey as well as the United States. In line with this policy, Iran joined the North-South Axis (Moscow-Erevan- Tehran) to weaken the growing influence of the East-West Axis (Washington – Ankara – Baku- Tashkent).³³⁶

Consequently, Iran follows a conciliatory and non-interventionist foreign policy towards CA/TC and buck-passing alliance pattern -owing mostly to its desire to form close cooperation in the economic, civilian, military, nuclear space fields with Russia. The presence of a powerful Russia in its north compels Iran to abandon its revolutionary vision and establish well-calibrated ties with the other regional actors. The “Russia factor” seems one of the most prominent elements shaping Iran’s approach towards the developments in Central Asia and Transcaucasia. As Johnston underlines; “Iran’s security decisions and actions in the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict and the Tajikistani civil war were greatly influenced by Russia. The geographic proximity of Russia to Iran, its great size, its nuclear power, and its past history of involvement with Iran point to an inevitable impact of the Russians on Iran’s Security Policy”.³³⁷ Tehran’s non-interventionist stance and buck-passing strategy in the face of regional conflicts serves to its national interests at an utmost level, which could not be maintained by any kind of assertive policies. This situation proves Neorealism’s assumption: “when the risks of competition exceed the risks of cooperation, states should direct their self-help efforts toward achieving cooperation”.³³⁸

Yet, the mutually beneficial ties between Tehran and Moscow are not completely free from obstacles and disagreements. According to Neorealism, the

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Efegil.Ertan. “Iran and Turkey in Central Asia Opportunities for Rapproachment in the Post-Cold War Era.” *Journal of Third World Studies*, XX, No.1, (2003): 55-77.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Glaser,Charles. “Realists as Optimists: Cooperation as Self Help”. *International Security*,19,No.3, (Winter, 1994-1995): 50-90.

level of suspicion among the states can not be reduced to trivial levels as today's friend could turn into tomorrow's enemy. Therefore, neither Russia nor Iran could fully trust each other. For instance, any rapprochement between the West and Iran have a potential to harm the dialogue between Moscow and Tehran, as Iran with its vast energy reserves could serve as a good alternative for Russian oil and gas. The improvement of relations with the EU could make it less dependent on Moscow's support. As Neorealism contends, international structures have a huge impact on the foreign policy decisions of the states. In case of any changes in the structure such as a potential rapprochement between the United States and Iran or Russia, the nature of Moscow-Tehran contacts could change in a more negative direction.

While explaining the unpredictability of Russo-Iranian relations, Kozhanov states that "this volatility is largely attributable to the absence of any lucid, applicable Russian strategy toward Iran; instead, Moscow deals with its southern neighbor on a case-by-case basis, and its attitude toward Tehran changes accordingly".³³⁹ According to him, "one can always trace the linkage between periods of improved Russo-Iranian relations and periods of difficulty in Moscow's dialogue with the West".³⁴⁰ This linkage generally shows itself in the issue of arms deals. Despite Iran's insistent interest in more sophisticated military system, Russia has supplied Iran with only a small numbers of weapon systems, so far. The several discussions for large-scale weapons have brought by very few outcomes. In addition to Iran's economic shortages to finance the new large weapons, the US' heavy pressure creates hesitations on the Russian side. Lately, with the help of external factors such as the Syrian Civil War that foster cooperation, the talks about military cooperation intensified between the two. During the visit of Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu - a visit to Tehran for the first time in 15 years by defense minister level- the two actors made a comprehensive agreement on military

³³⁹ Kozhanov, Nikolay. "Understanding the Revitalization of Russian Iranian Relations". *Carnegie Moscow Center*, 2015, published electronically, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_Kozhanov_web_Eng.pdf (Date Accessed 31 May 2019)

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

cooperation against terrorism.³⁴¹ Yet, the issue of arms deals remains as an obstacle between Moscow and Tehran.

To conclude, the relations between Iran and Russia witness a significant improvement during the second decades of 2000s with the help of external factors in the Middle East and Central Asia/Transcaucasia. “Russia factor” has conspicuously impacted Iran’s foreign policy projects towards the Middle East and Central Asia/Transcaucasia. In almost every front, there are quite visible differences between Iran’s state-to state and multilateral relations with the Middle East and Central Asia/Transcaucasia. As Tamim Kashgari properly points out; “the seemingly contradictory foreign policy stances of the Islamic Republic of Iran are clearly defined by two rules...if it is treated like a equal member of the region it responds constructively, while when it is isolated and marginalized it responds with an aggressive foreign policy and hard line stances”.³⁴² As opposed to the US and its allies in the Middle East, Russia acts in a truly realistic manner with the recognition that Iran is an important regional player. The Kremlin demonstrates several commitments to support Iran in key issues. Lately, the convergence of interests and commonality of the threat perceptions generate more room for cooperation between Tehran and Moscow. In accordance with the assumptions of Neorealism, Tehran pursues its foreign policy projects in a rational and pragmatic manner with calculating the costs and benefits of its actions. The exclusionary and turbulent structure in the Middle East towards Iran with the US military presence in the Gulf as well as adversary regional hegemons such as Israel and Saudi Arabia and the lack of true allies except the Syrian regime and Hezbollah compel Iran to play power politics more fiercely and assertively by adopting a strategy of balancing against its rivals within a “chain-ganging” mentality. The latest example of this policy is evident in Iran’s approach to the Syrian Civil War. Whereas in Central Asia and Transcaucasia, as seen from the case of Tajik Civil War, Iran follows more constructive and conciliatory foreign policy with a prudent avoidance to threaten Russia’s influence

³⁴¹ Kam, Ephraim. “Will Russia and Iran Walk Hand in Hand?”. *Strategic Assessment*, 19, No.2, (July, 2016): 105-117.

³⁴² Kasghari, Tamim. “Understanding Iran: Between Central Asia and the Gulf Cooperation Council”. *Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse*, 3, No.4, (2011). <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=505>

in its near abroad. Amongst the opportunities and constraint provided by each regional system, “Russia factor” remains among the top-level factors shaping Iranian foreign policy agenda.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the importance of “Russia factor” on Iranian foreign policy and its relevance while determining the differences between Tehran’s approach towards two regional systems where Iran densely interacts with the other actors: The Middle East and Central Asia/Transcaucasia. While exploring the two case studies, Tajik and Syrian Civil Wars and their impact upon the Iran-Russia relations, I adopted Neorealism as a theoretical framework. Yet, I acknowledge the limitations of its theoretical boundaries. However, it is also correct that Neorealism, as one of the oldest and most prominent IR theories with its conceptual tools, supplies consistent analyses for foreign policy and international relations. To compensate the limitations, the thesis incorporated certain multi-layered explanations based on historical, domestic, economic, state, sub and supra-state levels. Hence, the behaviors of the states mentioned in the thesis are not portrayed as “actors responding chiefly to system-level determinants”.³⁴³ Without doubt, the analyses with other theories of Iranian foreign policy as well as Tehran-Moscow relations would shed lights on what has not been told and thus open up new horizons. Yet, this is beyond the scope of this thesis and it would be very opportunate if this study could point the way for further scholarly researches in this field the future.

The thesis underlines the significance of “Russia factor” and explores its impact on Iranian foreign policy projects towards the Middle East and Central Asia/Transcaucasia by applying an inductive method. In this sense, I tried to reach broader region-wide analyses by moving from the two case studies. “Russia factor” defines not only Moscow’s desire to prioritize the former Soviet territories in its national interests’ agenda but it also refers to Russia’s presence in the Middle East as

³⁴³ Hinnebusch, Raymond. *The International Politics of the Middle East*, (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 2003).

a counterbalancing power against the US status as an extra-regional hegemon, which somehow contributes to Iran's attempt to consolidate its power as a regional power. In the thesis, I implemented a comparative research and compared Iran and the Middle East as well as Iran and CA/TC in terms of historical legacies, regional opportunities, regional constraints and their reflections on Iran's foreign policy all together.

As is known, after a short period of hesitance following the Soviet demise, Russian Federation declared its "near abroad" doctrine in 1993, which defined the former USSR geography as a vital sphere of influence for its social, political security and economic interests. In order to prevent its decline, Moscow felt obliged to regain and protect its upper-hand in its "near abroad" and maintain stable relations with the actors here. This policy generally evolves around the prescriptions of Euroasianism following the shortcomings of pro-Western policies in the face of growing NATO enlargement into the former Soviet region.

Tajik Civil War, erupted in 1992 and lasted five years, both affected and was affected by Russia's "near abroad" doctrine. After a short period of disinterest, the Kremlin intervened into the conflict in Dushanbe in order to prevent a domino effect of instability around its borders. Tajikistan constitutes a buffer zone between the former Soviet territories and Afghanistan. The increasing power vacuum accompanied with rising criminal activities throughout the border compelled Russia to consolidate its control over the course of the civil war and to support a pro-Moscow regime in Dushanbe. All in all in line with the Neorealist argument, Russia, in a self-help world in which anarchy defines the conditions, felt acutely sensitive against a potential threat near its borders and intervened into the Tajik Civil War by supporting Emomali Rahmon.

While Moscow was prioritizing its "near abroad" policy during the course of the Tajik Civil War, Tehran was redesigning its foreign policy as a result of its eight year-long war with Iraq in its west and south and the Soviet demise creating a power vacuum in its north. In this sense, the civil war in Tajikistan coincides with Iran's so called "de-ideologization" process in its foreign policy after the death of Ayatollah

Khomeini and the end of war with Iraq.³⁴⁴ The necessity for economic reconstruction inside the country compelled Tehran to follow its national interests more strictly rather than promoting ideological values that had been advocated in the heady days of the Revolution. The growing US military presence in the Persian Gulf and its unilateral decisions to intervene into the conflicts in the Middle East as seen in the Gulf War proved that the conditions in the region is far different from the conditions of bipolarity during the Cold War. Bearing in mind the regional constraints in the Middle East, Tehran perceived the developments in Central Asia/Transcaucasia as an opportunity to end its international isolation and diversify its economic and diplomatic relations. The Soviet legacy with a secular government tradition, the US' attempt to penetrate into Central Asia and Transcaucasia, the insufficiency of Iran's material capability in the face of Russian control and the lack of historical enmity between Iran and newly emerging countries as opposed to its adversaries in the Gulf all forced Iran to follow more constructive, non-interventionist policies towards Central Asia and Transcaucasia. Upon its initial attempts to support the United Tajik Opposition, Tehran revised its policies towards the Tajik Civil War in line with Russia's policies. In addition to Tajik case, Tehran has refrained from supporting the "Islamic" side in the regional conflicts such as Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Chechen insurgency. In all these cases, Iran avoided risking its relations with Russia, one of its main arm supplier and diplomatic channel. All together, according to the thesis; its prudent policies proved that Tehran has preferred to show a loose type of bandwagoning with Russia as a way of survival and opted for following conciliatory, non-interventionist, prudent policies and prefers playing second fiddle in the face of Russia's power. Tehran prioritizes establishing sustainable economic relations with CA/TC countries, acts to strengthen the regionalist agenda and helps to mediate the conflicts or keeps aloof with perceiving them as domestic issues. While following bandwagoning strategy, Iran left the responsibility to Russia in the face of the threatening developments in Central Asia/ Transcaucasia, which could be defined as "buck-passing" alliance pattern.³⁴⁵ To this regard, Iran perceives the conflicts in

³⁴⁴ See pages 52-53.

³⁴⁵ See pages 125,132

CA/TC not as means of accumulating power and influence but a potential source of instability that needs to be eliminated with the lowest cost. Therefore, Tehran jumps to Russia's wagon and passes the buck to Moscow vis a vis the security threats. Even though Russia is a potential threat and a historical enemy, Tehran could not afford to adopt balancing strategy against Moscow. On the contrary, it counts on Russia to bear the costs of stopping the extra-regional hegemonic claims of the US in CA/TC.

When it comes to the Middle East in 2010s, what captured the attentions of the extra-regional and regional states was the Arab Uprisings and its regional repercussions. Russia framed the uprisings from its experience with the color revolutions and faced the Western interventions into Libya and later Syria with caution and harsh criticism. After consolidating its economic status and grip around its borders, the Kremlin began to deal with the developments in the Middle East more directly, which is called by some scholars as Russia's return to the Middle East. Its intervention into the Syrian civil war in 2015 marked a significant reverse for the benefit of Assad regime and thus Iran's position regarding the war. At least for the short run, Russia's return to the Middle East serves to Iranian interests in the Middle East. Russian policies mainly converges with Iranian attempts to counterbalance the US and its allies' power. Russia has opposed the idea of regime changes with the initiative or at least the support of the Western states' so called democracy promotion. Hence, the Kremlin objected the US' invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan as well as NATO's intervention into Libya.

Iran, being historically furious about the external controls over its sovereignty and occupied with the fear of becoming the next target of the US' war against the 'axis of evil' following the Syrian civil war, welcomed Russia's advocacy of multipolar world system and its opposition to the US' unilateral actions in the Middle East. Moscow's position in the UN Security Council which enabled veto power against the decisions regarding the Syrian regime turns Russia into an appealing partner for Iran. Despite some certain divergences on their views about the future of Assad regime and Russia's desire to develop balanced relations with not only the US' enemies but also US-allies in the Middle East such as Israel and Saudi Arabia; Russia and Iran have been following a strategically calibrated pragmatic partnership

in the regional affairs. At least, in the short run, their convergent foreign policies seem mutually beneficial. However, Russia-Iran pragmatic relations are not completely based on bilateral terms and could be overshadowed by the factors provided by the regional and international conditions and the third party interventions.

All in all, Syria and the Middle East have always covered an extensive area in Iranian strategic thinking and security calculations more than CA/TC and Tajikistan. Partly due to this distinct strategic thinking and security calculations, in the Middle East, Iran finds balancing strategy against the United States, Israel and Saudi Arabia more applicable in its attempts to protect the national interests. This thesis argues that in the face of regional developments such as the toppling down of adversary Saddam regime in Iraq, the fall of Taliban in Afghanistan, success of Hamas and Hezbollah against Israel, the rise of Tehran's soft power, the conflict in the Gulf such as the cases Bahrain and Yemen that challenges Saudi Arabia and the decline of the US power partly derived from the costly failures in its Middle East policies; Iran tries to re-assert itself as a natural leader in the Persian Gulf and regional power in the Middle East and endeavors to fill the power vacuum with more assertive and even aggressive policies. Therefore, Iran follows a balancing strategy against the US and its regional allies in the form of strengthening its strategic depth via its long-enduring alliance with Syria, ties with Hezbollah, its noteworthy network with paramilitary and militia groups from various states. In this regard, it could not afford to see the destruction of its allies and thus follows a "chain-ganging" alliance pattern towards the regional conflicts such as Syrian Civil War.³⁴⁶ To sum up, Iran, being geographically and politically a significant party of two distinct regional systems, preeminently tries to exploit the benefits it possesses by calculating the costs with the ultimate aim of maintaining the state survival. In this sense, it follows distinctive foreign policies regarding the Middle East and CA/TC. Tehran's partnership with Moscow and "Russia factor" is one of the most significant determinants of Iran's foreign policy changes.

³⁴⁶ See pages 106,107,118,124,125

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: TURKISH SUMMARY / TRKE ZET

İran ve Rusya; Avrasya, Orta Asya, Transkafkasya ve Orta Doęu gibi farklı birçok bölgesel sistemde ortaya çıkan gelişmelerden etkilenmekle kalmayıp bu gelişmeleri hatırı sayılır ölçüde etkileyen iki önemli aktördür. Zengin kültürel bir medeniyet ve sosyal mirasla dolu uzun bir tarihin yanı sıra askeri, demografik ve yüzölçümü anlamında önemli bir maddi güce sahip olan İran ve Rusya; medeniyetler arasında birer geçiş noktası olarak görlmüş; geniş etki alanlarına sahip güçlü ülkeler olarak algılanmışlardır. Bu nedenle, devletler arası savaş ve iç savaş gibi bölgesel gelişmeler, her iki ülkeyi, varlıklarını minimum kayıp ile en avantajlı konumda sürdürebilmeleri için uygun dış politikalar geliştirmeye itmiştir. Bu kapsamda, iki ülkenin birbirleriyle yürüttükleri ikili ilişkiler ilgi odağı olmuştur.

Uluslararası İlişkiler, Orta Doęu Araştırmaları ve Avrasya Çalışmaları gibi bir çok disiplin ve disiplinlerarası bölüm tarafından ortaya konan akademik çalışmalarda, İran-Rusya ilişkileri oldukça ilgi görmüş ve görmeye devam etmektedir. Irak (2003) ve Afganistan'ın (2001) ABD tarafından işgal edilmesi, 2011 yılı itibarıyla Tunus başta olmak üzere tüm Orta Doęu'yu etkileyen Arap Ayaklanmaları, ABD'nin Orta Doęu'daki gelişmelerden kendisini soyutlamasına yönelik hamlesine rağmen gerçekleşen Libya'ya ABD öncülüğünde yapılan uluslararası müdahale, farklı güç dinamiklerinin etkisiyle giderek şiddetin yükseldiğı Suriye İç Savaşı gibi son dönemde yaşanan bölgesel ve küresel gelişmeler iki ülke arasındaki ilişkilere yönelik ilginin artmasına yol açmıştır. Zira, hem İran hem de Rusya, bölgesel gelişmeler sonucunda ortaya çıkan güç boşluklarını doldurmak için birtakım adımlar atmışlardır. Bu adımlar, "Rusya'nın Orta Doęu'ya geri dönüşü" ve "İran'ın bölgesel yalnızlığına son vererek Irak-Suriye-Hizbullah gibi devlet ve devlet dışı aktörlerle geliştirdiğı bağlar sayesinde nüfuz alanını genişletmesi" konuları üzerine yapılan tartışmaları arttırmıştır. Bunun yanı sıra, İran ve Rusya ilişkilerinin mahiyeti üzerine -bu ilişkinin taktiksel bir birliktelik mi yoksa stratejik bir ortaklık

mı olduđu yönünde- birçok makale kaleme alınmıştır. Ayrıca, İran'ın Orta Asya ve Transkafkasya (bu noktadan itibaren tezde OA/TK olarak kullanılacaktır) bölgelerine yönelik politikaları ile Orta Doğu'da uyguladığı politikalar arasındaki benzerlik ve farklılıklara yönelik karşılaştırmalı analizler yapılmıştır.

Bu tezde, Tacikistan ve Suriye İç Savaşları birer vaka analizi olarak ele alınarak İran'ın Orta Doğu ve OA/TK bölgelerine yönelik takip ettiğı dış politikanın ve nihayetinde Rusya ile ilişkilerinin incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Sovyet Sosyalist Cumhuriyetler Birliği'nin (SSCB) yıkılmasının hemen ardından 1992 yılında ortaya çıkan Tacikistan İç Savaşı ve 2011 yılından itibaren Orta Doğu'nun kalbinde vuku bulan Suriye İç Savaşı; İran ve Rusya'yı, farklı ölçülerde dahi olsa, doğrudan etkilemeyi başarmışlardır. Dahası, her iki iç savaş da Rusya ve İran ikilisinin dış politikalarından doğrudan etkilenmişlerdir. Bu tez, söz konusu iki vaka analizinin, Tahran'ın dış politikası üzerindeki etkisini karşılaştırırken, bazı metodolojik problemlerin olduğunu da kabul etmektedir. Her iki vaka arasında güç dinamiklerinin karmaşıklığı noktasında önemli farklılıklar bulunmaktadır ve bu farklılıklar karşılaştırmalı bir analiz için zorluk teşkil etmektedir. Zira, Tacik (1992-97) ve Suriye İç Savaşları (2011 ve sonrası) iki farklı zaman diliminde ve dolayısıyla iki farklı uluslararası şartlarda ortaya çıkmıştır. Tacik İç Savaşı, SSCB'nin yıkılmasının ardından iki-kutuplu dünya düzeninin son bulduğu ancak hala belirsizliğin devam ettiğı bir ortamda Rusya'nın “yakın çevresi” (near abroad) olarak gördüğü Orta Asya'da yaşanırken; Suriye İç Savaşı, Arap Ayaklanmalarını takiben “Amerika sonrası” (post-America) bir Orta Doğu'da nispeten çok-kutuplu bir dünya düzeni içerisinde Orta Doğu'nun kaotik atmosferi içerisinde ortaya çıkmıştır.

İç dinamikler göz önünde bulundurulduğunda da yine iki vaka arasında dikkate değer farklılıklar mevcuttur. 1946 yılında bağımsızlığını kazanan Suriye, daha uzun bir modern devletleşme (modern state formation) sürecine sahiptir. Ayrıca, emperyalizmin etkisiyle çizilen sınırları ve deneyimlediğı uzun ve sert emperyalizm mücadelesi nedeniyle devlet kimliği ile üst kimlik ve alt kimliklere arasındaki çatışma oldukça yoğundur. Diğer taraftan, Tacikistan bağımsızlığını çok daha yakın bir geçmişte, Suriye'ye kıyasla bağımsızlık için çok yoğun bir mücadele olmaksızın kazanmıştır. Dahası, devlet kimliği ile üst ve alt kimlik arasındaki

çatışma nispeten daha yumuşaktır. Yine de, her iki ülkede de ekonomik sıkıntı, sınıf ayrımı, etnik ve dini alt kimliklerin çeşitliliği nedeniyle çatışma dinamikleri her zaman mevcut olmuştur. Dolayısıyla hem Suriye hem de Tacikistan, içinde bulundukları bölgesel sistemdeki diğer devletlerden farklı olarak nadir bir olgu olan iç savaşı deneyimlemiş; dışarıdan müdahale ile birlikte çok sayıda ülke içi aktör arasında kanlı çatışmalardan geçmiş ve Suriye vakasında hala geçmeye devam etmektedir. Her ne kadar iki vaka arasında farklılıklar olsa da -ki bu farklılıklar benzerliklerden fazla bile olabilir- iki vakanın İran nezdindeki önemi hakkında yapılacak değerlendirmenin, karşılaştırmalı analizin ve İran-Rusya ilişkilerini etkileme kapasiteleri üzerine gerçekleştirilecek bir araştırmanın; İran'ın Orta Doğu ve OA/TK bölgelerine yönelik dış politika yaklaşımları ile ilgili etraflı ve derin bir analiz geliştirilmesine katkıda bulunacağı değerlendirilmektedir. Gerek Suriye gerekse Tacikistan bulundukları bölgelerin birer mikrokozmalarıdır. Bu sayede, vakalar ve bölge genelindeki koşullar arasındaki uyum özelden genele bir çalışma yürütülmesine imkan sağlamaktadır. Özetle, bu tez Tacikistan ve Suriye vakaları arasındaki salt benzerliklerden oluşan bir resim çizerek İran-Rusya ilişkileri hakkında sade ve düz bir analize varmaktan ziyade hem farklılıklar hem de benzerliklerden öğrenerek detaylı bir inceleme yapmayı hedeflemiştir. Zira, karşılaştırmalı çalışmalarda benzerlikler kadar farklılıklar da önem arz etmektedir.

İran'ın özelde Tacik ve Suriye İç Savaşlarına olan yaklaşımı, daha genel olarak OA/TK ve Orta Doğu bölgelerine yönelik takip ettiği dış politikalarla paralellik sergilemektedir. Her ne kadar İran her iki iç savaşa yönelik birbirinden çok farklı iki dış politika sergilemişse de bu dış politikalar Rusya ile olan ilişkilerini bozmamış ve hatta Tahran-Moskova arasındaki işbirliği ve diyalogun gelişmesine zemin hazırlamıştır. Bu tezde, iki iç savaşın İran-Rusya ilişkilerine olan yansımaları ele alınarak İran'ın iki farklı bölgesel sistem olan Orta Doğu ve OA/TK bölgelerine yönelik farklı politika izlemesine yol açan etmenler ve bu etmenlerin arasında “Rusya faktörü”nü yeri sorgulanmaktadır. “Rusya faktörü” ifadesi, Rusya'nın, OA/TK bölgesinde bölgesel bir hegemon olarak varlık göstermesine ve doğrudan veya dolaylı olarak İran'ın Orta Doğu'da iddialı politikalar izlemesine katkı sağlayan Orta Doğu politikalarına işaret etmektedir.

Analizde, Neorealizm, teorik çerçeve olarak kullanılmaktadır. Tezde, Neorealizm seçiminin arkasında yatan sebep, Uluslararası İlişkiler (Uİ) disiplindeki en önemli teorik yaklaşımlardan birinin sınırları dahilinde akademik ve tutarlı bir analiz sağlamaktır. Neorealizm teorisi tarafından sıklıkla kullanılan güç, uluslararası sistem olarak anarşi, dengeleme (balancing), peşine takılma (bandwagoning), prangalanmak (chain-ganging) ve sorumluluk yükleme (buck-passing) gibi teorik kavramlar, dış politika ve ülke ilişkilerine yönelik dikkate değer ölçüde açıklama kapasitesine sahiptir. Bununla birlikte, tez Uİ disiplinine çok büyük katkı sağlayan ve çok katmanlı/çok boyutlu analizler sunan diğer Uİ teorilerine karşı dışlayıcı bir bakış açısı taşımamaktadır. Dolayısıyla, tezde bir taraftan yapılan analizlere Kenneth Waltz ve John Mearsheimer gibi önde gelen Neorealist teorisyenlerin kaynakları entegre edilirken diğer taraftan uluslararası sistem düzeyindeki belirleyici faktörlerin rolüne gereğinden fazla vurgu yapılmaktan da kaçınılmıştır. Örnek vermek gerekirse, Suriye ve Tacik iç savaşları ve İran-Rusya ikilisinin bu vakalar ile genel olarak iki bölgeye yönelik yaklaşımları incelenirken, modern devletleşme süreci, öznel olarak devlet faktörü ve devlet içi faktörler de göz önünde tutulmuştur. Tacik ve Suriye iç savaşlarına yol açan ülke içi ve devlet yapısına bağlı faktörlere, Rusya ve İran siyasi arenasındaki politik eğilimler ve fraksiyonlara yer veren tez, sadece sisteme bağlı etmenler değil aynı zamanda ülke-içi şartlara da değinmiştir. Sonuç olarak, tez, Neorealizm'in "tarih dışı (ahistorical) eğilimi" gibi eleştirilere yol açan birçok hususu ve teorinin sınırlandırıcı yönlerinin farkındadır. Yine de, Neorealizmin sınırlarını zorlayarak ancak teorik tutarlılık çizgisini de kaybetmeden Orta Doğu ve OA/TK bölgelerindeki tarihi miras, Orta Doğu'da Batılı devletlerin OA/TK bölgesinde ise Sovyetler Birliği'nin emperyal miraslarının rolü gibi konular ele alınmıştır.

Bilindiği üzere, Sovyetler Birliği'nin yıkılmasının ardından yaşanan kısa bir tereddüt döneminin ardından, Rusya Federasyonu 1993 yılında "yakın çevre" doktrinini ilan etmiştir. Buna göre, Orta Asya ve Transkafkasya'nın da dahil olduğu eski Sovyet toprakları, Rusya'nın sosyal, siyasi, güvenlik ve ekonomik çıkarları nezdinde hayati etki alanı olarak tanımlanmıştır. Düşüşünü önlemek amacıyla, Moskova, "yakın çevresinde" üstünlüğünü tekrar tesis etmek ve sürdürmek zorunluluğu hissetmiştir. Buna göre, bölgedeki aktörlerle istikrarlı ilişkiler

sürdürmeyi amaçlamıştır. “Yakın çevre” politikası, genel itibariyle Rusya’da Batı yanlısı (Atlantikçilik) politikaların, NATO’nun eski Sovyet coğrafyasına doğru genişleme hamlesi karşısında yetersiz kalmasını takiben Avrasyacılığın yükselmesi ile güç kazanmıştır.

Tacik İç Savaşı, Rusya’nın “yakın çevre” doktrini üzerinde hem etki sahibi olmuş hem de bu doktrinden etkilenmiştir. Kısa bir ilgisizlik sürecinin ardından, Kremlin, sınırlarının yakınında gelişen istikrarsızlığın domino etkisi oluşturmasını engellemek amacıyla Duşanbe’deki çatışmaya müdahil olmuştur. Tacikistan eski Sovyet toprakları ve Afganistan arasında bir tampon bölge oluşturmaktadır. Sınır boyunca giderek artan suç faaliyetleri ve yükselen güç boşluğu Rusya’yı, iç savaşın gidişatını kontrol etmeye ve Duşanbe’deki Moskova yanlısı hükümeti desteklemeye sevk etmiştir. Dolayısıyla, Neorealizm argümanına paralel olarak, Rusya, anarşinin koşulları belirlediği ve ülkelerin kendi kendine yetmek (self-help) durumunda kaldığı bir dünyada, kendi sınırları yakınında gerçekleşen potansiyel bir tehdide yönelik ciddi bir şekilde hassasiyet göstermiş ve Tacik İç Savaşı’na, savaştan günümüze kadar iktidardaki konumunu koruyan Emamali Rahmonov’u (Rahmon) destekleyerek gerek askeri gerekse siyasi olarak müdahale etmiştir.

Moskova, Tacik İç Savaşı boyunca, “yakın çevre” politikasını öne çıkarırken, Tahran, batı ve güney cephesinde Irak ile verdiği sekiz yıllık savaşın ve kuzeyinde Sovyetler Birliği’nin yıkılmasıyla birlikte oluşan istikrarsızlığın ardından dış politikasını tekrar tasarlıyordu. Bu anlamda, Tacikistan’daki iç savaş, İran’ın dış politikasında dini lider Ayetullah Ruhullah Humeyni’nin ölümünü ve İran-Irak Savaşı’nı müteakiben yaşanan “ideolojiden arınma/ de-ideologization” olarak anılan sürecine tesadüf etmektedir. Ülke içinde ekonomiyi yeniden yapılandırmak için duyulan ihtiyaç, Tahran’ı, 1979 Devrimi’nin ateşli günlerinde savunduğu ideolojik değerleri geliştirmekten ziyade ulusal çıkarları daha katı bir şekilde takip etmeye zorlamıştır. ABD’nin, Fars Körfezi’nde giderek artan bir şekilde varlık göstermesi ve Körfez Savaşı örneğinde de görüldüğü üzere Orta Doğu’daki çatışmalara tek taraflı alınan kararlarla müdahil olması bölgedeki yeni koşulların Soğuk Savaş dönemindeki çift kutuplu dünya düzeninin sağladığı koşullardan çok farklı olduğunu kanıtlamıştır. Orta Doğu’daki bölgesel kısıtlamaların farkında olan Tahran, Orta

Asya/Transkafkasya’da yaşanan gelişmeleri, uluslararası yalnızlığına son vermek ve ekonomik, diplomatik ilişkilerini geliştirmek için bir fırsat olarak algılamıştır. OA/TK ülkelerinde laikliğin devlet kimliğinin bir parçası olmasına yol açan Sovyet mirası, güç boşluğunu avantaj bilen ABD’nin OA/TK bölgesine nüfuz etme hamleleri, İran’ın Rusya kontrolü karşısında yetersiz kalan maddi kapasitesi ve son olarak bağımsızlığını yeni kazanan OA/TK ülkeleri ile İran arasında Orta Doğu ve özellikle Körfez ülkelerinin aksine çatışma geçmişi ve tarihsel bir düşmanlığın olmaması Tahran’ın, bu bölgede daha yapıcı ve müdahaleci olmayan bir dış politika izlemesine zemin hazırlamıştır. Başlangıçta, büyük bir çoğunluğunu Tacikistan İslami Rönesans Partisi’nin (IRPT) teşkil ettiği İslamcı ve demokratik unsurlardan oluşan Birleşik Tacik Muhalefeti’ne (UTO) düşük düzeyde destek veren İran, sonrasında Tacikistan İç Savaşı’na yönelik politikasını Rusya’nın müdahale politikasıyla uyumlu bir şekilde revize etmiştir. Tacik İç Savaşı’na ek olarak, Tahran, Azerbaycan-Ermenistan arasındaki “Dağlık Karabağ” sorunu ve Rusya’ya karşı ortaya çıkan Çeçen isyanı gibi bölgede yaşanan diğer çatışmalarda da “İslami tarafı” açıkça desteklemekten kaçınmıştır. Dahası Çin-Uygur çatışmasında dahi İran’ın, ticari ilişkiler yürüttüğü Çin’i eleştirmekten imtina ettiği görülmektedir. Tüm bu vakalar göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, İran’ın, OA/TK bölgelerinde, kendisinin ana silah tedarikçisi olan ve Birleşmiş Milletler Güvenlik Konseyi’nin (BMGK) daimi üyesi olması sayesinde İran’ın uluslararası toplum ile arasında bir diplomatik kanal oluşturan Rusya ile olan ilişkilerini riske atmaktan kaçındığı anlaşılmaktadır. Dolayısıyla, bu teze göre, İran’ın müdahaleci olmayan politikaları; ulusal çıkarları korumak ve devletin kendini idame ettirmesini sağlamak amacıyla OA/TK bölgesinde Rusya’nın peşine takılma (bandwagoning) politikası izlemeyi tercih ettiğini göstermektedir. Nitekim, İran, uzlaşmacı, yapıcı ve ihtiyatlı politikalar takip ederek Rusya’nın bölgedeki nüfuzu karşısında daha alt düzey, ikinci derecede bir siyaset benimsemektedir. Buna göre, Tahran, OA/TK ülkeleriyle sürdürülebilir ekonomik ilişkiler kurmayı, Şengay İşbirliği Örgütü (ŞİÖ) ve Ekonomik İşbirliği Örgütü (EİÖ) gibi organizasyonlara angaje olarak bölgeselciliği güçlendirmede rol sahibi olmayı ve çatışmalarda arabuluculuk yapmayı veya onları ülke içi meseleler olarak adlandırıp uzak durmayı bölge politikası olarak ön planda tutmaktadır. İran, Rusya’nın peşine takılma stratejisi izlerken OA/TK bölgelerinde vuku bulan ve

ulusal çıkarlarına yönelik potansiyel bir tehdit oluşturan gelişmeler karşısında sorumluluğu Rusya'ya yükleme (buck-passing) politikasını takip etmektedir. Bu bağlamda, İran OA/TK'daki çatışmaları gücünü ve bölgesel nüfuzunu arttırma vesilesi olarak değil en az zararla bertaraf edilmesi gereken istikrarsızlık kaynağı olarak algılamaktadır. Dolayısıyla, İran güvenlik tehditleri karşısında, Rusya'nın "vagonuna" atlayarak sorumluluğu Moskova'ya yüklemektedir. Her ne kadar, Rusya, İran için potansiyel bir tehdit ve tarihi bir düşman olsa da, Tahran Rusya'ya karşı dengeleme strateji izlemeye güç yetirememektedir. Aksine, OA/TK'da ABD'nin bölge dışı hegemon olma hamlelerini durdurması için Rusya'ya güvenmektedir.

"2010'lu yılların Orta Doğu'suna" gelindiğinde ise, küresel ve bölgesel aktörlerin dikkatini çeken şey hiç şüphesiz Arap Ayaklanmaları ve bunun bölgesel yansımaları olmuştur. Rusya, Arap Ayaklanmaları'nı Ukrayna, Gürcistan ve Kırgızistan gibi eski Sovyetler Birliği ülkelerinde yaşanan renkli devrimlerden kazandığı deneyimler çerçevesinde betimlemiş; ABD öncülüğünde öncelikle Libya ve daha sonrasına Suriye'ye yönelik gerçekleşen uluslararası müdahaleleri sert bir dille eleştirmiştir. Özellikle ekonomik statüsünü güçlendirdikten ve eski Sovyet toprakları üzerinde nüfuzunu pekiştirdikten sonra Kremlin, Orta Doğu'da gerçekleşen olaylarla daha doğrudan bir şekilde ilgilenmeye başlamıştır. Bazı akademik çevreler bunu "Rusya'nın Orta Doğu'ya dönüşü" şeklinde tanımlamaktadır. Rusya'nın 2015 yılında Suriye İç Savaşı'na askeri olarak müdahil olması Beşar Esad rejiminin ve dolayısıyla İran'ın savaştaki pozisyonunun avantajına çok önemli bir dönüm noktasını oluşturmaktadır. Rusya'nın Orta Doğu'ya dönüşü, en azından yakın vadede İran'ın bu bölgedeki çıkarlarına hizmet etmektedir. Rusya'nın politikaları, esas olarak İran'ın ABD ve bölgedeki müttefiklerinin gücünü dengeleme hamleleriyle uyum sağlamaktadır. Rusya, Batılı devletlerin "demokrasinin savunulması" şeklinde lanse ettiği rejim değişikliklerini başlatma veya en azından destekleme fikrine karşı çıkmaktadır. Zira, Kremlin ABD'nin Irak ve Afganistan işgalini ve NATO'nun Libya müdahalesini güçlü bir şekilde eleştirmiştir. Kısacası, Rusya Orta Doğu'yu üç farklı bakış açısıyla algılamaktadır. İlk olarak, ABD'nin kazançlarını kendisinin kaybı, kayıplarını ise kendisinin kazancı olarak gördüğü sıfır toplamı bir jeopolitik bakış açısına sahiptir. İkinci olarak, bölgedeki ticari bağlarını ve yatırımlarını ön planda tutmaktadır. Son olarak, Rusya

Orta Doğu’da yükselen radikalizmin kendi “yakın çevresine” sıçramasından endişe duyduğu bir güvenlik bakış açısı ile bölge gelişmelerine yaklaşmaktadır. Bu üç boyutlu yaklaşımı neticesinde, Rusya Suriye’de doğrudan Batı eliyle veya en azından Batı destekli bir rejim değişikliğine son derece karşı çıkmaktadır. Rusya için Esad rejiminin varlığını sürdürmesinden ziyade dış müdahale yoluyla rejim değişikliği fikri kabul edilemez görünmektedir.

İran ise, ülke içindeki fraksiyon değişimleri ve siyasi eğilimlerden bağımsız olarak gelişen bir Suriye politikasına sahiptir. Yaklaşık olarak devrimden günümüze kadar gelen kırk yıllık süreçte İran, Suriye ile herhangi bir gerilemeye uğramamış sıkı bir ittifak portresi çizmiştir. Irak-İran Savaşı’nda dahi, Arap milliyetçiliğinin kalbi olan Suriye, Arap devleti olan rakibi Irak’a karşı İran’ı desteklemiştir. Dolayısıyla, Arap Ayaklanmalarını “İslami ayaklanma” olarak adlandırıp fırsatçı bir politika sergileyen ve bölgede revizyonist bir güç olarak tanınan İran, Suriye’deki çatışmalara yönelik statükoyu destekleyen ve Esad’ın varlığını kırmızı çizgi olarak benimseyen bir dış politika takip etmektedir.

İran’ın Suriye politikasını bu yönde etkileyen pek çok faktör bulunmaktadır. Öncelikle, bölge ülkeleri tarafından uluslararası bir yalnızlığa mahkum edilen İran, Şam yönetimi ile sürdürdüğü uzun soluklu ittifakı büyük bir diplomatik zafer olarak görmektedir. Ayrıca, gerek Suriye gerekse Hizbullah ile kurduğu ittifakı ABD ve İsrail karşısında bir “direniş eksenini” olarak algılamakta, kurulan bu eksen sayesinde Levant ve Akdeniz bölgelerindeki stratejik derinliğini güçlendirmektedir. Suriye’de Esad rejiminin yerine gelecek körfez destekli bir iktidar, İran’ın, Suudi Arabistan ile yaşadığı bölgesel nüfuz mücadelesinde çok büyük yenilgi almasına neden olacaktır. Bu nedenle, ekonomik yüklerine ve nükleer kriz gibi önemli bir konuda uluslararası toplum ile müzakere etmeyi desteklemiş olan Hasan Ruhani’nin pragmatik ve itidalli hükümetine rağmen, İran Esad rejiminin desteklenmesine yönelik taahhüdüne bağlı kalmıştır. Buna göre, Suriye’deki çatışmaların en başından itibaren, İran, Suriye rejimine askeri, lojistik ve isyanla mücadele taktikleri konusunda danışmanlık yapması için İran Devrim Muhafızları Ordusu’na bağlı bir grup göndermiştir. Dahası, on binlerce İran askeri personeli ve Lübnan, Irak, Pakistan ve Afgan kökenlilerden oluşan sayıları 100 bine yaklaşan milis gruplarıyla savaş alanında

oldukça aktif bir rol göstermektedir. Rusya'nın 2015 müdahalesi gibi, İran ve Hizbullah'ın sahadaki faaliyetleri Suriye İç Savaşı'nın Esad lehine dönmesinde son derece etkili olmuştur. Son tahlilde, Suriye krizi, Rusya ve İran'ın ortak bir safta yer almasını sağlamış, her iki ülke arasında stratejik bir ortaklıktan söz edilip edilemeyeceği konusunda tartışmaları beraberinde getirmiştir. Her iki ülke de bölgede Batı destekli rejim değişikliklerinden rahatsızlık duymaktadır, bu anlamda ortak bir tehdit algısına sahiptirler. Bu nedenle, Suriye kartı her iki devlet için de önem arz etmektedir. Son gelişmeler ışığında İran ve Rusya arasında gelişen askeri, siyasi ve diplomatik işbirliği ve koordinasyon Amerika sonrası (Post-America) Orta Doğu'sunda Arap Ayaklanmalarının ardından en önemli gelişmelerden birisidir.

Rusya ile yakın ilişkiler İran için çeşitli birçok sebepten dolayı önem taşımaktadır. Öncelikle, bağımsızlığına yönelik dış müdahaleler ve kontroller nedeniyle tarihsel anlamda öfkeli olan ve Suriye İç Savaşı'ndan sonra ABD'nin "şer ekseni" olarak adlandırdığı ülkelere karşı verdiği savaşın bir sonraki hedefi olmaktan endişe duyan İran; Rusya'nın çok kutuplu dünya sistemini savunmasından ve ABD'nin Orta Doğu'daki tek taraflı önleyici hareketlerine karşı çıkmasından memnuniyet duymaktadır. Moskova'nın BMGK bünyesinde Suriye Beşar Esad rejimini hedef alan kararları veto etmesine fırsat veren güçlü pozisyonu, Rusya'yı İran için cazip bir ortağa dönüştürmektedir. Esad rejiminin geleceği hakkındaki bazı görüş farklılıkları ve Rusya'nın bölgede sadece ABD'nin hasımlarıyla değil aynı zamanda Suudi Arabistan ve İsrail gibi ABD müttefikleriyle de dengeli ve dostane ilişkiler yürütme arzusuna rağmen; Tahran ve Moskova bölgesel konularda stratejik anlamda ölçülü pragmatik bir ortaklığa sahiptir. En azından kısa vadede, birbirleriyle uyumlu politikaları iki ülkeye de karşılıklı olarak yarar sağlamaktadır. Ne var ki, Rusya-İran ilişkileri yalnızca ikili ilişkilerden ibaret değildir ve üçüncü tarafların müdahaleleri, bölgesel ve uluslararası koşulların sağlayacağı yeni unsurların etkisinde kalabilir.

Neticede, Suriye ve Orta Doğu, İran'ın stratejik düşüncesinde ve güvenlik hesaplamalarında OA/TK bölgesi ve Tacikistan'a kıyasla çok daha geniş bir yer tutmaktadır. Kısmen bu farklı stratejik algı ve hesaplamalar nedeniyle, İran, ulusal çıkarlarını korumak amacıyla Orta Doğu'da ABD, İsrail ve Suudi Arabistan'a

yönelik dengeleme stratejisi izlemektedir. Irak'taki Saddam Hüseyin rejiminin düşmesi sonucu oluşan güç boşluğunda İran'a yakın politikacıların siyasi arenada güç sahibi olması, Afganistan'da Taliban'ın etkisini kaybetmesi, Hamas ve Hizbullah'ın İsrail'e karşı elde ettiği başarıları Arap toplumu arasında kazandığı yumuşak gücüyle pekiştirmesi, Fars Körfezi'nde Bahreyn ve Yemen gibi ülkelerde, Suudi Arabistan'ın bölge politikalarını zora sokan çatışmaların ortaya çıkması ve ABD'nin, Orta Doğu politikalarının maliyetli başarısızlıkları neticesinde bölgeden nispeten çekilmesi gibi fırsatlar karşısında; İran, kendisini Fars Körfezi'nin doğal bir lideri ve Orta Doğu'da bölgesel bir güç olarak yeniden tesis etmeye çalışmaktadır. Bu nedenle, Orta Doğu'daki bölgesel baskı ve fırsatları değerlendirerek oluşan güç boşluklarını daha iddialı ve hatta agresif politikalar izleyerek doldurmayı amaçlamaktadır. Dolayısıyla, İran Suriye ile olduğu üzere uzun soluklu ittifakları, Hizbullah ile olan bağları, farklı ülkelere bölge paramiliter ve milis gruplar ile sürdürdüğü dikkate değer işbirliği ağı vasıtasıyla stratejik derinliğini güçlendirerek ABD ve bölgedeki hasımlarına karşı dengeleme politikası izlemektedir. Bu bağlamda, müttefiklerinin bertaraf olmasını görmeyi göze alamamaktadır. İran, bu noktada, Suriye İç Savaşı gibi bölgesel çatışmalara karşı “prangalanma /chain-ganging” ittifak modelini takip etmektedir. Bu nedenle kendi rejim güvenliğini, ittifaklarının bölgedeki güvenliğine sıkı bir şekilde bağlamaktadır. Özetlemek gerekirse, coğrafi ve siyasi anlamda iki farklı bölgesel sistemin önemli bir parçası ve rasyonel bir aktör olan İran; öncelikli olarak en önemli amacı olan rejim idamesini sağlamak için maliyetleri hesaplayarak sahip olduğu avantajlardan istifade etmeye çalışmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Orta Doğu ve Orta Asya/Transkafkasya politikaları arasında önemli farklılıklar yer almaktadır. İran'ın söz konusu politika ayrışmasında en önemli belirleyici faktörlerden birisi Moskova ile olan ilişkileri ve “Rusya faktörü”dür.

APPENDIX B: TEZ İZİN FORMU / THESIS PERMISSION FORM

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YAZARIN / AUTHOR

Soyadı / Surname : Yanık

Adı / Name : Esra

Bölümü / Department : Middle East Studies (MES)

TEZİN ADI / TITLE OF THE THESIS (İngilizce / English) :

A NEOREALIST ANALYSIS OF IRAN-RUSSIA RELATIONS: TAJIK AND SYRIAN CIVIL WARS

TEZİN TÜRÜ / DEGREE: Yüksek Lisans / Master

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