

# **KHAZAR UNIVERSITY**

**Faculty:** Graduate School of Science, Art and Technology

**Department:** Political Science and Philosophy

**Qualification:** Conflict Studies

## **MASTER'S THESIS**

**Theme:** Comparative Analysis of US and Russian Foreign Policy Approaches  
in the Middle East

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**BAKU-2024**

# XƏZƏR UNIVERSİTETİ

**Fakültə:** Təbiət Elmləri Sənət və Texnologiya Yüksək təhsil

**Departament:** Siyasi Elmlər və Fəlsəfə

**İxtisas:** Konfliktologiya

## MAGİSTR TEZİSİ

**Mövzu:** ABŞ və Rusiyanın Yaxın Şərqdə xarici siyasət yanaşmalarının müqayisəli təhlili

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**BAKİ-2024**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>CHAPTER I. LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1 Theoretical Framework.....	7
1.2 Hypothesis based on literature review.....	9
<b>CHAPTER II. METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>CHAPTER III. THE CULTURAL AND IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF US AND RUSSIAN GEOPOLITICS.....</b>	<b>12</b>
1.1 The relations between the US and Russia after the Cold War and Attitudes towards world regions.....	12
1.2 A comparison of US and Russian approaches to the use of instruments in foreign policy: the expression of theoretical schools in realpolitik.....	23
<b>CHAPTER IV. EVOLUTIONARY FACTORS OF US AND RUSSIAN MIDDLE EAST POLICIES.....</b>	<b>31</b>
2.1 Historical foundations in the formation of US and Russian Middle East policies.....	31
2.2 US and Russia's geopolitical goals for the region and comparison of resources.....	42
2.3 Comparison of foreign policy methods applied by the USA and Russia in the region.....	48
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>59</b>

## INTRODUCTION

The Middle East, situated in the crossroads of Africa, Asia and Europe, has long served as a pivotal point for conquest, migration, commerce, and cultural exchange. Its advantageous geographical position, rich oil resources, religious significance for different nations, and numerous political conflicts collectively grant it an outsized global significance.

Russia and the United States are believed to be the most important international actors in the Middle East and they are considered the primary global players in this region, with their policies significantly shaping the region's geopolitical landscape. Both countries have been formulating increasingly detailed strategies and policies for the Middle East over time. Recent shifts in their foreign policies always have sparked growing interest by researchers in the field.

The United States, as a global superpower, has historically viewed the Middle East as vital to its national interests due to its vast oil reserves, strategic location, and the presence of key allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia. American foreign policy in the region has been shaped by a mix of security concerns, economic interests, and ideological imperatives, including the promotion of democracy and human rights. This has manifested in military interventions, such as the Gulf War and the invasion of Iraq in 2003, as well as diplomatic initiatives aimed at brokering peace agreements between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

In contrast, Russia's involvement in the Middle East has undergone significant transformation since the collapse of the Soviet Union. While the region was once a focal point of Cold War rivalry, Russia's influence waned in the aftermath of the Soviet disintegration. However, under President Vladimir Putin, Russia has sought to reassert itself as a major player in the region, capitalizing on opportunities created by the power vacuums resulting from the Arab Spring uprisings and the Syrian civil war. Moscow has cultivated ties with regimes like those in Syria and Iran, while also positioning itself as a mediator in regional conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

**The relevance of the study.** The Middle East stands as a crucible of global affairs, characterized by intricate socio-political landscapes, abundant energy resources, and enduring conflicts. Both the United States and Russia have wielded considerable influence in the region, shaping its trajectory through diplomatic maneuvers, military interventions, and economic engagements. Understanding the nuances of their respective approaches is imperative for comprehending the broader dynamics of international relations.

This study seeks to dissect and compare the foreign policies pursued by the United States and Russia in the Middle East, elucidating their underlying motivations, strategies, and consequences. By delving into historical contexts, contemporary developments, and future projections, it aims to

offer a comprehensive analysis of the intertwined interests and divergent agendas that define their engagement in the region.

**Significance to the field.** Examining the differences between Russian and US foreign policy in the Middle East is important for the field of political science and international affairs. These differences offer a nuanced understanding of the competing interests, alliances, and power dynamics at play in the region. Moreover, this comparative analysis provides valuable insights into how these divergent approaches influence regional stability, conflict resolution efforts, and the prospects for peace.

**The purposes of this research are:**

- to get thorough understanding into the foreign policy approaches of Russia and the United States in the Middle East, particularly, objectives, methods and strategies;
- to compare the foreign policy decisions taken by Russia and the US in the Middle East;
- to understand the reasons behind these differences.

**Research Questions.** The key questions of the research are "What are differences between the US and Russian foreign policy approaches in the Middle East?" and "Why do US and Russian foreign policy approaches in the Middle East differ, particularly in terms of objectives, methods and alliances?".

**Independent and Dependent Variables.** Independent variables in this research encompass "Military presence and interventions", "US and Russian political interests", "Diplomatic engagements", "Security concerns". Dependent variables are "Regional stability in the Middle East", "Influence and power dynamics".

**Unit of Analysis.** The units of analysis in this research are the foreign policy strategies and actions undertaken by the United States and Russia in the Middle East.

## CHAPTER I. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars offer diverse perspectives that shed light on the motivations, strategies, and implications of US and Russian engagements in the Middle East. This literature review aims to provide an overview of scholarly works examining the analysis of US and Russian foreign policies in the Middle East.

One cohort of scholars approaches Russia's stance towards Iran and Syria with skepticism, suggesting that Russia's support for these nations may pose risks to its own interests. However, researchers like Freedman (2002) and Katz (2006) delve into President Vladimir Putin's assumption of Russian-Iranian relations from the Yeltsin era, shedding light on the historical context and factors driving this relationship. Similarly, Kreutz (2002), Ginat (2001), and Omestad (2007) provide valuable perspectives on Russia's interest in Iran, emphasizing economic benefits such as oil and arms sales, as well as its strategic importance in countering US expansionism. Scholars like Aras and Özbay (2008) argue that Russian-Iranian relations constitute a strategic partnership.

Furthermore, discussions on the Iranian nuclear crisis and its impact on US-Russian relations have been explored by academics such as Milhollin and Lincy (2004), Katz (2006), and Khrestin and Elliott (2007). Gvosdev and Simes (2005) delve into the US perspective on Russia's dual foreign policy towards Iran. Aras and Özbay (2006) and Simpson (2010) examine the implications of the nuclear issue and Russia's efforts to navigate the interests of the US, Iran, and the UN.

Turning to Russian-Syrian foreign policy, literature highlights the longstanding friendship between the two nations, particularly in arms exports. Magen and Shapir (2012) analyze Russia's policy towards Syria, focusing on its implications and reputational consequences. Lipman (2006), Seale (2012), and Widlanski (2005) explore Putin's efforts to bolster Russia's engagement in the Middle East to enhance security and address challenges in US relations, particularly due to its support for Syria as discussed by Nichol (2012). Additionally, Seale (2012), Friedman (2012), Dergham (2012), and Kramer (2012) discuss current events in Syria, highlighting Russia's backing of the Assad regime and opposition to intervention.

Steven J. Rosenthal (2010) states that after the World War II, the United States emerged as the dominant imperial power in the Middle East, driven by three interrelated objectives such as controlling the oil and gas resources of the region to secure its energy needs and maintain economic stability, providing regional stability and maintaining balance of power.

James L. Gelvin's (2023) book - "The New Middle East: What Everyone Needs to Know, and "America's War for the Greater Middle East" (2016) that was written by Andrew J. Bacevich, a

historian and professor of international relations and history at Boston University provides a comprehensive overview of the region's history, politics, and contemporary issues. Gelvin outlines interrelated objectives that have historically guided US foreign policy in the Middle East. He gives brief explanations about various topics such as demography, state system, political life, the roots of authoritarianism, great power involvement and the oil politics in the Middle East. Bacevich (2016) traces America's involvement in the Middle East back to the late 1970s, with events such as the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. He argues that these events marked the beginning of what he terms "America's war for the greater Middle East."

Itamar Rabinovich's (2023) and Atallah S. Al Sarhan (2017) offers a comprehensive analysis of the complex geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. Rabinovich emphasizes the interplay of various actors and interests as well. The book discusses the roles of global and regional powers, such as the United States, Russia, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, in shaping the dynamics of the Middle East. Atallah S. Al Sarhan (2017) emphasises to shed light on the United States' economic and political presence in the Middle East region after World War II to understand how United States' presence has developed in the region and what motives were behind its presence. This is accomplished by exploring broad economic, strategic, and political motives of the United States.

This thesis aims to address certain overlooked aspects in the existing literature, particularly focusing on the primary motivations behind Russia's and US' assertive stance and their overarching goal of reviving its influence in the region.

**Literature gaps:** In synthesizing these literatures, it becomes evident that understanding US and Russian foreign policy in the Middle East requires a multidimensional approach. Each scholar offers valuable insights into the historical, strategic, and ideological underpinnings of US and Russian engagements in the region. However, their analyses also highlight the complexities and limitations inherent in studying this dynamic geopolitical arena. In some works, focusing too much on the historical context, key political strategies are overlooked. Although the foreign policy of Russia and the United States in the Middle East has been separately focused, we can see a number of gaps in literature researches that comprehensively compare their foreign policy approaches.

## **1.1. Theoretical framework**

In the context of the Middle East, realist thinkers have argued for a pragmatic approach that prioritizes stability and security over idealistic endeavors such as democracy promotion. This perspective views the region through a lens of power politics, where states pursue their interests through alliances, balance of power strategies, and sometimes collaboration with authoritarian regimes.

The Russian approach to the Middle East aligns closely with neo-realist principles, prioritizing national interest and projecting a firm stance on resource expansion and political objectives, while also fostering the international development of its own transnational companies like Gazprom (Whitmore, 2009). This evolution in Russian foreign policy, notably under Vladimir Putin's presidency, aimed at bolstering economic measures, increasing oil and gas exports, and fostering European dependence on Russian energy, all in pursuit of a renewed hegemonic status (Whitmore, 2009). Power, in this context, is defined as the capacity to act in foreign affairs (Puchala, 1971, p.176). Moscow consciously adjusts its foreign policy tools, reflecting a shift towards assertive behavior, particularly towards actors who don't view relations as competitive (Hopf, 1999). From a neorealist perspective, this transformation into a more assertive actor has allowed Russia to navigate structural pressures in the international arena (Hopf, 1999).

The centralization of state power in Russia has historically limited the influence of sub-agencies and parties, aligning with neo-realist thought, which prioritizes state interests (Wieclawski, 2011). Moscow's pursuit of its national interest, particularly in reviving influence in the Middle East, consolidates domestic opinion and gains support from ruling powers, even if it means overriding liberal formations to counter Western rivalry. Russian competition in the Middle East serves as a counterbalance to U.S. influence, leading to deeper ties with Iran and Syria (Wieclawski, 2011). Under the neorealist perspective, such competition aims to ensure survival and secure interests within an anarchic international system (Hopf, 1999).

The complexity of Russian foreign policy in the Middle East, especially towards Iran and Syria, can be understood through the contemporary form of realism, as presented by Kenneth Waltz (Wieclawski, 2011). This perspective focuses on the nature of the system-level structure rather than assumptions about human nature or morality (Waltz, 1959). Waltzian neorealism underscores the importance of hegemonic rivalry in the international arena, with dynamic changes evident since the Cold War (Feng & Ruizhuang, 2006).

If we look at the historical background of US Middle East foreign policy, we can see that the dominance of neo-conservative ideals within the Bush administration in the early 2000s exemplified a departure from realist principles, culminating in the controversial invasion of Iraq in 2003. However, the subsequent failures and setbacks in US democracy promotion efforts in the region prompted a resurgence of realist critiques, advocating for a more measured and pragmatic approach to Middle Eastern affairs. Realist criticisms of US foreign policy in the Middle East highlight the inherent challenges of imposing Western ideals on culturally and politically complex societies. Moreover, realists caution against rapid political overhauls, arguing that such actions



could exacerbate instability and weaken America's strategic position in the region, particularly in the context of the 'war on terror'. [F. Gregory Gause, 2005]

In contrast to realism, liberalism posits that democratic principles, human rights, and international cooperation should form the foundation of foreign policy. Liberal internationalists advocate for the promotion of democracy and good governance as means of fostering stability, peace, and prosperity in the Middle East. The Obama administration's approach to the Middle East exemplified a blending of realist pragmatism with liberal internationalist principles. While acknowledging the complexities of the region, President Obama articulated a vision of US foreign policy that sought to balance the pursuit of national interests with a commitment to universal values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. [John Chipman, 2006]

In conclusion, the examination of both Russian and US foreign policies in the Middle East through the lenses of realism provides valuable insights into the complexities of international relations and power dynamics in the region. The Russian approach, grounded in neo-realist principles, underscores the prioritization of national interests, the projection of assertive behavior, and the pursuit of hegemonic status. This perspective illuminates Russia's strategic maneuvers in the Middle East, including its deepening ties with Iran and Syria as a counterbalance to US influence.

On the other hand, the historical analysis of US Middle East foreign policy reveals a nuanced interplay between realism and liberalism. While the early 2000s witnessed a departure from realist principles under neo-conservative influence, subsequent failures in democracy promotion efforts prompted a resurgence of realist critiques advocating for a more measured and pragmatic approach. The Obama administration's foreign policy exemplified a synthesis of realist pragmatism with liberal internationalist principles, seeking to balance national interests with the promotion of democratic values and human rights. Furthermore, the insights of realist scholars like Meirshheimer shed light on the broader dynamics of hegemonic rivalry and power politics in the international system. Meirshheimer's concept of offensive realism provides a framework for understanding the US's historical pursuit of regional hegemony and its efforts to prevent the emergence of potential rivals. [John J. Mearsheimer, 2003]

## **1.2. Hypothesis.**

Despite differing historical backgrounds, geopolitical interests, and ideological orientations, both the United States and Russia pursue foreign policy approaches in the Middle East that prioritize securing strategic interests, maintaining regional stability, and projecting influence. However, while the United States often employs a combination of military interventions, economic issues,

and alliance-building to advance its objectives, Russia tends to emphasize diplomatic negotiations, arms sales, and support for authoritarian regimes as means to assert its presence and counterbalance Western influence in the region. Consequently, while both countries seek to achieve similar outcomes, their approaches exhibit distinct nuances shaped by their respective geopolitical calculations and historical experiences.

## CHAPTER II. METHODOLOGY

As I mentioned before, this research aims to analyze and compare the foreign policy approaches of the United States and Russia in the Middle East. Specifically, it seeks to examine their objectives, strategies, reasons for differences and impacts on regional dynamics. Both primary and secondary sources of research are tried to use to define and analyze core concepts and approaches. However, the secondary sources that consist of literature reviews, review articles and books are given more priority.

Qualitative data will be analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and themes in US and Russian foreign policy objectives and strategies. Using a qualitative research method to study US and Russian foreign policy in the Middle East involves gathering and analyzing non-numerical data to understand the nuances, complexities, and underlying motivations of these policies. Comparative analysis will be used to assess the similarities and differences between the two countries' approaches. We will pay attention specific case studies of US and Russian involvement in the Middle East, such as interventions in Syria, Libya, or Iraq. Analysing these cases in-depth will help to understand the contextual factors, decision-making processes, and outcomes of US and Russian policies.

I have analyzed and synthesized studies published and I will substantiate research by referring to sources which are mentioned in the bibliography. In order to get a better insight into the problem, I will also analyse some later studies looking at the earlier history of Russia - US strategy in the Middle East.

**Content Analysis.** Analyzing speeches, official documents, policy statements, media coverage, and academic literature related to the US and Russian foreign policy in the Middle East can reveal key themes, discourses, and policy priorities. Content analysis will allow for the contextualization of information within a broader framework, enabling us to understand the historical, cultural, or social contexts that influence the content.

## **CHAPTER III. THE CULTURAL AND IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF US AND RUSSIAN GEOPOLITICS**

### **3.1. The Relations Between US and Russia After the Cold War And Attitudes Towards World Regions**

The geopolitics underwent a significant transformation in the United States following World War II. However, as Cold War tensions escalated and global dynamics shifted, particularly with the emergence of the Third World as a battleground for influence, there was a resurgence of interest in geopolitics. Henry Kissinger, in particular, played a pivotal role in redefining geopolitics within the context of American foreign policy. He emphasized a pragmatic and unemotional pursuit of global equilibrium, effectively using geopolitics as a tool for *realpolitik*. Scholars like Zbigniew Brzezinski and Colin Gray further contributed to this revival of geopolitical studies, particularly focusing on its application to the Cold War dynamics.

On the other hand, within the Soviet Union, geopolitics was often viewed with suspicion, seen as little more than a justification for U.S. strategies of encirclement. Despite the ideological underpinnings of the Brezhnev Doctrine, which provided justification for Soviet interventions, there was still a degree of skepticism regarding the practical utility of geopolitical concepts within Soviet intellectual circles.

The contrast between the American embrace of geopolitics for strategic purposes and the Soviet skepticism highlights the divergent approaches to understanding and utilizing geopolitical theory during the Cold War era. (Kolossoff and Turovsky, 2002, p.143)

After the termination of the Cold War the self-liquidation of the USSR ‘created a black hole in the very centre of Eurasia. It was as if the geopoliticians’ Heartland had been suddenly yanked from the global map’ (Brzezinski, 1997: 87). Thanks to the eruption of ethnic and national rivalries generated by the new geographical configurations arising from the breakup of the national-federal structures of both the USSR and Yugoslavia, Moscow found itself operating within a Eurasian environment ‘shot through with geopolitical manoeuvring to a degree unseen at the present stage in any other part of the world’ (Buzan and Waver, 2003: 414). The new external boundaries of the Russian Federation and many of the fourteen post-Soviet successor states had not been designed to be international boundaries but had been drawn to serve administrative and political functions in the periods of imperial and Soviet rule (Rieber, 2007:257). The contest for control of Eurasia therefore re-emerged as the great prize of geopolitics (Mead, 2014).

After the Cold War, Western governments expressed optimism regarding the consolidation of democracy in Russia, while Russian leaders anticipated Western assistance in fostering economic and political transitions. Additionally, there was a consideration of the security relationship, which had been a focal point for years with substantial investments to maintain a geopolitical balance of power.

Despite the high hopes for Russia's political transformation, there was little consensus among Russian leaders regarding the country's foreign policy direction. Lingering Cold War competition, growing resistance in Russia to the US's claim of victory in the Cold War, and concerns about the permanence of Russia's loss of great power status all contributed to an identity crisis in Russian foreign policy-making, straining relations with the United States (Chafetz, 1996/97; Tolz, 1998). This led to internal debates about where Russia's interests naturally aligned. The relationship with the United States not only influenced Russian perceptions of its global position but also its role within the post-Soviet space.

Disappointment in Western support for Russia's democratic transition coincided with a "paternalistic" tone from US leadership, which expected Moscow to adopt policies favorable to Washington, assumed to be in Russia's own interest. Domestic political instability and uncertainty about Russia's global role left its foreign policy direction adrift. The perception of Russian weakness at home and abroad raised concerns among Russian leaders about their global power status. Consequently, there was a desire to "reverse the decline of Russia's international prestige" and counter the narrative of Russia's defeat in the Cold War, influencing foreign policy decisions (Roberts, 2010). Both Putin and Medvedev perceived US hegemony as a challenge to Russian interests (Monaghan, 2008; Roberts, 2010). While the Cold War might be over, its residual effects continue to influence Russia-US relations, prompting Russian leaders to resist the narrative of diminished power. These influences persist across presidential administrations.

During Yeltsin's first presidential term, relations with the United States significantly shaped internal policy debates. Presidents Yeltsin and Clinton attempted to maintain an open and cooperative dialogue, despite facing domestic opposition. The shifting power dynamics among opinion groups in Russia allowed for varying foreign policy orientations, from alignment with the West to isolationism or expansionism to reclaim Russia's geopolitical space. These debates, along with domestic challenges to Yeltsin's authority and conflicting elite perspectives on national interests, created political instability, hindering a clear articulation of Russia's stance on key issues.

Shedding the Cold War mindset proved challenging for Russian leaders, particularly due to their perception of US power confronting them at every juncture. Despite robust foreign policy

debates among Russian elites, there was a consensus on Russia's entitlement to primacy in the former Soviet space (Lynch, 2016). Arms control and NATO's new role have been identified as two emblematic and contentious issues in the evolving world order (Donaldson and Noguee, 2009).

The contrasting geopolitical perspectives within Russia since the late 1990s have indeed played a significant role in shaping and guiding its post-Cold War foreign policy. Let's explore how each perspective has contributed to Russia's geopolitical identity and actions on the international stage:

*Pragmatic Geopolitics and Eurasianism.* Advocates such as Sergei Rogov, Andranik Migranyan, and Yevgeni Ambartsumov emphasized Russia's historical legacy, vast territory, and central Eurasian location. They argued for a pragmatic approach focused on maintaining Russia as a multinational Eurasian great power. This perspective likely influenced Russia's efforts to maintain influence in its immediate neighborhood, such as through initiatives like the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). It also contributed to Russia's assertive stance in areas perceived as part of its traditional sphere of influence, including the Caucasus and Central Asia.

*Civilizational Geopolitics.* Figures like Vladimir Tsymburskii and Gennady Zyuganov proposed a more inward-looking approach, advocating for Russia to focus on its development as an autarkic ethnocivilizational entity within Eurasia. This perspective may have influenced Russia's reluctance to fully integrate with Western institutions and its emphasis on preserving its cultural and historical identity. It could also have led to tensions with neighboring countries, especially those with significant ethnic Russian populations.

*Eurasianist Coalition Building.* "Hard-line" Eurasianists like Aleksandr Dugin and Aleksei Mitrofanov advocated for a Eurasian continental coalition, opposing Atlanticism and advocating for closer ties with countries like Germany, Iran, and Japan. While this perspective may have contributed to Russia's efforts to diversify its diplomatic relationships and reduce dependence on the West, it also fueled suspicions among Western powers about Russia's intentions and contributed to geopolitical tensions, especially in regions where Russia sought to assert its influence.

*European Integration.* Dmitri Trenin argued for Russia to stress its European identity and seek integration into a Greater Europe, dismissing Eurasianism as a hindrance to Russia's engagement with the West. This perspective may have influenced periods of détente and cooperation between Russia and Western powers, such as Russia's participation in initiatives like the G8 and the Partnership for Peace program. However, it also faced resistance from segments of Russian society

and political elites who were skeptical of Western intentions and preferred a more independent geopolitical stance.

Overall, these contrasting geopolitical perspectives have contributed to a complex and multifaceted foreign policy approach for Russia in the post-Cold War era. The interplay between these perspectives has often resulted in a balancing act between asserting Russia's influence in its immediate neighborhood, maintaining cultural and historical identity, diversifying diplomatic relationships, and navigating tensions with Western powers.

The Cold War era was defined by a pervasive atmosphere of ideological, political, and military competition, which manifested in numerous confrontations and conflicts worldwide, including the Korean War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the dynamic between the two nations underwent a profound transformation, signifying the end of the Cold War and the dawn of a new phase characterized by cooperation and partnership. This transitional period witnessed the conclusion of various arms control agreements, the expansion of economic interdependence, and Russia's integration into the broader international community.

However, this era of collaborative endeavors was relatively short-lived. The tensions between the United States and Russia were prominently displayed during the conflict in the Balkans. Initially, Russian leaders hesitated at NATO's involvement in Bosnia but eventually cooperated reluctantly with NATO during its UN-sanctioned operation in Bosnia in 1995. Despite Yeltsin's concerns about exacerbating the conflict and his support for Russia's Orthodox Serbian allies, he directed Russian forces to partake in the NATO-led peacekeeping mission. However, Yeltsin's decision coincided with domestic upheaval in Russia, which weakened his political clout and left him practically powerless to effectively oppose NATO's actions (Stent, 2014, p.160).

The dynamics shifted in 1999 when Russia strongly opposed NATO's intervention in Kosovo without a UN mandate and impeded UN decision-making on the matter. Russia objected to NATO's activities outside its traditional sphere of influence, particularly within a region considered within Russia's orbit. The drafting of the Rambouillet peace deal by NATO was perceived by Russia as a provocation, interpreted as a pretext for bombing Serbia after Belgrade rejected the agreement. Tensions soared, leading Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov to order his plane to return to Moscow in protest, coinciding with the onset of NATO airstrikes in Kosovo (Stent, 2014, p.160).

Yeltsin cautioned Clinton against pushing Russia into the conflict, warning of the potential for Russian military involvement. Eventually, Russia and NATO reached an agreement to deploy peacekeeping troops to stabilize Kosovo, albeit with disagreements over the extent and manner of Russian participation. The incident at the Pristina airport, where Russian troops were dispatched to ensure Russia's inclusion in the post-war arrangement, highlighted the heightened tensions between the two sides. While direct conflict between Russian and NATO troops was avoided, the incident underscored the depth of the rift between them. Kosovo symbolized the deteriorating relationship, prompting Russia to assert its interests as a major power and affirming Kosovo, still regarded by Russia as part of Serbia, within its sphere of influence (Talbot, 2003, p.428).

When Vladimir Putin assumed office in 2000, he was already a familiar figure in Russian politics, having served as Prime Minister prior to his presidency. During this time, he played a pivotal role in shaping Russia's opposition to NATO's presence in Kosovo (Lynch, 2016). Putin approached Russia's interests pragmatically, asserting them assertively and dismissing Western criticisms of Russia's domestic affairs (Roberts, 2014). His consolidation of power within the vertical structure enabled him to assert Russia's priority to restore its rightful status among global powers more confidently. With a reputation at home for decisive action in Chechnya and effective management of the Russian economy, Putin was in a stronger position to assert Russian interests on the world stage. In the early 2000s, this translated into seeking a strategic partnership with the United States, facilitating cooperation on counterterrorism and advancing an arms control agenda beneficial to both countries. However, despite an optimistic start marked by President Bush's memorable comment about seeing Putin's soul, relations between the two nations quickly soured, culminating in a need to reset the relationship.

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 and Russia's conflict in Chechnya led both nations to perceive a mutual interest in combating terrorism. This initial goodwill was substantial enough for Russia to be approached about potential military intervention in Afghanistan, an offer they ultimately declined (Mankoff, 2009). However, this paved the way for intelligence sharing, the opening of Russian airspace, and Russian diplomatic support in Central Asia for US operations in Afghanistan. Russia also contributed to search and rescue efforts and provided assistance to anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan (Tsygankov, 2013). Leveraging its ties with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, Russia emerged as a crucial conduit, granting it influence in US military endeavors in the region (Mankoff, 2009). Temporarily, Russia enjoyed a level of influence commensurate with a major power, aligning with its concept of *derzhava*, which implies Russia's inevitable return to greatness and its challenge to assumed US hegemony.



This collaboration in military and civilian intelligence facilitated cooperation on other critical issues, including addressing weapons of mass destruction proliferation and the nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea. However, as Mankoff (2009) insightfully notes, this cooperation was based on shared interests rather than a deep commitment to strategic or civilizational alignment (2009: 115). For Putin, 9/11 and its aftermath presented an opportunity to pursue longstanding goals of Russian foreign policy, rather than an unconditional embrace of partnership (Mankoff, 2009: 115). While issue convergence facilitated a brief period of cooperation in Russia-US relations, areas of contention resurfaced as the rapprochement dissolved, notably regarding missile defense withdrawal and the inclusion of Baltic States in NATO.

Relations continued to deteriorate during the 21st century, driven by an array of political, economic, and security-related factors. A pivotal moment in this downward trajectory occurred in 2014 with the conflict over Ukraine, wherein Russia's annexation of Crimea and its backing of separatist forces in eastern Ukraine precipitated a significant rupture in European security and prompted the imposition of sanctions by Western powers. Since then, tensions between the United States and Russia have intensified across multiple fronts, including the Syrian conflict, nuclear arms proliferation, cybersecurity concerns, and mutual allegations of interference in domestic affairs.

Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, occurring shortly after the conclusion of the Sochi Winter Olympics, stands out as a pivotal juncture in the trajectory of Russia-US relations, catalyzing a shift in dynamics between the two nations. Notably, this event triggered widespread speculation regarding President Putin's geopolitical ambitions and evoked stark comparisons, with Hillary Clinton drawing parallels between Putin's actions and Hitler's maneuvers in the 1930s (Rucker, 2014). However, tensions had been simmering prior to this significant event. Instances such as the exposure of a Russian spy ring within the United States and the WikiLeaks debacle, which saw the unauthorized release of classified US Embassy communications, contributed to the growing rift.

Moreover, the enactment of the Justice for Sergei Magnitsky Act in 2012 served as another flashpoint, intensifying the strain in relations. This legislation, a direct response to the tragic treatment and subsequent death of Russian banker Sergei Magnitsky, led to reciprocal punitive measures, with Russia imposing bans on high-ranking US officials, thereby further exacerbating the diplomatic discord (Stent, 2014).

Putin's reelection in 2012 exacerbated the deepening schism. Allegations of voter fraud sparked pro-democracy protests in Russia, allegedly encouraged by Washington, which further

fueled Putin's long-standing grievances regarding NATO expansion and what he perceived as US overreach. Russia's 2014 military doctrine explicitly identified NATO as a direct threat, underscoring its readiness to safeguard its interests through any means necessary, a stance precipitated by NATO's condemnation of Russian actions in Ukraine. Additionally, Putin's decision to grant asylum to Edward Snowden, a former NSA contractor who exposed classified US surveillance programs in 2013, further exacerbated tensions, as did his attribution of unrest in Ukraine to NATO expansion during his 2015 address to the UN General Assembly (Putin, 2015).

Despite efforts to mitigate tensions, since the commencement of Putin's third presidential term, tangible progress in Russia-US relations has been conspicuously absent. Concerns regarding NATO expansion and the deployment of missile defense systems persistently loom large. However, the relationship has been marred by a series of contentious issues, including Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its involvement in the ongoing Syrian civil war, factors that have arguably dealt a significant blow to bilateral ties, possibly irreversibly straining the relationship.

The United States' vocal support for Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution and subsequent diplomatic gestures towards the country in response to the 2013 Euromaidan movement were significant thorns in Putin's side (Roberts, 2017). These gestures, aimed at fostering closer ties between Ukraine and Europe, were viewed by Putin as encroachments on Russia's sphere of influence. Consequently, under pressure from Moscow, Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich reneged on a previously negotiated trade deal with the EU, a move that ignited widespread pro-EU protests in western Ukraine in late 2013 (Roberts, 2017). The timing of these protests, which coincided with the Sochi Olympics, drew international attention and added to the escalating tensions.

Amidst the backdrop of ongoing protests, the situation in Crimea escalated dramatically just days after the conclusion of the Sochi Games (Roberts, 2017). Pro-Russian forces seized control of key government buildings in Crimea, prompting Putin to deploy Russian troops ostensibly to stabilize the region. However, this military presence quickly paved the way for Crimea's annexation by Russia. Putin issued a presidential decree recognizing Crimea as sovereign and independent, followed by a controversial referendum in which Crimean residents voted overwhelmingly to unite with Russia (Roberts, 2017). This swift and decisive action by Putin drew swift condemnation from Western powers, who accused Russia of violating Ukraine's sovereignty and instigating unrest in Crimea.

In defense of Russia's actions, Putin invoked international law and argued that Russia had an ethical and legal obligation to protect the interests of ethnic Russians in Ukraine, who he claimed were at risk of persecution amid rising nationalist sentiments (Roberts, 2017). Putin cited provisions in the Russian Constitution granting the President the authority to safeguard Russian speakers abroad, portraying Russia's intervention as a humanitarian necessity to prevent a looming crisis in eastern Ukraine, where hostilities were escalating. Drawing parallels to Western interventions, particularly the NATO-led intervention in Kosovo in 1999, Putin sought to justify Russia's actions as a legitimate response to threats to its security and interests (Roberts, 2017).

However, the West remained unconvinced by Putin's arguments. The absence of high-ranking US officials at the 2015 Victory Day military parade in Moscow's Red Square symbolized the deepening rift between Russia and the United States (Roberts, 2017). Some interpreted this absence as a deliberate snub, denying Russia recognition for its sacrifices in World War II and its place in the global power hierarchy. This symbolic gesture underscored the growing hostility and mistrust between the two nations, signaling a "war of values" characterized by competing visions of world order and conflicting geopolitical interests (Lynch, 2016: 101).

Putin's defense of Russia's actions in Crimea and Ukraine reflects not only his commitment to protecting Russia's perceived interests but also his broader vision of Russia's role in the world (Lynch, 2016: 101). Putin portrays Russia as a defender of traditional values and a counterweight to Western hegemony, challenging the notion of a unipolar world dominated by Western powers. As tensions persist and conflicts of interest intensify, the prospect of reconciliation between Russia and the United States appears increasingly remote, with both sides entrenched in their respective positions and unwilling to compromise.

The 2016 election of Donald Trump as President of the United States introduced further complexity to the relationship, as accusations of collusion with Russia surfaced alongside broader controversies regarding Russian involvement in U.S. electoral processes. Consequently, the antagonism between the two nations has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges confronting the international community, with far-reaching implications for global security, economic stability, and regional tranquility in areas such as Europe, the Middle East, and beyond.

Central to the perpetuation of this conflict are fundamental political disparities. The United States and Russia possess divergent political systems, ideologies, and values, which frequently manifest in discord and discordance, particularly concerning issues of human rights, democratic governance, and state sovereignty. Following the demise of the Soviet Union, Russia underwent a complex political evolution characterized by the centralization of power under President Vladimir

Putin, the resurgence of nationalist sentiments, and a pronounced anti-Western stance. This transformation precipitated a more assertive and confrontational approach to foreign policy aimed at challenging Western hegemony.

Similarly, the United States underwent a notable political shift marked by the ascent of populism, nationalism, and a departure from the liberal international order toward a more transactional and unilateral foreign policy approach. These inherent political disparities have engendered mutual distrust and animosity between the two nations, exacerbated by allegations of Russian interference in U.S. electoral processes, thereby further eroding mutual trust and cooperation.

The ongoing Syrian crisis serves as a poignant illustration of the deep-seated divergence of interests between Russia and the United States in their bilateral relations. Despite this, both nations seem to acknowledge the inherent dangers of allowing the Syrian conflict to escalate into a direct confrontation, prompting them to tread cautiously. Russia's steadfast backing of Bashar al-Assad, both financially and militarily, coupled with its deliberate obstruction of UN Security Council mandates aimed at intervening in the civil war, has thwarted the US objective of ousting Assad from power (Roberts, 2017). Western efforts to support anti-Assad rebels and combat the Islamic State (IS) within the destabilized Syrian landscape have been hampered by Russian support for the regime and reluctance to risk further destabilization by forcibly removing Assad.

Putin's reluctance to endorse a UN Security Council mandate in Syria stems from his skepticism toward NATO's use of similar mandates, citing the example of NATO's actions in Libya as a pretext to pursue regime change rather than protecting civilians (Putin, 2015). In his 2015 UN address, Putin criticized what he perceived as the United States' exceptionalist approach to international law and its tendency to circumvent UN authority under the guise of democracy promotion (Putin, 2015). He linked the 2003 invasion of Iraq to the rise of IS and warned against undermining Assad in the fight against terrorism.

A pivotal moment in the Syrian crisis occurred when Assad deployed chemical weapons in Damascus in 2013, prompting a tepid ultimatum from President Obama. Putin capitalized on this opportunity by offering to broker a deal to compel Assad to destroy his chemical weapons stockpile. However, this gesture was met with suspicion in Washington, given Russia's prior support for the Assad regime (Roberts, 2017). Nevertheless, Putin's involvement elevated Russia's role in resolving the crisis and lent legitimacy to a regime that Western leaders sought to replace.

The prolonged civil war in Syria facilitated the rise of IS, which temporarily established a caliphate in Aleppo in 2014 before being ousted by government forces in December 2016 (Roberts,

2017). The complex dynamics of the conflict, with Assad's regime supported by Russia and both the United States and Assad fighting IS, necessitated cooperation between Washington and Moscow. However, this cooperation was fraught with challenges, particularly due to the proximity of Russian and NATO troops and differing perceptions of the conflict's objectives and adversaries (Roberts, 2017). Concerns about accidental confrontations were realized in March 2017 when Russian airstrikes mistakenly targeted Syrian fighters being trained by the United States, exacerbating tensions between the two sides.

Despite occasional attempts at ceasefire agreements, such as the one brokered by Russia and Turkey in late 2016 to facilitate civilian evacuations, the Syrian civil war remains a persistent source of tension in Russia-US relations. The conflict highlights the complexities and contradictions inherent in their respective approaches to the region, making the prospect of a lasting resolution elusive.

The 2016 US presidential election campaign exacerbated the already deteriorating relationship between Russia and the United States. Donald Trump's bid for the White House thrust Russia into the spotlight as a central issue in the election discourse. Trump's public admiration for Putin drew sharp criticism from his opponent, Hillary Clinton, who denounced Putin's authoritarian leadership and accused Russia of supporting Assad's regime in Syria (Bradner and Wright, 2016). Clinton further alleged that Russian hackers were responsible for breaching the Democratic National Committee's security, leading to the release of private emails that embarrassed the party leadership. These accusations fueled Clinton's claim that Russia was actively working to secure a Trump victory, making Russia a focal point of the election campaign unlike ever before.

By the time of the November 2016 election, relations between Russia and the United States had arguably reached their lowest point in the post-Cold War era. However, the inauguration of Donald Trump in 2017 brought a glimmer of hope for a reset in relations, with Trump expressing a desire to mend ties and even hinting at the possibility of lifting sanctions against Russia (Bradner and Wright, 2016). Nevertheless, concerns lingered about the extent of personal and business connections between Trump administration officials and the Kremlin.

Revelations about undisclosed conversations between White House officials and Russian intelligence during the election campaign, as well as prior to Trump's inauguration, fueled speculation about the depth of Russian influence within the Trump administration (Bradner and Wright, 2016). Trump's reversal of President Obama's policies towards Russia, including his reluctance to investigate allegations of Russian interference in the election and his willingness to

consider lifting sanctions, raised further eyebrows. Trump's vocal skepticism of NATO and his attribution of Russia's annexation of Crimea to Obama's supposed weakness added to the uncertainty surrounding his administration's stance on Russia.

As Congress probes the extent of the Trump administration's ties to the Kremlin, the future of Russia-US relations hangs in the balance. The outcome of these investigations will likely shape the trajectory of bilateral relations for years to come.

Russian foreign policy towards the United States has been shaped by its leadership and its evolving global status. Perceiving a lack of acknowledgment of its regional power entitlements by the United States, Russia has adopted a reactionary stance in its foreign policy. NATO's expansion, plans for missile defense in Europe, and a perceived exclusion from the post-Cold War European order have fueled Russia's sense of being treated as an enemy rather than a partner (Sakwa, 2015). The Crimea crisis, in this context, can be seen as the culmination of two decades of exclusion and neglect, leading to the current animosity in Russia-US relations.

As noted by Lynch (2016), Russia, under Putin's leadership, has successfully insulated its borderlands from encroachment by other powers, a crucial aspect of projecting power on the global stage. The perception of Russia's growing strength has emboldened it to obstruct US initiatives, contributing to the discord in bilateral relations. This trend is likely to continue, with Russia becoming increasingly assertive in the future.

Despite periodic instances of cooperation, such as in nuclear disarmament and counterterrorism, long-standing issues like NATO enlargement and missile defense have perpetuated discord in Russia-US relations. Disagreements over Syria and Crimea further polarize the relationship, threatening to deepen the divide permanently.

Putin's assertion that Russia-US relations are poisoned reflects the underlying tensions and mutual distrust between the two nations. Both countries have brought historical baggage to the relationship, contributing to the current state of antagonism. However, the past two decades also demonstrate that cooperation is essential for achieving common goals.

While Russia seeks to assert its power and offer an alternative to US global dominance, both nations must recognize the importance of finding common ground despite their divergent values and interests. Escalating rhetoric and antagonism serve neither country's interests, and open channels of communication are crucial for mitigating tensions and fostering cooperation. Ultimately, it is in the best interests of both Russia and the United States to work together towards shared objectives rather than succumbing to the pitfalls of a new Cold War mentality.

### **3.2. A Comparison Of US And Russian Approaches To The Use Of Instruments In Foreign Policy: The Expression Of Theoretical Schools In Realpolitik**

In the realm of international relations, the use of foreign policy instruments plays a crucial role in shaping the interactions between states. Realpolitik, a theoretical approach grounded in pragmatism and the pursuit of national interest, provides a framework through which countries formulate their foreign policy strategies. This part of the research explores the comparison of US and Russian approaches to the utilization of foreign policy instruments within the context of realpolitik, examining how theoretical schools manifest in practical diplomatic and strategic actions.

*Realism and the US / Russian foreign policy.* Realists commonly assert that both Russia and the United States are searching for more power and influence and they are actively seeking to enhance their power and influence in the realm of international relations. However, the precise definitions and implications of power and influence are subjects of ongoing debate within the realist framework. While traditional realist examinations of Russian foreign policy typically prioritize the assessment of tangible indicators of power and influence, such as economic strength, financial resources, and military capabilities relative to other major powers, there is a growing tendency among realist scholars to adopt a more nuanced understanding of power.

For instance, in his book on Soviet foreign policy and its pursuit of power, Wohlforth, as classified as NCR by Rose (1998), introduced an additional variable to define power, focusing on the elites' perceptions of power and shifts in power dynamics. This modified concept of power allowed Wohlforth to analyze the patterns of conflict and de-escalation in Soviet-Western relations. To explore these perceptions, he utilized various written sources such as journals, archives, interviews, and employed content analysis methodology.

Wohlforth's conclusion (1993: 301–302) was that each episode of conflict was influenced by the interpretation of changes in power dynamics by both sides. Following each shift, each side sought to maximize its own position. However, neither side was willing to escalate to war to test the distribution of power, leading to stalemates characterized by posturing and signaling until a perceived new shift in power occurred, prompting another cycle of conflict.

Overall, the Cold War was depicted as an ongoing rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, revolving around disputes over their respective levels of power and the influence they were entitled to wield within the international system (Rose, 1998: 159).

Defensive realism and offensive realism are two dominant theories which put forth strong arguments that US foreign policy are the consequences of external pressures stemming from the distribution of power in the international system. These assumptions include the anarchic structure of the international system; states' uneven levels of capabilities; states' uncertainty about the intentions of the other states; survival as the ultimate aim of states; and the rationality of states. Defensive realism and offensive realism view the lack of a higher power above the state governments in the international system as the major driver behind the power-seeking behaviour of states.

This is what has been underlined by Meirsheimer: 'the best way to ensure their survival is to be the most powerful state in the system'. (Meirsheimer 2001, p.33) According to Meirsheimer (2008), the United States is the only state to ever obtain the hegemonic position in the international system. A careful reading of US history of foreign policy in the nineteenth century indicates that the United States succeeded in expanding across the North America and gained a number of offshore territories after the Spanish and American War (1898). This leads to Mearsheimer's conclusion that the US is 'well suited to be poster child for offensive realism' (Meirsheimer 2001, p.238). When the US became a regional hegemon, offensive realism's prediction is that US foreign policy's goal was to prevent the emergence of a hegemonic state in other regions in the world. It means that the US has tried to deter the emergence of a hegemon in either the European continent or Asian continent. Offensive realism is supportive of an offshore strategy, and Mearsheimer (2001) believed that this is also the strategy that has been pursued by the US since the end of the Second World War.

In the Russian case, this implies expansion as the main strategic choice: 'expand where feasible until you come to a natural geographical frontier or the border of a strong state with which you can establish predictable relations. Take the territory now, we'll figure out what to do with it later' (Wohlforth, 2001, p. 228–229). Such an account is indeed plausible, yet presents only part of the story: in fact each expansion cycle has been followed by painful adaptation, which revealed Russia's relative backwardness in terms of economic and institutional development. Strictly speaking, economic backwardness and domestic institutional deficiencies cannot be addressed from within the realist paradigm. Even less useful is in explaining Russia's permanent concern with status: Wohlforth's (2001, p.234) suggestion that Russian and Soviet leaders 'used status as an index of power' is not particularly helpful and certainly does not explain why status was invariably defined in terms of recognition by European states.

Neoclassical realism posits that understanding US foreign policy requires examining the interplay between systemic and domestic factors. While systemic factors, such as relative power



in the international system, are crucial for framing foreign policy objectives, solely relying on them is insufficient for comprehensively explaining US foreign policy behavior. According to neoclassical realism, domestic factors play a vital role in shaping how systemic pressures are perceived and translated into foreign policy decisions.

For instance, while the distribution of power in the international system sets the stage for foreign policy considerations, it does not offer a complete explanation for how US leaders formulate and implement foreign policy. Neoclassical realists argue that domestic politics act as an intervening variable between systemic pressures and foreign policy behavior, influencing how leaders interpret and respond to external challenges.

As Walt (2002) notes, neoclassical realism places domestic politics at the center, asserting that it mediates the relationship between power distribution and foreign policy decision-making. This perspective underscores the importance of considering internal dynamics, such as elite interests, public opinion, and institutional constraints, in understanding how systemic factors shape US foreign policy.

In the case of Russia, neoclassical realism suggests that its foreign policy is influenced by a combination of systemic constraints, historical experiences, and domestic politics. Russia's foreign policy is heavily influenced by its historical experiences of invasion and insecurity, particularly during the 20th century. From the Napoleonic Wars to World War II, Russia has faced significant threats from the West, leading to a deep-seated sense of insecurity. Neoclassical realists argue that this perception of threat shapes Russian leaders' behavior on the international stage, driving policies aimed at securing the country's borders and maintaining strategic depth. Neoclassical realism emphasizes the role of state leaders in interpreting and responding to systemic pressures. In the case of Russia, leaders like Vladimir Putin have pursued a foreign policy aimed at restoring Russia's status as a great power on the world stage. This has involved assertive actions, such as the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and military intervention in Syria, aimed at projecting Russian power and influence. [Roberts, S., 2010]

Neoclassical realists argue that states seek to balance external threats with internal capabilities and constraints. In the case of Russia, this involves balancing its desire for great power status with economic limitations and geopolitical realities. Russian foreign policy often seeks to exploit divisions within the Western alliance while also hedging against potential threats from China and other regional powers.

*Liberalism and the US / Russian foreign policy.* Liberalism is indeed a significant framework for understanding US foreign policy, given the country's historical commitment to promoting

liberty and democracy. The essence of liberal theory suggests that US foreign policy should reflect and advance the liberal and democratic values embedded in its domestic institutions. From this perspective, the primary objective of US foreign policy is to spread individual freedom and human rights globally. This is believed to benefit both the United States, by enhancing its security through the promotion of like-minded liberal states, and the rest of the world, by advancing the cause of freedom for all.

However, within the liberal camp, there are variations in how best to extend the values of freedom and liberty worldwide. One argument posited by liberalism is that non-liberal regimes are more prone to hostile policies and seek to amass power. In contrast, liberal-democratic states tend to be more peaceful and accumulate power to defend themselves rather than engage in aggression. Additionally, liberalism contends that democratic states rarely engage in conflict with each other, making the promotion of democracy a key strategy for global peacekeeping.

Liberalism also emphasizes the importance of free-market economies in the spread of democracy. It argues that free-market economies are more conducive to peace and prosperity, as they prioritize economic growth over military expansion or conflict. Therefore, promoting liberal democracies with free-market economies is seen as the most effective way to foster goodwill among nations and promote peace. [Hashemi, Nader, 2009]

US foreign policy, influenced by liberal principles, has historically focused on spreading democracy and liberty worldwide. However, policymakers face challenges in deciding whether to directly support freedom movements through aid and diplomacy or to intervene militarily to encourage democracy in non-liberal states. Additionally, promoting free trade and engaging with international institutions are key elements of the liberal approach to US foreign policy. As Ikenberry (2000) argues, these three pillars of liberalism—democracy, free trade, and international institutions—reinforce each other and serve both US interests and the cause of global peacebuilding.

As we mentioned, Liberalism emphasizes principles such as democracy, human rights, and international cooperation. From this standpoint, Russian foreign policy may be criticized for its authoritarian tendencies, suppression of political dissent, and disregard for liberal values. Russia's actions in Ukraine, annexation of Crimea, and support for authoritarian regimes in Syria and elsewhere may be seen as contrary to liberal norms.

However, liberalism also recognizes the importance of state interests and security concerns. Russian foreign policy can be understood as driven by a perceived need to protect national sovereignty, maintain regional stability, and assert influence in its neighborhood. Realpolitik, or

the pursuit of power and security through practical means, becomes a central aspect of Russian foreign policy from this perspective.

Liberalism also recognizes the importance of economic and strategic interests in shaping foreign policy. Russia's engagement with other states, including energy partnerships, arms sales, and diplomatic alliances, reflects a pragmatic approach to advancing its economic and security interests. These relationships are often transactional in nature, driven by mutual benefit rather than ideological alignment.

While Russia is often portrayed as a revisionist power challenging the liberal international order, it also participates in multilateral forums and agreements when it serves its interests. For example, Russia is a member of international organizations such as the United Nations and participates in diplomatic initiatives on issues like nuclear non-proliferation and counterterrorism.

*Constructivism and the US / Russian foreign policy.* Constructivism stands apart from traditional theories such as realism and liberalism by broadening the range of actors and factors considered in global affairs. While it recognizes the importance of states, it also emphasizes the roles played by various other entities such as state agencies, social communities, international organizations, and think tanks in shaping international dynamics (Weber, 2007, p. 98). In terms of factors, constructivism places a significant emphasis on human consciousness and its influence on global politics. Unlike realism and liberalism, which often rely on materialistic assumptions and a rational actor model, constructivism argues for understanding human behavior through the lens of social constructs rather than purely material interests (Busse, 1999, p. 44).

Constructivists assert that states are not solely motivated by the pursuit of survival, power, and wealth, as proposed by traditional theories. Instead, they view states as social actors whose actions are shaped by both domestic and international norms and rules. This perspective suggests that interactions among states inherently involve social dynamics and offer greater adaptability in international relations (Busse, 1999, pp. 44-45).

Constructivists argue that identity, rooted in ideas, plays a pivotal role in shaping international politics (Houghton, 2007, pp. 29-30). This perspective diminishes the significance of material forces, emphasizing instead the socially constructed meanings that individuals assign to their world. For instance, the possession of nuclear weapons by different countries holds varying implications for the United States based on identity rather than solely on material factors. While British nuclear weapons are perceived as benign due to the identity of the UK as a friend of the US, Iranian possession of nuclear weapons is seen as threatening due to the identity attributed to Iran.

In the constructivist framework, ideas and identity are paramount in understanding US foreign policy. National ideas serve as the foundation for analyzing and explaining US external behavior, with US identity shaping its foreign policy objectives and self-perception. Identity is inherently relational, emerging from distinguishing oneself from others. During the Cold War, for example, US national identity as the guardian of liberty, democracy, and human rights was reinforced by positioning itself in contrast to the totalitarian Soviet Union, as evidenced by documents like NSC-68 outlining US Cold War policy.

What sets constructivist theory apart from material-based theories is its assertion that national identities form the basis of national interests, profoundly influencing foreign policy formulation. While material-based theories view interests as derived from material power, constructivism contends that they stem from ideas. US foreign policy behaviors are thus not fixed but subject to change as identities and interests evolve over time. Constructivism suggests that US national interests are internally shaped through social interaction processes, explaining why the US may engage differently with liberal democratic states compared to non-democratic ones (Nau, 2002).

If we look at the Russian foreign policy, from the constructivist perspective, firstly, we should mention that since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has undergone a profound identity crisis, seeking to redefine its role in the international system. Constructivist theorists argue that Russia's actions are not solely motivated by power or security concerns but are also influenced by its desire to assert a distinct identity on the world stage.

One of the central tenets of Russian foreign policy constructivism is the notion of 'sovereign democracy,' championed by President Vladimir Putin. This concept emphasizes the primacy of state sovereignty and rejects external interference in domestic affairs. From a constructivist lens, Russia's insistence on sovereign democracy can be seen as an attempt to assert its identity as a unique civilization with its own set of values and norms, distinct from Western liberal democracy.

Furthermore, Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its involvement in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine can be understood through a constructivist framework. These actions were driven not only by strategic calculations but also by a desire to reclaim a sense of national pride and historical significance. Putin's narrative of protecting ethnic Russians abroad resonated with a domestic audience and reinforced a collective identity rooted in notions of Slavic brotherhood and historical grievances. [Busse, 1999, pp. 47]

While constructivism provides insights into the ideational factors shaping Russian foreign policy, *realpolitik* remains a crucial aspect of its behavior on the international stage. *Realpolitik*

emphasizes the primacy of power and national interest in statecraft, often leading to pragmatic and Machiavellian tactics aimed at maximizing strategic advantage.

In the case of Russia, *realpolitik* manifests in its pursuit of a multipolar world order as a counterbalance to perceived Western hegemony. The Kremlin views the unipolar moment following the Cold War as inherently unstable and seeks to assert itself as a global power capable of challenging American dominance. This ambition is evident in Russia's assertive actions in regions such as the Middle East, where it has cultivated alliances with states like Syria and Iran to expand its influence and challenge Western interventionism.

Moreover, Russia's energy diplomacy exemplifies *realpolitik* in action. As one of the world's largest energy exporters, Russia leverages its vast oil and gas reserves to advance its strategic objectives. By using energy as both a tool of coercion and cooperation, Russia seeks to assert control over its neighbors while simultaneously positioning itself as an indispensable partner for European energy security.

While constructivism highlights the ideational factors shaping Russia's behavior, *realpolitik* underscores the pragmatic pursuit of power and national interest. By integrating these frameworks, we can gain deeper insights into Russia's actions on the global stage and anticipate its future trajectory in an increasingly complex and contested world order.

*Marxism and US/Russian foreign policy.* Marxism, with its focus on class struggle, imperialism, and economic exploitation, offers a critical perspective on Russian and US foreign policy. In Russia, Marxist analysis highlights the legacy of imperialism, the exploitation of resources, and the persistence of economic inequality in shaping Russian behavior. Russian actions such as energy diplomacy, support for authoritarian regimes, and opposition to Western-led interventions reflect a Marxist critique of capitalist hegemony and neocolonialism.

Similarly, Marxism informs critiques of US foreign policy, highlighting the role of corporate interests, military-industrial complexes, and capitalist expansionism in shaping American behavior. US actions such as regime change operations, economic sanctions, and military interventions are viewed through a Marxist lens as instruments of capitalist imperialism and hegemonic control. Both countries engage in geopolitical competition, economic exploitation, and geopolitical maneuvering to advance their respective interests and preserve their power and privilege.

In conclusion, the foreign policies of Russia and the United States are shaped by a complex interplay of theoretical perspectives within the framework of *realpolitik*. Realism emphasizes

power and security, liberalism emphasizes cooperation and interdependence, constructivism emphasizes ideas and identities, and Marxism emphasizes exploitation and inequality. By examining how these theoretical schools manifest in Russian and US foreign policy, we can gain deeper insights into the motivations, strategies, and dynamics driving their behavior in the international arena.

## CHAPTER IV. EVOLUTIONARY FACTORS OF US AND RUSSIAN MIDDLE EAST POLICIES

### 4.1. Historical Foundations In The Formation Of US And Russian Middle East Policies

*Shaping Russia's Middle East Policy: Historical Underpinnings and Evolution.*

According to Andrei Grachev [2008: 196], the events surrounding the first Gulf War serve as a reflection of the state of Russian foreign policy shortly before and after the collapse of the USSR. The rivalry between Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze and Gorbachev's top adviser Yevgenii Primakov highlighted the "chaos," "indiscipline," and "demoralization" prevalent within the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Between 1992 and 1996, the Middle East was largely overlooked in Russian foreign policy. During Andrey Kozyrev's tenure as Foreign Minister, Russia pursued a distinct pro-Western stance, striving for maximum integration within Western organizations and institutions. For Kozyrev, "Arab leaders were a group of political riffraffs... to be kept at bay" [Posuvalyuk, 2012: 51–53].

Russian foreign policy toward the Middle East during this period was also shaped by the transformations occurring within the region itself. Sparked by the end of the Cold War, the Middle East experienced significant changes, including coups d'état (Algeria, Sudan), unification (Yemen), and open warfare (Iraq). The erosion of legitimacy of old authoritarian and secular regimes, the emergence of political Islam, a shift in attitudes towards Israel, and the rise of new values, players, and demands profoundly altered the region and posed challenges to the foreign policy of post-Soviet Russia, which was grappling with internal disarray and struggled to adapt to the new Middle Eastern realities.

Given its economic circumstances in the early 1990s, Russia displayed particular interest in the economic aspects of its relations with the Middle East. As a conflict-prone region, the Middle East represented a significant market for Russian arms sales. Russia contributed to perpetuating these conflicts by supplying weapons and had a vested interest in their continuation. Following the Cold War, Iraq and Syria, both of which owed substantial debts to Moscow, assumed critical importance for post-Soviet Russia in the Middle East. For Iraq, this entailed Russia advocating for an end to the UN Security Council sanctions imposed after the 1990 invasion of Kuwait. Concerning Syria, which solidified its international standing by supporting the international coalition against Iraq in 1990, this involved a swift restoration of relations with Russia, particularly in the military realm.

Kozyrev's pro-Western trajectory began to lose momentum by 1993, encountering opposition to his approach even within Yeltsin's administration. The resurgence of the Middle East in Russian foreign policy deliberations commenced with Yevgenii Primakov assuming leadership of the Foreign Ministry from Kozyrev. Primakov questioned Russia's unwavering Western alignment and redirected attention towards the Middle East.

Yevgenii Primakov assumed the role of Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs in January 1996 and held the position until September 1998. His tenure had a dual impact. Initially, it saw Russia asserting itself more vigorously in foreign affairs, striving to reclaim its stature as a superpower and a global influencer. Concurrently, Primakov's deep familiarity with the Middle East, cultivated over decades as a scholar, journalist, and KGB operative since the 1960s, prompted Russia to deepen its involvement in the region [Andrew and Mitrokhin, 2005: 151].

Under Primakov's guidance, there was heightened Russian engagement with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He endeavored to position Russia as a mediator between Israel and Syria, particularly during his extensive travels in the region in 1997. However, these endeavors yielded limited tangible results. Primakov also introduced a renewed sense of pragmatism into Russia's Middle East relations, a trait that Russia claims to maintain in its approach today. This pragmatism is a recurring theme in Russian discourse, often referred to as "pragmatism" (Vasilev, Primakov) or "de-ideologization" (Streltsov). While it is true that Soviet ideological influence has waned in Russia's Middle East policies, these terms themselves carry implicit ideological assumptions, such as prioritizing economic efficiency or emphasizing Russia's status as a major power.

Relations between post-Soviet Russia and the West have been consistently challenging. During Primakov's tenure, Russia adopted a more assertive stance. Although there was a brief improvement in relations following the events of 2001 due to the shared context of the "war on terror," overall, their relationship experienced a prolonged decline. This decline was characterized by NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the simultaneous enlargement of the EU and NATO in 2004, the "color revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine in 2003 and 2004 respectively, the planning of a NATO missile defense system in 2002/2007, and the intervention in Libya in 2011. These events were perceived in the Kremlin as instances of Western encroachment on Russia's borders or interference in the affairs of sovereign states, disregarding Moscow's objections and diminishing Russia's global stature. This anti-Western shift reached its peak with Putin's renowned speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007. [Putin 2007]



Subsequently, many of the issues raised in this speech recurred in several of Putin's subsequent addresses, notably his speech on March 18, 2014, addressing the Crimean crisis. Despite the signing of the new START agreement in 2010 and the attempted "reset" of U.S.-Russia relations under Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev, progress was limited, and tensions persisted during Putin's third term, spanning from the Syrian civil war to the Ukraine crisis. Meanwhile, despite being Russia's largest trading partner, relations with the EU stagnated, exacerbated by European sanctions against Russia and the flirtation of European far-right parties with Russia. Russia's pivot towards Asia and the Global South, including the Middle East, should be understood against this backdrop of strained relations with the West.

Russian foreign policy towards the Middle East is influenced by a multitude of factors beyond just its bilateral relationships with regional governments or its escalating tensions with the West. One significant factor is the emergence of the BRICS alliance (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), with China and India particularly impacting the Middle East due to their substantial oil imports from the region. While Russia competes in the oil export market, China and India prioritize stable oil prices, potentially leading to a scenario where competition for influence in the Middle East intensifies, necessitating delicate navigation by both Russia and the West. [Roberts, S., 2010]

Another pivotal factor shaping Russia's Middle East policy is the surge of secessionist nationalism across the region and globally. While Russia generally opposes secessionist movements, it has had to adapt to instances like South Sudan's independence and the effective autonomy of the Kurdish Regional Government. However, supporting secessionists in some contexts risks fueling similar movements elsewhere and complicating relations with threatened governments.

Additionally, the Middle East is witnessing a fierce rivalry between Iran and certain Sunni Arab states, notably Saudi Arabia, manifested in conflicts across Sunni-Shi'a divided states like Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Bahrain, and Yemen. While Moscow has predominantly aligned with Iran in these conflicts, it has supported the Sunni monarchy in Bahrain and maintained neutrality in Yemen, seeking to cultivate good relations with both Iran and Sunni Arab states. Nevertheless, this stance has led some Sunni factions to perceive Russia as favoring Shi'a interests over Sunni ones.

The "Arab Spring," initially perceived by Russian observers as akin to Western-backed "color revolutions," further shapes Moscow's policies in the region. Russian suspicions of Western intentions, particularly in light of events like the Euromaidan protests in Ukraine, reinforce Putin's

resolve to support regimes like Assad's in Syria. This perception, compounded by allegations of Islamist fighters from Syria and Libya participating in the Euromaidan protests, underscores Russia's determination to resist what it perceives as Western attempts to orchestrate regime change, particularly in strategically significant regions like Ukraine and Syria. [Rabinovich, I., 2023]

Despite the significant impact of Russia's actions in Ukraine, such as the annexation of Crimea and support for secessionist forces in eastern Ukraine, on its relations with the West, the Middle East has largely remained detached from this conflict. Arab states, Iran, and Israel have shown little opposition to Russian policy towards Ukraine, viewing it as unrelated to their own interests. Even Turkey, which has expressed concerns about Russia's actions, has not allowed this to significantly impede the recent restoration of good relations with Moscow initiated in mid-2016. This suggests that while Russia's actions in Ukraine have deeply affected its relations with the West, they have had a limited impact on its relations with the Middle East.

After a period of reduced involvement in the Middle East during the Yeltsin era in the 1990s, Putin embarked on a mission to reestablish Russian influence in the region [Nizameddin, 2013]. Despite significant efforts throughout the early 2000s, Russia still appeared to play a secondary role compared to the United States during the Bush Administration, which conducted large-scale interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq while actively pursuing the "War on Terror" across the region. However, the relative disengagement of the United States from the region under the Obama Administration, coupled with strained relations with several longtime U.S. allies such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, and even Israel, alongside Putin's perceived successful intervention in support of the Assad regime in Syria from 2015 onward, has led to a perception of increasing Russian influence in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, while Russian influence is perceived to be on the rise, U.S. influence in the region remains significant. Even if U.S. influence were to further decline, it does not necessarily imply automatic replacement by Russia. The complexities inherent in the Middle East, which have posed challenges for the United States, similarly affect Russia. To understand the opportunities and obstacles encountered by Putin's efforts to enhance Russian influence in the Middle East from its low point during the Yeltsin era, it is essential to examine Moscow's intricate relationships with major states and actors in the region since the end of the Cold War.

*Foundations of US Policy in the Middle East: A Historical Perspective.*

The profound interconnection linking America and the Middle East is a relatively recent occurrence. American supremacy in the Middle East emerged distinctly after World War II. Preceding WWII, the U.S. maintained a predominantly peripheral role; European colonial powers

wielded dominance over the Middle East. During those years, the Middle East, much like large parts of the Global South, was molded by the rivalry among European imperial forces. France exerted influence over North Africa, along with a significant portion of Francophone West Africa, and assumed control over Lebanon and Syria post-World War I. Great Britain played a pivotal role in Iran and held sway over both Egypt and the coastal regions of the Arabian Peninsula, vital transit points linking to colonial India. Following World War I, London also took command of Palestine, Transjordan, and Iraq. Italy, in its pursuit of colonial expansion, inflicted substantial harm on what would later become Libya. The primary focus of nationalist and anti-colonial movements that swept through the region after World War I was directed towards the European powers, not the United States. [Anderson, Lisa, 2020]

However, this dynamic shifted. American engagement in the Middle East intensified alongside the Cold War. Due to its abundant oil reserves and strategic location, the Middle East swiftly evolved into a major battleground in the global contest between the United States and the Soviet Union. By the Suez Crisis of 1956, during which the Eisenhower administration compelled Britain and France to withdraw from their occupation of the Suez Canal, the U.S. had supplanted the European powers in the Levant. France retained influence in North Africa for a brief period longer, but ultimately conceded defeat in the Algerian war for independence in 1962; Britain remained the primary power in the Gulf until 1971, when it formally relinquished its imperial role. [Fawcett, Louise L'Estrange, 2019]

Instead of the competition among various colonial powers that characterized the preceding century, a bipolar division of global politics between the United States and the Soviet Union took root in the Middle East. Many newly independent Middle Eastern regimes found themselves compelled to pick sides to secure access to arms sales, economic assistance, and political patronage. These regimes adeptly framed their local agendas in the rhetoric of socialism or anti-communism, while the superpowers feared that the loss of any local ally could trigger a chain reaction of defections—reminiscent of the "domino theory" that drew the United States into the Vietnam War.

Despite the fierce rivalry, regime defections were rare occurrences. The dynamics of bipolarity ensured that any country switching sides would have significant implications for the perceived regional and global power balance. There were notable exceptions to this trend. Iraq's revolution in 1958 transformed it from a British protectorate into an Arab nationalist regime that would soon lean towards Moscow. Conversely, Iran's shift towards an independent foreign policy under the democratically elected Prime Minister Mossadegh was thwarted in 1952 through a coup backed by Great Britain and the United States. In 1979, Egypt completed its transition from a

Soviet ally to an American ally as part of its peace treaty with Israel. However, in the same year, the pro-American Shah of Iran was toppled in the revolution that led to the establishment of Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Republic of Iran. These monumental changes in the regional order serve as exceptions that underscore the prevailing pattern: most regional states, for the most part, remained entrenched within a global alliance framework. [Rabil, Robert G, 2016]

Israel emerged as a pivotal focal point in this Cold War rivalry. Both in 1967 and 1973, conflicts between Israel and its Arab neighbors brought the United States and the Soviet Union to the brink of direct confrontation. Increasing American support for Israel, notably its airlift to replenish Israeli forces during the 1973 war, significantly complicated its relations with key Arab allies such as Saudi Arabia, which responded by imposing the OPEC oil embargo. Leveraging the shockwaves of the 1973 war, the United States assumed a leading role in the subsequent peace negotiations, aiming to sideline Moscow from the process while demonstrating to its estranged Arab allies that its mediation was indispensable in compelling Israel to make concessions. [Prifti, B., 2017] The Camp David Accords, signed by Egypt and Israel in 1979, returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in exchange for peace and security assurances, marking the apex of that diplomatic effort and solidifying Washington's hegemonic position in the heart of the Middle East—albeit as the Iranian revolution dealt a significant blow to its influence in the Gulf by transforming its staunchest ally into a regional adversary with revolutionary ambitions.

The United States escalated its military involvement in the Gulf during the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88). It could not remain indifferent to the largest conventional conflict in the region's modern history, even though it pitted Iraq (a long-standing Soviet ally) against Iran (vehemently anti-American since the revolution). Furthermore, Washington was unwilling to overlook the traumatic hostage crisis that ensued after the 1979 seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran, or the Islamic Republic's endeavors to destabilize America's Gulf allies. Encouraging the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which brought together the six oil-rich states of the Arabian Peninsula to collectively safeguard their interests against the two belligerent powers, the U.S. pursued a somewhat duplicitous strategy, clandestinely supplying arms to Iran in exchange for the release of Hezbollah-held hostages in Lebanon, while simultaneously increasing assistance to Iraq in the latter part of the decade. Direct intervention only commenced when the war began to disrupt oil shipping in the Gulf. [Prifti, B., 2017]

In 1988, after reflagging Kuwaiti oil tankers as its own and downing an Iranian passenger jet, the United States finally persuaded Iran to agree to a UN-mediated ceasefire, bringing an end to the Middle East's longest conventional conflict. Despite receiving growing economic and military support from the U.S., Iraq seized the opportunity of the ceasefire to launch a genocidal campaign

against its Kurdish population in the north—a heinous war crime that had minimal impact on Washington's efforts to lure it away from the Soviet Bloc.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the conclusion of the Cold War in 1989 marked the beginning of unparalleled American dominance in the region. It's crucial to grasp that before 1990, the U.S. did not have any permanent military installations in the Middle East and seldom deployed its own troops for intervention; its involvement primarily operated from a distance, collaborating with local counterparts. When Saddam Hussein launched an invasion of Kuwait in the summer of 1990, he had grounds to believe that the United States would remain uninvolved. Following Iraq's occupation of Kuwait, the United States orchestrated an international coalition, a feat unlikely during the Cold War era, and persuaded a hesitant Saudi Arabia to accommodate U.S. military forces. The liberation of Kuwait saw a diverse coalition of over half a million troops. It also established the groundwork for the fundamental tenets of U.S. strategy throughout its years of dominance in the region.

The ascendancy of the U.S. was characterized by two pivotal facets subsequent to the liberation of Kuwait. Initially, the Gulf War concluded with Saddam Hussein retaining power in Iraq, initiating twelve years of sporadic confrontations over arms inspections. This justified the implementation of some of the most severe sanctions in history and led the United States to maintain a significant troop presence in bases encircling the Gulf. Even today, Iraqis vividly recall how the Bush administration encouraged them to rebel against Saddam in the tumultuous aftermath of the conflict, only to observe passively as Saddam's forces ruthlessly suppressed those who rose up. Additionally, since the U.S. still needed to safeguard its Gulf allies against Iran, the strategy of "dual containment" of both Iraq and Iran necessitated the continuous presence of American military forces, given the vulnerability of the Gulf states.

The second aspect revolved around securing Arab backing for the conflict against another Arab nation, necessitating Washington's demonstration of a commitment to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. After initiating a sweeping regional peace initiative in Madrid in 1991, the U.S. supervised nearly a decade of intensive negotiations involving Israel and key Arab players: Jordan, Syria, and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Most other Arab nations participated in multilateral talks addressing issues like environmental concerns, water management, and economic advancement. This American-led peace endeavor led to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza and portions of the West Bank. However, despite seven challenging years of negotiations, the talks ultimately faltered in reaching a definitive resolution during the final days of the Clinton administration's Camp David summit. Despite its failure to achieve peace, the peace initiative played a crucial role: its demonstration of effort facilitated the smoother

functioning of a dominion encompassing both Israel and a coalition of Arab states supportive of Palestinian aspirations. [Saikal, Amin, 2019]

The 1990s marked the pinnacle of America's influence in the Middle East, a decade characterized by U.S. hegemony over political and security frameworks in both the Levant (anchored in the Egypt-Israel Camp David peace accord and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process) and the Gulf (centered on military assistance to the Gulf Cooperation Council states and the containment of Iraq and Iran). During this period, all regional affairs were heavily influenced by Washington. However, this very dominance laid the groundwork for future instability. The sanctions imposed on Iraq resulted in a humanitarian crisis that appalled the global community and became increasingly unsustainable, especially as Saddam Hussein resisted the weapons inspections regime and consolidated his domestic authority. The tumultuous trajectory of the Oslo peace process fostered significant disillusionment regarding the prospects for Israeli-Palestinian peace, eventually culminating in a devastating conflict. Additionally, American hegemony made it a prime target for radical elements seeking to challenge the regional status quo, as evidenced by the terrorist atrocities perpetrated by al-Qaeda on September 11, 2001. [Wright, Lawrence, 2006]

The terrorist attacks of 2001 prompted the U.S. to aggressively seek to reshape the Middle East through the Global War on Terror, the invasion of Iraq, and a significantly increased presence in the region. It's somewhat perplexing that the Bush administration sought to drastically alter a Middle Eastern order that had been established by the United States itself. For some in the administration, the shock of 9/11 prompted a reassessment of all policy assumptions, while for others, it presented an opportunity to pursue long-desired objectives such as the removal of Saddam Hussein. Regardless of the underlying reasons, Washington's new revisionist approach disrupted regional politics, resulting in a range of unintended consequences.

Foremost among these was the invasion of Iraq and the disastrous aftermath of occupation. The removal of Saddam Hussein left Iraq in ruins, paving the way for a brutal sectarian civil war and a highly effective insurgency that claimed the lives of millions of Iraqis and displaced over 10 million more. The human and financial costs incurred by the U.S. turned much of the American public against further involvement in Middle Eastern conflicts, with significant repercussions in the years ahead.

Moreover, the war significantly bolstered Iran by eliminating its primary military and political adversary, strengthening its local Shia allies, and enabling Iran and its allies to portray themselves as "resisting" America's hegemonic influence. In 2006, Hezbollah, a key ally of Iran, battled Israel to a stalemate, emerging as the political victor of the conflict—a stark contrast to Secretary of State

Condoleezza Rice's optimistic characterization of it as "the birth pangs of a new Middle East" marked by Israeli-Arab cooperation against Iran. Concurrently, the war transformed al-Qaeda from a small transnational terrorist network into a deeply entrenched mass insurgency capable of engaging and killing American forces on the battlefield. [Telhami, Shibley, 2013]

Additionally, revelations of U.S. abuses of Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib prison fueled a surge of anti-American sentiment across the region. However, Iraq was just one facet of a broader transformation in the region. The period following 2001 witnessed a significant escalation of America's presence, shifting from primarily offshore engagement to unprecedented involvement in regional security and politics. The Global War on Terror extended the battlefield globally, leading to close cooperation between the U.S. and Middle Eastern intelligence services in pursuing, interrogating, and often torturing suspected al-Qaeda militants. The accompanying "war of ideas" saw Washington advocating for substantial changes in various aspects of government and society, including religious doctrines, educational curricula, and media content.

The brief-lived "freedom agenda," advocating democracy as a solution to extremism, saw the U.S. promoting elections and supporting civil society organizations and opposition political movements. However, the U.S. retreated from this stance when opposition forces, such as Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood or Palestine's Hamas, gained traction, undermining its credibility.

Discussions about American "retreat" from the Middle East often reference this exceptional period as the norm for U.S. engagement with the region. However, it's important to recognize the historical rarity and short-lived nature of this period. General David Petraeus' troop surge in Iraq from 2006–2008 was intended as a temporary measure towards a U.S. withdrawal. The costs and failures of the Iraq intervention soured the American public on further involvement in the Middle East. The Obama administration campaigned on withdrawing from Iraq and cautiously pursued a complete withdrawal upon assuming power. The promotion of democracy lost its appeal, and authoritarian allies regained their influence. Washington largely abandoned efforts to advance Israeli-Palestinian peace, allowing the situation to drift towards increased Israeli settlements and Palestinian political stagnation. [Gerges, Fawaz A., 2012]

The Obama administration aimed to address the aftermath of the Bush era by mitigating the extremes of the War on Terror, initiating a phased withdrawal from Iraq, and attempting to mend relations with the moderate Muslim majority, notably through a significant speech in Cairo. However, the eruption of the Arab uprisings in 2011 fundamentally reshaped the administration's regional engagement, revealing the constraints of U.S. dominance and its reliance on autocratic allies for stability.

The early months of 2011 marked a revolutionary period in the Middle East, beginning with protests in Tunisia that swiftly spread across the region, fueled by Al Jazeera's coverage and social media discussions. The overthrow of President Ben Ali in Tunisia and President Mubarak in Egypt ignited a wave of protests throughout the Arab world, challenging the established American-backed order. Despite being driven primarily by domestic grievances, these uprisings confronted the U.S. with the reality that many of the regimes facing opposition were its allies. [Lynch, Marc, 2013]

Amid this upheaval, regional powers such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia pursued their own interests, often diverging from U.S. preferences. They supported a military coup in Egypt against President Morsi and encouraged anti-Islamist movements in Tunisia. Additionally, wealthy Gulf states provided assistance to fellow monarchs and intervened militarily in Bahrain, Libya, and Syria, sometimes in conflict with American aims.

While the U.S. collaborated with Gulf states in some instances, like Yemen, where they worked on a transition plan from President Saleh, in crucial cases such as Egypt, the UAE and Saudi Arabia directly opposed American policies, casting doubt on U.S. leadership.

In 2013, Obama initiated covert negotiations with Iran concerning its nuclear program, eventually leading to public talks and the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). These negotiations underscored Obama's strong commitment to preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons and his resolve to avoid a potentially disastrous conflict in the region. Although Israel and the Gulf states shared the goal of curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions, they vehemently opposed the diplomatic approach and actively worked to undermine the negotiations. [Karen DeYoung & Carol Morello, 2015]

The Gulf states, in particular, viewed Iran's regional influence as a more significant threat than its potential nuclear capabilities. They criticized the talks for excluding issues such as Iran's support for Assad's regime in Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Shia groups in Iraq, and the Houthi rebels in Yemen. Obama addressed these concerns by offering significant arms sales and reluctantly supporting the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen. [Schatz, Edward, 2021]

Despite facing resistance, Obama successfully reached the JCPOA, although it couldn't be ratified as a formal treaty due to Senate opposition. Nevertheless, the agreement proved effective, with Iran fully complying with its obligations, including surrendering nuclear materials and accepting rigorous international inspections.

*Navigating the US-Russia Relationship: Allies or Adversaries in the Middle Eastern Arena?*



In recent times, the relationship between Russia and the West, especially the United States, has worsened due to conflicts unrelated to the Middle East, such as disputes over Georgia, Ukraine, Baltic countries, NATO expansion, EU enlargement, and EU regulations that Russian entities resist adhering to. However, in the Middle East, both Russia and the West have found areas of agreement. Russia supported the U.S.-led efforts in Afghanistan against the Taliban and other extremist factions. Moreover, Russia participated alongside other major powers in negotiating a nuclear deal with Iran.

While the Soviet Union either backed or benefited from the overthrow of pro-Western governments in the Middle East during the Cold War era, Putin's Russia has not actively pursued their downfall. The main point of contention between Putin and the West in the Middle East revolves around Western efforts to promote or support the removal of authoritarian regimes.

Moscow sees as allies or associates, evident in countries like Iraq, Libya, and Syria. Especially concerning Syria, Moscow has tried to persuade Western governments that backing Assad is essential, as the alternative could lead to a jihadist regime hostile to both the West and Russia. However, Western governments remain skeptical, attributing the rise of jihadist opposition to the brutality of the Assad regime. Despite their differences within the Middle East and elsewhere, both Russia and the West share a common interest in combating jihadist organizations—a notion hinted at during Donald Trump's presidential campaign.

As we see, the relationship between the West and Russia in the Middle East is multifaceted, characterized by both cooperation and competition. While there were instances of collaboration, particularly in areas such as counterterrorism and diplomatic initiatives, tensions and rivalries persisted, especially concerning regional influence and geopolitical strategies.

On one hand, the West and Russia have cooperated on certain issues in the Middle East. Both have a shared interest in combating terrorism and stabilizing conflict zones like Syria. In some instances, they have worked together within international frameworks to address humanitarian crises and facilitate peace negotiations. Additionally, there have been diplomatic efforts, albeit intermittent, to find common ground on issues such as the Iranian nuclear program and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

However, the relationship is far from amicable, with numerous instances of competition and divergence of interests. Russia's military intervention in Syria, for example, has challenged Western influence in the region and complicated efforts to resolve the conflict. Furthermore, Russia's support for regimes like that of Bashar al-Assad in Syria and its assertive actions in

countries like Libya have often clashed with Western objectives and values, leading to friction and mistrust.

While the West and Russia occasionally cooperate on certain issues in the Middle East, their relationship is primarily defined by competition and rivalry. Both sides seek to advance their interests and exert influence in the region, leading to complex dynamics that shape the geopolitics of the Middle East.

## **4.2. US and Russia's Geopolitical Goals for The Region And Comparison of Resources**

The United States and Russia have long been significant players in the complex geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, each pursuing distinct goals shaped by historical, strategic, and economic interests.

For the United States, its primary objectives in the region often revolve around maintaining stability, safeguarding access to energy resources, combating terrorism, and promoting democratic governance and human rights. Historically, the U.S. has sought to exert influence through military interventions, alliances with regional powers, and diplomatic initiatives aimed at resolving conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian issue and the Syrian civil war. Additionally, the U.S. has pursued policies aimed at containing the influence of adversaries like Iran and extremist groups like ISIS.

On the other hand, Russia's goals in the Middle East are driven by a desire to restore its influence in the region, which waned following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Key objectives for Russia include securing access to warm-water ports, expanding its arms sales, countering U.S. influence, and projecting power on the global stage. Russia has pursued these goals through military interventions, most notably in Syria, where it has supported the regime of Bashar al-Assad, bolstering its position as a key player in shaping the country's future and enhancing its regional standing. In this part of the thesis, we will focus in more detail to better understand their goals and objectives in the region.

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the United States made counterterrorism a primary focus of its Middle East policy. Nations like Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen garnered international recognition for their efforts in combating terrorism, with the U.S. strengthening ties even with historically overlooked countries like Algeria. Both the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations exerted considerable influence on stable Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia,

advocating for measures such as banning terrorist financing and supporting jihadist movements (Rudner, 2004).

To address terrorism globally, the Bush administration introduced the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism in February 2003. This comprehensive plan aimed to dismantle terrorist organizations, diminish their funding and support networks, address socio-economic conditions exploited by terrorists, and ensure the safety of U.S. citizens both domestically and abroad (National strategy for combating terrorism, 2003). The U.S. subsequently invaded Iraq on March 19, 2003, overthrowing Saddam Hussein's regime. The Bush administration accused the Iraqi government of human rights violations, possession of weapons of mass destruction, and harboring terrorist leaders, asserting that it posed a threat to regional security and stability in the Middle East (Desoli, 2015).

In August-September 2014, the United States formed a global coalition to combat ISIS and terrorism. Together with several Arab nations like Bahrain, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, the U.S. launched airstrikes against ISIS targets in Syria on September 23, 2014, aiming to degrade the group's capacity to recruit, train, and resupply its fighters (Fantz & Pearson, 2015).

The U.S. leverages joint efforts to access vital intelligence, with local agencies employing agents and resources to track and eliminate terrorists domestically. Additionally, the U.S. conducts drone strikes in certain situations, such as in Yemen. Notably, Saudi Arabia played a crucial role in thwarting an AQAP (Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula) plot to bomb a U.S. airliner in 2010, with a joint U.S.-Saudi operation in 2011 preventing similar attacks (Dreazen, 2012).

Hamas and Hezbollah are prominent militant groups in the Middle East, both hostile to the United States. However, unlike Al-Qaeda, neither group plans operations against Americans. While the fight against terrorism can potentially foster democracy, collaboration with partners in counterterrorism often strengthens intelligence agencies, which may not align with democratic principles, as observed with Hamas and Hezbollah (Mueller and Stewart, 2012).

The relative absence of major recent attacks by Al-Qaeda indicates the group's vulnerability. The debate lies in whether this vulnerability is partly due to sustained U.S. counterterrorism efforts or if it remains largely unaffected by U.S. intervention. Additionally, the threat posed by Al-Qaeda affiliate groups to U.S. interests depends on whether they are perceived as part of the central movement or merely localized organizations with a tangential threat (Byman, 2012).

In other words, strengthening counterterrorism strategies, the U.S. deepened ties with traditional allies like Egypt and Jordan while seeking to build stronger connections with previously overlooked or unfriendly regimes such as Yemen and Libya. The most notable manifestation of this commitment was the 2003 invasion of Iraq, triggering an insurgency and maintaining a U.S. presence in the country until the end of 2011.

As U.S. forces were withdrawing from Iraq, the Arab Spring reshaped the region, toppling long-standing U.S. allies in Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen, and igniting civil conflicts in various nations, notably Syria. Despite the Obama administration's reluctance for extensive military engagement in the region, it launched airstrikes against Islamic State militants in Iraq in 2014 and intensified efforts to collaborate with regional allies and local partners in combating the group.

As I mentioned before, regional stability is also one of the main objectives of the United States. Since the conclusion of the Cold War, the United States has wielded considerable influence in the Middle East, a trend that has only intensified over time. During the Cold War era, the region, with its oil reserves and communist-leaning governments, served as a strategic battleground between the United States and the Soviet Union (Byman and Moller, 2016). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S. entered a new phase of engagement in the Middle East, marked by significant military interventions and diplomatic efforts.

In the 1990s, the United States expanded its military presence in the region to counter the regimes of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Iran's clerical rule. This period also saw sustained efforts by Washington to facilitate peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors, although these endeavors often fell short of achieving lasting resolutions (Byman and Moller, 2016).

The post-Cold War era witnessed the U.S. responding swiftly to regional conflicts. In August 1990, when Iraq invaded oil-rich Kuwait, the United States quickly assembled a coalition and exerted pressure on Iraq to withdraw its forces (Byman and Moller, 2016). Later, in December 1998, the U.S. launched a four-day bombing campaign aimed at diminishing Iraq's capacity to produce and utilize weapons of mass destruction, in line with UN Security Council Resolutions (Byman and Moller, 2016).

The September 11 attacks on U.S. soil marked a significant turning point, leading to the U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan and, subsequently, the controversial invasion of Iraq in 2003. The latter conflict ushered in a new phase of U.S. foreign policy in the region, characterized by direct military action against ISIL in Iraq and Syria, as well as diplomatic engagements with regional powers like Iran (Brands, 2016).

The transition from the Bush administration to the Obama administration brought hopes for a recalibration of U.S. foreign policy towards the Middle East. President Obama campaigned on principles of mutual peace and shared prosperity, promising a departure from fear-based politics and a reduction in U.S. involvement in global conflicts (Ackerman, 2008). His administration emphasized the need for a new approach to the Middle East and the Muslim world, as evidenced by his early visits to Turkey and Egypt, where he pledged a "New Beginning" in U.S. foreign policy (Holzman, 2009).

However, the Trump administration introduced further shifts in U.S. foreign policy towards the Middle East. In 2018, President Trump withdrew the United States from the JCPOA (Iran nuclear deal) and authorized airstrikes against Syrian regime positions in response to a suspected chemical weapons attack. These actions introduced a degree of unpredictability into U.S. foreign policy, as seen in the fluctuating responses to similar incidents over time (Quero & Dessì, 2019).

The primary objective of the United States as a regional superpower in the Western Hemisphere is to prevent the rise of any regional hegemon or hemispheric influence from other areas, as well. This diplomatic objective has been pursued through the offshore balancing grand plan (Mearsheimer, 2001), aiming to preserve international hegemony, maintain peace, support alliances, secure energy supplies, prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), combat terrorist groups, and promote democracy.

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has intensified its efforts to gain or sustain global influence, with a focus on bolstering regional dominance in the Middle East as part of a broader strategy to rule the globe. Given the region's perceived insecurity, maintaining stability and prosperity in the Middle East is considered one of the highest priorities for the United States (Shukri, 2017). The involvement of numerous players with varying preferences facilitates the buck-passing strategy, where no direct offensive action is taken against the aggressor. By encouraging regional states to counter aggressive states, the United States protects its military capability while weakening the military capabilities of adversarial countries (Mearsheimer, 2001).

According to Michael Beckley (2018), power is a combination of military, economic, and political factors. To avoid the drawbacks of buck-passing, the United States employs a dual-containment strategy, as seen in the Iran-Iraq War, to prolong conflicts and prevent the emergence of a victor. The geographic location of the U.S. plays a significant role in its reliance on the buck-passing strategy, as distance and natural barriers between rival great powers increase the likelihood of using this approach (Toft, 2005).

Since 2003, Saudi Arabia and Iran, the major powers of the Gulf region, have engaged in a hegemonic war over power and influence, exacerbated by events like the Arab Spring and the JCPOA. This rivalry intensified as Iran's Western partners rehabilitated its international image, leading to strategic concerns for Saudi Arabia and altering U.S. perceptions of Iran (FathollahNejad, 2017).

If the buck-passing strategy fails, the United States resorts to direct intervention through diplomatic warnings, forming alliances against the aggressor, or deploying its own economic and military forces (Prifti, 2017). However, a shift in America's Middle East policy has been advocated, as massive military involvement has not improved regional stability or U.S. security. Instead, it has often led to unintended consequences. A more hands-off approach could be more effective in managing U.S. strategic interests, signaling a need for reduced U.S. military presence in the Middle East (Ashford, 2018).

For the United States, the Middle East also serves as a crucial source of oil and a strategic arena for maintaining global leadership. Through economic ties with oil-producing nations like Saudi Arabia and strategic military bases across the region, such as Jubail and Manama, the US aims to ensure energy security while exerting political influence. Historical examples, like the Iraq war, underscore the US commitment to securing control over Middle Eastern oil reserves, bolstering its geopolitical leverage. Additionally, the US leverages its position as a global energy leader, utilizing initiatives such as the Greater Middle East Initiative and diplomatic visits to reinforce its dominance in the region.

As conflicts continue to simmer across the Middle East, the spotlight often shifts to the intricate web of alliances, rivalries, and power dynamics shaping the region's future. While much attention is understandably focused on the actions of regional actors and the United States, another formidable player looms large in the landscape: Russia. In recent years, Moscow has strategically leveraged its defense relationships in the Middle East to assert its influence and compete with the West, particularly the United States. Understanding Russia's multifaceted approach is crucial for deciphering the evolving geopolitical chessboard in the region.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's worldview is characterized by a belief in a perpetual struggle for power and influence with the United States. For Putin, the Middle East represents not just a theater of conflict but also a battleground where Russia can assert its geopolitical ambitions and challenge American dominance. Prior to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Middle East had emerged as a vital arena for Russian strategic interests, notably as the second most important arms market for Moscow.

Arms sales constitute a significant component of Russia's defense strategy in the Middle East. Moscow has actively courted regional powers by offering a diverse array of advanced weaponry, ranging from fighter jets and air defense systems to tanks and missiles. These arms sales are often accompanied by joint military exercises, which serve the dual purpose of showcasing Russian military capabilities and strengthening ties with client states. Notably, Russia's defense exports have surged in recent years, positioning Moscow as the world's second-largest arms exporter after the United States.

In addition to arms sales, Russia has sought to cement its presence in the Middle East through access to military bases. Securing basing agreements allows Moscow to project power across the region, extend its logistical reach, and enhance its ability to respond to crises swiftly. Key agreements, such as the lease of naval facilities in Syria's Tartus and the establishment of an airbase in Latakia, underscore Russia's commitment to bolstering its military footprint in the region. These bases serve as strategic hubs from which Russia can deploy forces, conduct reconnaissance, and provide support to allies, thereby bolstering its influence in regional affairs.

Furthermore, Russia has employed paramilitary forces, most notably the Wagner Group, as a tool to advance its interests in the Middle East. Originally conceived as a private military company, the Wagner Group has evolved into a quasi-official paramilitary force operating at the behest of the Russian state. Renamed the Afrika Korps in a recent rebranding effort, these mercenaries have been deployed to various conflict zones, including Syria, Libya, and beyond, where they have reportedly carried out a range of clandestine operations on behalf of Moscow. By leveraging paramilitary forces, Russia can pursue its objectives with a degree of deniability while maintaining a low-cost, low-risk approach to intervention. [Roberts, J. M., 2017]

Russia's ambitions to expand its military influence in the Mediterranean and Africa continue to unfold, with strategic moves aimed at bolstering Moscow's presence in key maritime and geopolitical theaters. While plans for naval bases in Libya and Sudan are still in flux, Moscow's concerted efforts underscore its determination to project power and assert dominance in regions of strategic importance. At the heart of Russia's expansionist agenda lies the role of private military companies (PMCs), particularly the notorious Wagner Group, which has emerged as a pivotal tool for advancing Kremlin's foreign policy objectives.

Tobruk, with its deep-water port, represents a coveted asset for Moscow, offering logistical advantages that complement Russia's existing facilities in Tartus. The potential establishment of a naval base in Tobruk would significantly enhance Russia's maritime capabilities, facilitating operations across the Mediterranean and beyond. Similarly, Moscow's pursuit of access to a naval

base in Sudan, along the Red Sea, reflects its broader strategic vision, aiming for permanent access to vital maritime routes such as the Suez Canal and strategic proximity to the Indian Ocean and Arabian Peninsula.

The Wagner Group, a shadowy PMC with close ties to the Kremlin, has played a central role in Russia's military endeavors, both in the Middle East and Africa. Despite recent setbacks, including the death of Putin ally Yevgeny Prigozhin and subsequent restructuring efforts, the Wagner Group remains instrumental in executing Moscow's foreign policy objectives. Following Prigozhin's demise, the Russian Defense Ministry has assumed control over many of Wagner's security, resource extraction, and diplomatic contracts, underscoring the group's continued significance in Russia's geopolitical calculus.

In Africa, the Wagner Group has undergone a rebranding effort, now operating under the moniker Afrika Korps. This renaming underscores the group's adaptability and the Kremlin's reliance on paramilitary forces to pursue its interests abroad. Whether operating as Wagner or Afrika Korps, the PMC serves as a flexible instrument for advancing Russia's geopolitical agenda, conducting covert operations, and establishing footholds in strategically significant regions. [Rosenthal, S. J., 2010]

The Kremlin's reliance on PMCs like Wagner highlights the evolving nature of modern warfare, where traditional state actors increasingly leverage non-state entities to achieve strategic objectives. By outsourcing military operations to PMCs, Russia can pursue its interests with plausible deniability, circumventing international scrutiny and minimizing political risks. However, the growing presence of Russian PMCs in conflict zones raises concerns about human rights abuses, destabilization, and exacerbation of local conflicts.

As Russia continues to expand its military influence in the Mediterranean and Africa, Western policymakers must closely monitor developments and adopt a proactive approach to counter Russian assertiveness. This requires strengthening alliances, enhancing maritime security, and promoting democratic governance and stability in vulnerable regions. By addressing the root causes of instability and engaging with regional partners, the West can mitigate the risks posed by Russia's militarization efforts and uphold the principles of international order and peace.

### **4.3. Comparison of Foreign Policy Methods Applied by the USA And Russia In the Region**

When comparing the foreign policies of the United States and Russia in the Middle East, several key similarities and differences emerge.



Beginning with similarities, both countries maintain nuanced relationships with Israel, a significant player in the region. The United States has long regarded Israel as a close ally, a legacy dating back to the Cold War era when the Soviet Union aligned itself with Arab states like Egypt. On the other hand, Russia's ties with Israel are bolstered by a substantial Russian-speaking population within the country, fostering cultural and historical connections. This observation is supported by the fact that "there is a large Russian-speaking population in Israel," highlighting the depth of this relationship. Additionally, both nations have intervened militarily in the region in recent years, reflecting their strategic interests and commitments. [Bacevich, A. J., 2016, p.54]

Furthermore, the continued presence of both powers underscores the region's importance to their respective geopolitical agendas. This point is reinforced by the recognition that "the continuing presence of both powers in the region implies that they hold this region to be of significant importance."

However, a notable difference lies in the scale and magnitude of their activities in the Middle East. The United States has notably scaled down its involvement over time, as evident from its withdrawal from certain roles as the "world policeman" and the reduction of military operations. Despite this, it has maintained some military presence, particularly in Syria and through drone strikes in Yemen. This trend is illustrated by the observation that "the United States has notably scaled down the magnitude and scale of its activities in the Middle East," indicating a reduction in its engagement over time. In contrast, Russia's foreign policy presence in the region has expanded, highlighted by its military intervention in Syria and the deepening of economic ties with Middle Eastern states.

Moreover, there are clear disparities in the rhetoric of their policies. US policy in the Middle East has faced criticism for its ideological approach, particularly its attempts to promote democracy and values such as human rights. This criticism is supported by references to scholars like John Mearsheimer, who argue that such efforts have often led to instability and the rise of extremist groups. Additionally, accusations of hypocrisy have arisen, with the US being criticized for employing morally dubious practices such as torture and targeted killings, tarnishing its image as a defender of human rights and international law. This perspective is underscored by the argument that "the legitimacy of US foreign policy has taken a nosedive," indicating a decline in its credibility due to perceived inconsistencies.

The Trump administration continued a policy, inherited from the Obama administration, of minimizing Middle Eastern military commitments. President Trump's October 2019 decision to withdraw most US forces from Syria strengthened the hands of Russia, Iran, and Turkey in Syria.

The Trump administration's Middle East policy diverged from that of the Obama administration in three respects. First, President Trump withdrew from the JCPOA and initiated a strategy of "maximum pressure" against Iran, aimed at reducing Iran's regional influence through economic sanctions. In January 2020, the United States struck Qasem Soleimani's entourage in Iraq, killing Soleimani. These steps have pushed Russia and Iran closer together, reinforcing Russia's narrative that, unlike the United States, it "talks to all parties" in the Middle East. Second, the Trump administration drew closer to the Arab countries, particularly the Gulf states. It did so in part by eschewing criticism of their internal behavior. The Trump administration encouraged a coalition between Israel and the Gulf states, downplaying human rights concerns, and signed high-publicity arms deals with the Gulf states. Third, Trump developed a close working relationship with Benjamin Netanyahu. The Trump administration related its confrontations with Iran and its relations with the Gulf states to a "deal of the century" peace process for Israel. This project was never started, but revisions in US policy enabled the normalization of relations among Israel, Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan, and the UAE.

With the exception of the Abraham Accords as a foreign policy concept, the new administration will diverge significantly from Trump's foreign policy. It will seek a return to the JCPOA and is sure to be more critical of Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Turkey, and Egypt and their respective policies in the region, as well as their human rights issues, putting greater pressure on Israel to avoid unilateral actions (especially settlement expansion) that could undermine a two-state solution and the resumption of negotiations in the future. President Biden might struggle to cooperate with Netanyahu, given skepticism about Israel in the progressive wing of the Democratic Party. Earlier tensions between Netanyahu and the Obama administration will not have been forgotten. At the same time, Biden may not need to worry about annexation, which might help him get off on the right foot with Israel. The Biden administration's focus on negotiating with Iran on the nuclear issue, coupled with greater criticism of Israel, Turkey, and the Arab countries, may create an opening for Russia to provide greater service as Iran's regional partner. [Grachev. A. 2016]

For the new administration in Washington, a push to improve the US position vis-à-vis China and a pledge to deepen cooperation with fellow democracies suggest a tough road ahead for US relations with China, Russia, and Turkey alike. In particular, Biden has indicated that he would impose costs on Russia for any interference in the US elections. Following the large-scale cyberattacks against US networks reported in 2020, Washington will sharpen its response to the Russian threat in this domain. At the same time, the new administration will do what it can to bolster NATO, of which Turkey is an increasingly problematic member. How this will play out in

the Middle East is unclear. On the campaign trail, Biden criticized “endless wars” and indicated that he would maintain only a limited troop presence in Iraq and Syria, one that was focused on counterterrorism.

The United States and Russia will have a rocky relationship in the short to medium term, though not one that is destined to be focused on the Middle East. The United States could try to impose further sanctions on Russia, enhance the US military commitment to Ukraine, and return US policy to democracy promotion in Eastern and Central Europe. Putin will do what he can not to yield to this pressure, and he may well look for ways to take the initiative and put pressure on the United States in Europe, Asia, or the Middle East. Neither country wants to see military or other kinds of confrontation between the United States and Russia in the Middle East; both will try to manage tension.

When examining Russian foreign policy in the Middle East, it becomes evident that it adopts a largely non-ideological stance, prioritizing flexibility in its interactions with various regional actors. Unlike the United States, which has been criticized for its less flexible and even partisan approach, Russia has demonstrated a willingness to engage with all parties involved in conflicts such as the Syrian Civil War, with the exception of ISIL. This approach allows Russia to maintain trust with a wider range of local partners, as highlighted by Sladden et al. (2017).

However, characterizing US foreign policy in the Middle East solely as inflexible would be oversimplifying, given the dynamic nature of events in the region. Since the Arab Spring, US policy has exhibited fluctuations, ranging from aggressive military interventions, such as the removal of Muammar Al-Ghaddafi in Libya, to more restrained actions, like the limited military campaign against ISIL. These variations in US policy have made it unpredictable at times, contrasting with Russia's perceived flexibility.

Analyzing these differences, it becomes apparent that the nature and character of US and Russian policies in the Middle East diverge significantly. Russian policy is characterized by its non-ideological and flexible approach, enabling cooperation with a broader range of regional actors. In contrast, US policy tends to be more doctrinally rigid, limiting the number of potential allies and partners. For instance, the US's unwillingness to compromise with the Assad government contrasts with Russia's willingness to engage with multiple parties in the Syrian conflict.

Moreover, differences emerge in the relations between each country and their regional partners. The US has faced challenges in maintaining positive relations with its regional allies, as evidenced by instances like the abandonment of Kurdish forces. This indicates a willingness to compromise smaller regional players to preserve relations with larger ones, with implications for

regional stability. In contrast, Russia has managed to maintain good relations with key regional actors like the Syrian government, Iran, and Turkey, without jeopardizing these ties. This observation underscores Russia's adeptness in managing its relationships in the Middle East.

The Middle East stands as a pivotal battleground for great powers due to its strategic geopolitical position and its significance in energy strategy. Both the United States and Russia have gradually formulated their comprehensive energy strategies and policies in the region, integral to their broader Eurasian energy strategies. Post-Cold War, the United States adopted an offensive policy, while Russia, buoyed by its economic resurgence, pursued a defensive strategy, primarily centered around its energy interests. [Bacevich, A. J., 2016]

For the United States, the Middle East holds a dual significance: as a vital source of oil and as a strategic arena for maintaining global leadership. Recognizing the symbiotic relationship between economic and military presence, the U.S. has fostered robust economic ties with oil-producing nations like Saudi Arabia while establishing strategic military bases across the region. This two-pronged approach aims not only to ensure energy security but also to exert political influence and control over the volatile region.

The U.S.'s energy strategy, exemplified by actions such as the Iraq war, underscores its determination to secure control over Middle Eastern oil reserves, bolstering its geopolitical leverage and economic dominance. By employing energy diplomacy as a tool, the U.S. seeks to shape the political landscape of the region, counter OPEC's influence, and disrupt the economic foundations of terrorism. Historically, the United States has maintained leadership positions across various energy fronts, including oil and natural gas production, LNG exports, and emissions reductions. Moreover, its prowess in energy industry manufacturing and technological innovation has further cemented its global standing in the energy sector.

In contrast, Russia has strategically maneuvered to reassert its influence in the Middle East, leveraging its abundant energy resources as a diplomatic asset. As Russia underwent economic transformation post-Cold War, its energy riches became the linchpin of its foreign policy, enabling it to forge closer ties with Middle Eastern nations and expand its sphere of influence.

Russia's energy strategy, articulated in documents like the Energy Strategy 2020, prioritizes the maximization of national interests through energy diplomacy. As it seeks to counterbalance U.S. dominance in the region, Russia aims to carve out a significant role in shaping Middle Eastern affairs by capitalizing on global energy trends and fostering strategic partnerships.

While the United States and Russia pursue divergent energy strategies in the Middle East, their actions converge on a shared objective: maintaining and enhancing their respective global positions of power. Whether through military presence and economic partnerships for the U.S. or energy diplomacy and strategic alliances for Russia, both powers are deeply invested in shaping the region's political and economic dynamics. [Tang, 2009]

The United States' approach to energy diplomacy in the Middle East is characterized by a comprehensive strategy that integrates political, economic, military, and diplomatic efforts. This systematic approach has enabled the U.S. to wield considerable influence, leveraging its economic power and military presence to advance its geopolitical interests.

On the other hand, Russia's energy diplomacy in the Middle East reflects a nuanced strategy aimed at safeguarding its economic interests and narrowing the gap with major oil-producing countries. Despite constraints such as its alignment with Iran, Russia seeks to assert itself in the region by fostering energy cooperation and strategic alliances.

Both the United States and Russia share a mutual goal of diminishing OPEC's influence on global oil prices and lessening their reliance on Middle Eastern oil. Consequently, they are motivated to challenge OPEC's dominance and diversify their energy imports, thereby reshaping the energy landscape of the Middle East and beyond. [Yin, 2008]

In this intricate geopolitical chessboard, energy diplomacy serves as a potent instrument for asserting influence, safeguarding interests, and reshaping alliances. As the United States and Russia continue their strategic maneuvering in the Middle East, the region remains a crucible of competition where the stakes are high, and the outcomes are consequential for global power dynamics.

The United States leverages its economic prowess, military capabilities, and diplomatic acumen in its pursuit of dominance in the Middle East. However, it faces challenges such as geographic distance and anti-American sentiment in the region. In contrast, Russia enjoys the advantage of geographic proximity, shared interests, and historical ties with Middle Eastern nations, despite its relatively weaker economy.

Despite their differing approaches, both countries encounter obstacles in implementing their energy strategies in the Middle East, exacerbated by the financial crisis and its adverse effects. Competition and cooperation between the United States and Russia in the region are shaped by traditional power dynamics, as well as emerging factors like energy diplomacy and economic maneuvers masquerading as political interests. The divergent strategic policies of the United States

and Russia underscore that the Middle East's interest dynamics are far from a simple zero-sum game but rather a complex interplay of competing agendas. Both sides prioritize maximizing national interests, navigating a landscape fraught with contradictions and nuances.

In conclusion, the Middle East remains a crucible of strategic competition and cooperation, where the interests of great powers intersect and clash. The evolving energy landscape and geopolitical dynamics ensure that the region continues to be a focal point of global power rivalry, with the United States and Russia at the forefront of this intricate chessboard.

## CONCLUSION

The Cold War era marked a significant period in the geopolitical landscape, defined by ideological confrontation and military competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. This period saw the resurgence of interest in geopolitics, particularly as a tool for realpolitik, with figures like Henry Kissinger shaping American foreign policy strategies. However, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 ushered in a new era, characterized by shifts in global dynamics and the reconfiguration of geopolitical interests. Russia emerged as a key player on the international stage, grappling with internal debates and external pressures as it sought to define its post-Cold War identity and foreign policy direction.

Within Russia, contrasting geopolitical perspectives have influenced its approach to foreign policy and engagement with the international community. From pragmatic geopolitics to civilizational identity and Eurasian integration, these perspectives have contributed to a multifaceted approach, balancing assertiveness in its immediate neighborhood with cooperation and competition on the global stage.

The period following the collapse of the Soviet Union witnessed significant shifts in Russian foreign policy towards the Middle East, reflecting both internal dynamics within Russia and external transformations occurring within the region itself. During Andrey Kozyrev's tenure as Foreign Minister, Russia pursued a pro-Western trajectory, largely overlooking the Middle East. However, this approach began to lose momentum amid internal opposition and the resurgence of the Middle East in Russian foreign policy deliberations under Yevgenii Primakov's leadership. Primakov's deep familiarity with the Middle East and his pragmatic approach prompted Russia to deepen its engagement with the region. He sought to position Russia as a mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and introduced a renewed sense of pragmatism into Russia's Middle East relations.

However, relations between post-Soviet Russia and the West remained challenging, characterized by instances of perceived Western encroachment and interference in Russia's affairs. Events such as NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia, the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, and the enlargement of the EU and NATO strained relations between Russia and the West, culminating in a notable anti-Western shift highlighted by Vladimir Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007.

The aftermath of the Cold War witnessed a period of reduced involvement in the Middle East during the Yeltsin era, followed by a concerted effort under Putin to reestablish Russian influence in the region. The surge of secessionist nationalism, the rivalry between Iran and Sunni Arab states,

and the impact of events like the Arab Spring have all influenced Russia's approach to the Middle East. Additionally, the emergence of the BRICS alliance, particularly the energy policies of China and India, has added another layer of complexity to the region's geopolitical landscape.

The evolution of American involvement in the Middle East from a peripheral role to a position of supremacy was a gradual process that unfolded against the backdrop of global geopolitical dynamics, particularly during and after World War II. Prior to this period, European colonial powers wielded dominance over the region, shaping its political landscape through imperial rule. However, the emergence of the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union transformed the Middle East into a major battleground for influence.

As the Cold War intensified, the United States supplanted European powers in the region, leveraging its economic, military, and diplomatic resources to establish hegemony. The bipolar division of global politics led to a strategic competition wherein many newly independent Middle Eastern regimes found themselves compelled to align with either superpower to secure support and patronage. Despite occasional regime defections, the dynamics of bipolarity largely kept regional states entrenched within the global alliance framework. Israel emerged as a pivotal focal point in the Cold War rivalry, with conflicts between Israel and its Arab neighbors bringing the United States and the Soviet Union to the brink of direct confrontation. The Camp David Accords in 1979 marked a significant milestone in American diplomacy in the region, solidifying Washington's hegemonic position by securing peace between Egypt and Israel. However, the Iranian revolution introduced new complexities, transforming a staunch American ally into a regional adversary.

The United States' involvement in the Middle East underwent significant transformations throughout the latter half of the 20th century and into the early 21st century. From initially operating from a distance and primarily collaborating with local counterparts, the U.S. gradually escalated its military presence and intervention in the region, particularly following pivotal events such as the Iran-Iraq War and the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the conclusion of the Cold War marked the beginning of unparalleled American dominance in the region, characterized by the orchestration of international coalitions and the establishment of military bases encircling the Gulf. This dominance was underscored by efforts to resolve regional conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, through diplomatic initiatives like the Madrid peace talks.

However, the 1990s also saw the unintended consequences of American hegemony, including humanitarian crises resulting from sanctions imposed on Iraq, disillusionment with the Oslo peace



process, and the emergence of radical elements challenging the regional status quo, exemplified by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

The response to these attacks led to a new phase in U.S. policy towards the Middle East, characterized by aggressive military intervention, most notably the invasion of Iraq. Yet, this intervention had disastrous consequences, including exacerbating sectarian tensions, strengthening Iran's regional influence, and fueling the rise of insurgency movements such as al-Qaeda.

The Middle East remains a complex and dynamic region where the interests and actions of global powers like the United States and Russia intersect and influence the geopolitical landscape. Both countries have distinct goals and strategies in the region, shaped by historical, strategic, and economic factors. The comparison of United States and Russian foreign policies in the Middle East reveals a complex landscape of similarities and differences. Both countries navigate nuanced relationships with key players like Israel, maintain military interventions, and recognize the region's strategic importance. However, they diverge significantly in the scale and flexibility of their activities, as well as the ideological underpinnings of their policies.

The United States, historically committed to promoting democracy and human rights, has faced criticism for its ideological approach and perceived inconsistencies. In contrast, Russia adopts a more flexible stance, prioritizing pragmatic cooperation with a wide range of regional actors. Both countries pursue distinct energy strategies in the region, with the US aiming for dominance through military presence and economic partnerships, while Russia leverages its energy resources for diplomatic influence.

The United States has traditionally pursued objectives such as maintaining stability, combating terrorism, promoting democratic governance, and safeguarding access to energy resources. Throughout history, the U.S. has engaged in military interventions, diplomatic initiatives, and alliances with regional powers to advance its interests. However, the approach has evolved over time, marked by fluctuations in military engagement and diplomatic priorities, as seen from the Bush to the Obama administrations.

Russia, on the other hand, seeks to restore and expand its influence in the Middle East, leveraging its defense relationships and arms sales to assert itself as a key player. President Putin's worldview frames the region as a battleground where Russia can challenge American dominance and pursue its geopolitical ambitions. Moscow's strategy includes arms sales, joint military exercises, and diplomatic maneuvering to cultivate alliances and strengthen its position in the region.

Despite their differing approaches, both countries share a common objective of shaping the political and economic dynamics of the Middle East to serve their national interests. Whether through military interventions, economic partnerships, or diplomatic initiatives, the United States and Russia remain deeply invested in the region's affairs.

As the Middle East continues to face challenges such as terrorism, regional conflicts, and shifting alliances, the roles of the United States and Russia are likely to evolve further. Understanding their strategies and objectives is essential for navigating the complex geopolitical chessboard of the region and anticipating future developments.

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