

**KEEP YOUR DISTANCE: THE SHIFTING OF AMERICA'S STRATEGIC
MINDSET IN THE MIDDLE EAST REGION AS ILLUSTRATED BY THE
SYRIAN WAR.**

By

Nicholas Jones

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Chapter 1. Presentation of Research Paper.

1.1 Introduction.

Syria has spiraled into an uncontrollable situation, which threatens to engulf the entire Arab world into a raging sectarian conflict. This threatens the national interests of America and its allies, the stability of the region, and will most certainly undermine any progress towards a peaceful transition in the Middle East. Yet America has shown a clear reluctance in wanting to pursue any form of intervention in Syria.

This unwillingness to take action when there is a clear moral and humanitarian disaster unfolding could be interpreted as a lack of leadership from the American President. However, it is vital to consider the justification for this inaction, in order to give perspective on how this play fits the design of a grander U.S. strategy as a whole. Nonetheless, many academic scholars, researchers, and policy analysts, have felt the urge to stress that the current American Administration is simply not getting the job done. When there are so many interests at hand it is nearly vital for the U.S. to become involved in the Syrian War in some extent. Why then does it choose to remain on the sidelines and pursue a policy of leading from behind, and how can it afford to ignore these key regional objectives and interests?

The answer remains highly complex, and the current American strategy towards the conflict in Syria must not only reflect upon their immediate interests, but also take into consideration the interests of their allies who inhabit the region, and above all it must be reflective of America's own strengths, capabilities, and realities. The decisions that the United States takes in Syria today must not be only beneficial in the short term but must also prove to be the correct action as time unfolds.

It is not only the United States which has the insufficient means to bring this conflict to a close. The most detrimental action which impedes the progression of a humanitarian intervention in Syria is the obvious and continuing abuse of the United Nations Security Council by the vetoing powers of Russia and China. It is clear that there

are many other nations which hold a particular interest in this region, and more specifically within this sovereign state.

Any approach the U.S. takes towards Syria must also take into account the consequences that will unfold, following an increased American role in the conflict. Thus Syria remains a conundrum for America, in which there remain many interests but far too few options available.

1.2 Research Question.

In order to properly account for how U.S. strategy is being utilized to achieve specific goals, a suitable research question must be presented. This question must also be capable of relaying how these key strategic interests are pursued in Syria, reflect upon a regional and global strategic focus. Therefore the following research question will be presented. How does America's reliance upon diplomatic measures to resolve the unsettling conflict in Syria better serve their immediate regional interests, as well as solidify their overall security strategy?

It is essential that both the American strategy in the Middle East as well as the global U.S. security strategy be linked, yet it is just as equally important to be able to distinguish between the two. America's strategic focus in the Middle East region is highly centric. It only applies to that arena, and it is highly dependent upon America's foreign policy towards specific regional players. The global security strategy on the other hand, is a much more overarching approach to the maintenance of the current strategic power balance.

In the case of the Syrian War, the humanitarian cost coupled with growing concerns over Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles, and the emergence of a violent sectarian war, has transformed the conflict into something much more. This relatively small conflict has been given a global agenda, as there are major fears that a post Assad Syria could further destabilize the Middle East. The sectarian war can also have regional implications as the violence spreads, and these chemical weapons will pose a grave

security risk if they fall into the hands of terrorists. These are all fears which some states wish to quell and others wish to capitalize on. Therefore, America's strategic focus in the Middle East must be in line with their global security strategy, as this conflict clearly holds an international context, and expands far beyond the borders of Syria.

1.3 Hypothesis.

The main hypothesis of this study is that by maintaining a relative absence within the Syrian War, the U.S. can achieve its strategic interests by making effective use of diplomatic strategies. The anti-thesis would present itself in the form of some of the harsh criticism, which has emerged in the recent years over Washington's response to the crisis as it unfolded. To state it as such, the null hypothesis would be that America's current policy and strategy in the Syrian War has only served to undermine U.S. regional security interests, and has allowed for an escalation in violence which further threatens global stability. A third or alternative hypothesis will also be given consideration. This will state that the current U.S. strategy runs counterintuitive against what the real U.S. interests in Syria are.

The hypothesis if proven valid, will indicate that the case of Syria does suggest that the U.S. has altered its strategy, in hopes to further its strategic goals through means other than exercising its military force. The null hypothesis on the other hand, will rely upon evidence indicating that the current measures taken do not help to further America's strategic and security objectives. Furthermore, the null hypothesis will have to explain that the reasoning as to why no military action has been taken in this conflict is because America does not have vital interests which sanction the use of military force.

For the third hypothesis to hold validity there will have to be a substantial amount of evidence which indicates that Washington's motives in Syria are conflicting with the essential security interests at stake.

1.4 The Case Study, Why Syria?

Two immediate questions first come to mind when assessing the value of a case study conducted on the Syrian War. The first would be what makes Syria so different, and the second, why does Syria matter? It would be prudent to assume that the answers to these questions could be provided in a couple short sentences, or with some rudimentary research. Nonetheless, with the help of this research thesis, it is my intention to present and contribute to the existing knowledge which attempts to unravel the conundrum called Syria. The underlying aim of this project is to root out the causes and subsequent chain of events, which have hindered the advancement of U.S. actions and interests in this conflict. It is also vital for this study to explain how a diplomatic effort remains to be an essential process for the U.S., if it is to gain its most desired outcome. This research project will also uncover some of the conditions which have been detrimental to the international community's efforts in establishing a humanitarian relief effort, or intervention. Yet as I will stress now, the indented purposes of this research and of its findings, has been to explain and examine the position and the actions of the United States in this conflict.

Now then it is time to provide an explanation as to why the Syrian case is unique and why it is significant. For the first question, "What makes Syria so different?", the intention of the mind is to compare Syria with other obvious cases such as Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and then state, if an intervention was possible in these countries, then why is a similar action not feasible in Syria? The short answer is that Syria in itself holds a variety of historic and religious affiliations to many different countries, which makes it almost impervious to these types of interventions. This is best described when highlighting just some of the complexities which prevent a "Libyan-style" type of intervention from occurring in Syria.

One can observe that prior to the onset of an intervention in Libya, Gadhafi remained fairly isolated and was weak militarily. Assad's Syria on the other hand has presented itself as being a stark contrast to this. The Syrian military remains well equipped, especially in its air defense capabilities, and there are several regional allies

that Bashar Al-Assad can depend upon such as Iran and Hezbollah.¹ What helped to hasten Gadhafi's exit, was the fact that the Western forces could accomplish many of their objectives without needing to worry about a risk of involvement. To accomplish similar objectives in Syria, it would take a lot of destruction, a serious commitment of time and resources, calculated measures to weaken Assad's military capabilities, and possibly even an invasion force.²

There is also the problem that many different religious groups within Syria are in a contention for control. The Shia Alawi who is currently the minority group in power feel threatened by the Sunni majority. As Harvard Professor Stephen Walt describes, "Syria is a genuine ethical dilemma, if you stay out thousands of innocents will die. Yet if you choose to intervene you may have to slaughter the thousands who supported the regime. There is no automatic formula to come to the right choice here."³

Intervening in Syria thus increases the complexity of the problem at hand. When a powerful nation drives towards its interests in highly destabilized region, it will likely increase the tensions between all the different groups which have interests in Syria, and above all else raises the stakes. This makes an intervention costly, lengthy, and increases the risks for failure.

Not surprisingly the explanation of the first question has tied itself into the second question, as there are many more mechanisms behind the international community's failures to implement an intervention in Syria. To answer the question "Why does Syria matter?", and to further expand upon the points made answering the previous question, it is necessary to make note of why Syria has sparked so much interest from both regional and foreign actors.

Beginning with the interests of the local actors, Syria is geographically centered in a regional rivalry for hegemonic power between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The sectarian war

¹ "Syria: Why international action remains unlikely even as death toll rises," The Christian Science Monitor, February 12, 2012 , 2

² *ibid.*, 1-2

³ *ibid.*, 2.

in Syria threatens the stability of both Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. Israel is pursuing its interests in this conflict so that it can thwart Hezbollah's operations.⁴ Turkey and Qatar very much have their own agenda when it comes to Syria, as they once partnered with the regime, but now find themselves preparing for a post-Assad Syria.⁵

Secondly there are the interests of Iran, to whom the Syrian Regime is a long standing ally. Their thirty year old strategic alliance has been mutually beneficial in preventing the influence of the United States, Israel, and other Arab states from dominating the Middle East. Iran stands to lose much if the Assad regime were to fall; most notable is the strategic foothold Syria serves for Tehran in the Levant.⁶

For the Western powers, Syria was never regarded as being a major strategic problem, as it could be managed by diplomacy. Bashar Al-Assad was seen as a willing reformer who would engage cooperatively with the West. Almost from the onset, when the collapse of the Soviet Union forced Syria to engage in more serious relations with the European Union, the strategy has always been to entangle Syria into a web of norms and agreements which formatted its behaviour.⁷ Yet as the crisis unfolded, it became ever more apparent that Assad was not a reformer, and the U.S. signalled to Assad that he must step down to further the progress of Syria.⁸ However from a Western standpoint, the timing of this crisis in Syria could not have been any worse.

The Libyan intervention demonstrated that N.A.T.O. has a clear dependence upon American logistics and military capabilities in order to properly function. The European partners suffer from military operational deficiencies, and no military commanders in either Europe or N.A.T.O. felt committed to proceed in what was perceived as being a

⁴ Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, eds., *The Syrian Dilemma*. (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press), 2013: 6.

⁵ Emile Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant*. (New York: International Institute for Strategic Studies), 2013: 107-112.

⁶ *ibid.*, 123-125.

⁷ *ibid.*, 151-153.

⁸ *ibid.*, 156.

much longer campaign.⁹ Even the Obama administration seemed inclined to ignore the events unfolding in Syria, and felt the need to focus on other priorities. The optimism of the Arab Spring had worn off as it had produced lengthy and costly political transitions in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, and had also sparked a wave of Islam following in its wake, which challenges American interests.¹⁰

Western interests re-emerged in Syria, when it became evident that Assad had in his possession a large stockpile of chemical weapons. The threat that these weapons posed was so serious to American interests that in August 2012, President Obama stated the following, “We have made it very clear to the Assad regime, but also to other players on the ground, that a red line for us is when we start seeing a whole bunch of these chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus.”¹¹

The fact that Obama has forcefully taken this hard stand in light of all the complications that enforcing such a statement entails, speaks volumes about how large the U.S. interests in Syria are and how they will not be ignored. To put this into further context, the U.S. is still reeling from the after effects of its incredible blunder in the Iraq War of 2003, and the entire nation is divided upon what parameters are necessary to execute a humanitarian intervention and responsibility to protect. Some argue that a full scale intervention is necessary while others lie in favour of arming the rebels. Many wish to see the Assad Regime get toppled, but fear the possibility of Islamists groups taking power in Syria.¹² Thus there remains a huge incentive for the United States to take action in Syria but far too few good options exist in how to procure these fundamental interests.

The final foreign actors whom are making their presence felt are those of Russia and China, and both of these nations have been vigorously involved in preventing the U.N. Security Council from generating a mandate for intervention in Syria. These two

⁹ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹² Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, eds., *The Syrian Dilemma*. (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press), 2013: 9-12.

key players have made it clear that they will not stand to tolerate an international system in which only some states are allowed to dictate the nature of the world order.¹³ Russia holds a lot more at stake in this conflict than does China. Syria and Russia have had historical relations dating back as far as the 1950s. Not only is Syria a strategic ally for Russia, but it also remains to be one of the very few footholds Moscow has in the Middle East. After losing another ally in Libya to a Western intervention, Russia has realized that if it wants to maintain its geographic influence, and deny the ability of the Western powers to intervene in the affairs of sovereign states, it must take a firm stand in Syria now.¹⁴

All of the concerns listed represent only but a small sample of the interests that regional and foreign states hold in Syria. This brief description has demonstrated that to many international players, the Syrian War is of strategic importance. The most crucial point to take into account is the fact that by drawing a red line in Syria, the U.S. has willingly or otherwise forced itself into a position of commitment to the conflict. Syria matters because it is situated in a hotspot of continual geographic contention. Many different actors interpret Syria as being an opportunity to heighten their regional influence and to further their strategic goals. Consequently, the same reasons which make the Syria conflict important are the same reasons as to why it remains so different. The competing interests between both large and small states, coupled with the internal dynamics of the civil war, make an intervention either by a large state actor, or by the international community nearly impossible.

Chapter 2. Exploring Theoretical Concepts and Strategies.

2.1 America's Changing Strategic Mindset.

There is no doubt that the collapse of the Soviet Union allowed the United States to emerge as the dominating hegemon in the international system. This unequivocal

¹³ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹⁴ Emile Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant*. (New York: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2013): 172.

position of power had left strategists and policymakers with the struggle to take advantage of this newly acquired status. To retain this position, the United States' strategic focus was on the maintenance of its power foundation, and to prevent competitor nations from taking hold of the international system.¹⁵

Yet as history can explain, states who hold such influence over the international system struggle to maintain this position. This is because historically speaking; states that have held a similar position to that of the U.S. have learned that having more power makes a state less secure.¹⁶ For a state to hold power in the international system is a good thing, but there is always the risk of a state becoming too powerful, which will generate some unintended consequences. All states like to remain competitive with one another, but when one emerges as the clear dominating force, the other states will each fear for their safety.¹⁷ As the infamous Henry Kissinger has stated, "Hegemonic empires almost automatically elicit universal resistance, which is why all such claimants sooner or later exhaust themselves."¹⁸

Thus the more the U.S. struggles to maintain its power structure and influence, the more other states will become fearful of its global reach and intentions. Christopher Layne argues that the Kosovo Intervention was the pivotal moment for when the international community became concerned about the implications of U.S. hegemonic power. The rise of an anti-American alliance emerged between rising states Russia, China and India. These three states were concerned that America's efforts in Kosovo, would serve as the model for Washington to further violate and ignore important international norms.¹⁹ These concerns gained further credit during the Persian Gulf War, where America directly oversaw the security management of the Middle East through a "dual containment" strategy, aimed at isolating the two regional powers of Iran and Iraq. The

¹⁵ Christopher Layne, "Offshore Balancing Revisited." *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No.2, (Spring 2002): 237.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 240.

orchestration of this type of security strategy specific to one region highlighted America's need to manage its strategic interests directly through its hegemonic claims.²⁰

The goal therefore of U.S. security strategy, should be to allow itself to continue to defend its interest unilaterally if necessary. Yet this cannot come at the expense of further exposing itself to unwanted counterhegemonic balancing initiatives from other states.²¹ Clearly the primary goal of the U.S. is to manage its presumed security threats, in the ways Washington best sees fit. However, it is becoming more apparent that there needs to be a strategy implemented which minimizes the blowback and negativity that plagues such dominant state. Even when America feels threatened and is forced to take action in an intervention.

2.2 Lessons From the Iraq War.

It has become painfully obvious that the Iraq invasion of 2003 is an unmitigated disaster for the United States. It was not the mistakes made during the war which ultimately cost the U.S. a victory, but rather the decision to go to war in the first place was mistakenly based on wrongful assumptions and unrealistic objectives.²² Yet some within Washington's inner circle approve the action taken as being the moral and responsible thing to do. President Bush stated that Iraq was not a mistake, and that the objective was to bring about the removal of a brutal dictator and to replace it with a free and democratic Iraq.²³ Seemingly though, invading Iraq with faulty aims in mind has caused the situation in the Middle East to become much more unstable.

In fact, Iraq has never fit the criteria necessary for being a successful transition state. There is no modern market based economy, there exists an abundance of hostile ethnic and religious groups, a vibrant civil society, a political culture that is hostile towards democratic principles, and furthermore, the Iraqi population never welcomed the

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 240.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 244.

²² Christopher Layne, "Who Lost Iraq and Why It Matters: The Case for Offshore Balancing." *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 3, (Fall 2007): 38.

²³ *Ibid.*, 39.

American occupation force.²⁴ The prospects for developing a democracy in a setting which it never existed are challenging enough as it is, and Iraq should be considered even more of an unstable setting for this transition, given the fact that the country has an underdeveloped state structure which allows for the emergence of ethnic and sectarian tensions.²⁵

The Bush Administration had been forewarned by the intelligence community about all these considerations and of the high probability of failure which would produce a messy post war Iraq.²⁶ Yet despite all of these warnings, the invasion of Iraq proceeded as did the subsequent failure of the operation. The operation was doomed to be a disaster prior to the onset since the country never seemed stable enough to accept such a transition, and in no way matched any criteria which indicated otherwise. Layne argues that the lesson learned to learn from Iraq is not next time to do it right, but rather next time do not do it at all.²⁷

The Iraq War experience has had an adverse impact on America's willingness to intervene in future democracy transitions, even in situations where vital interests are at stake. The Bush Administration's misguided foreign expeditions have made any national security objectives, which can be considered ideological or moralistic in nature, subject to intense scrutiny, all for fear that the United States may enter in yet another quagmire.²⁸

Nonetheless, despite a military withdraw from the region, the United States does hold a limited position of influence within the Iraqi state. The slow but steady increase in Iraqi oil production, has allowed the U.S. to stabilize the regional oil markets. This provides the U.S. with an opportunity to further exert pressure on Iran's oil economy,

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 39

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁸ Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, eds., *The Syrian Dilemma*. (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press), 2013:22-24.

without fear of damaging the flow of oil from the Gulf.²⁹ Yet in order to keep this process working, the U.S. must balance its interests with that of Iraq, as the democratic process in Iraq is being threatened by the sectarian conflict in Syria. In order to ensure Iraq's longevity, it must have the ability to maintain a position of neutrality, so as to minimize any potential hostilities with Syria and Iran.³⁰

The question now becomes what type of strategy would allow for America to best pursue its interests in Iraq, Syria, Iran, and in the region as a whole, while at the same time mitigating the risks posed to its own security?

2.3 The Theory of Offshore Balancing

Offshore balancing strategy, as Christopher Layne describes, is a realist strategy which aims to capitalize on the strategic advantages that great powers possess. It is a realist strategy in the sense that it defines what the principle interests of great power states are, rather than what is considered to be desirable. It highly emphasizes the costs and benefits of decision making, along with the necessity to exercise restraint when needed.³¹ This strategy is beneficial to great powers in a variety of ways.

First, it calls for the great power to refrain from upsetting the ongoing regional power balances, which generate stability and prevent rising powers from emerging. For the offshore balancing approach to function properly, it is imperative for the great power not to be prematurely engaged in confrontations. The great power can simply choose to remain on the sidelines during a contention between regional adversaries. When involvement becomes necessary, staying out of the conflict has allowed for the great power to decide upon the best opportunity for striking.³² The great power would have already observed the conflict prior to engagement, so it can accurately account for which

²⁹ Denis B. Ross and James F. Jeffery, "Obama II and the Middle East: Strategic Objectives for U.S. Policy." *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* Washington D.C., Strategic Report 12, (March 2013): 19.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

³¹ Christopher Layne, "America's Middle East Grand Strategy after Iraq: the Moment for Offshore Balancing Has Arrived." *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, (January 2009): 8.

³² *Ibid.*, 10,

side it intends to support. Furthermore, the great power can maximize whatever benefits it receives from an alliance or relations with friendly states, whom share similar interests in the contested region or are within a geographic proximity to the conflict.³³

Stephen Walt and C. Raja Mohan both touch upon this unique advantage that offshore balancing provides. Mohan explains that providing regional adversaries with the time and opportunity to engage with one another over a contestation, allows the great power to tip the balances when it deems it necessary to do so. If the great power remains in the center of the conflict, it will have limited opportunities to affect the outcome. This is because all the other players will be resisting the great power and balancing against it.³⁴ Stephen Walt explains how such a strategy furthers America's national interests, as it would allow for the U.S. to take advantage of its geopolitical positioning as the hegemon. Walt argues that this strategy would be a cost effective means for America to manage future conflict setting and it would only have to intervene into areas where a balance was lost.³⁵

To build upon the argument of Mohan, Layne expresses that by refraining from the desire to deploy forces into contested territory, an offshore balancer can reap the rewards off the international system. Rival states will no longer be focused on the great power's intrusion into the conflict setting, as they will be preoccupied with competing against one another. This system serves to benefit the greater powers, because the highly fractured relationships between the lesser powers do not provide them with the ability to come together and match the power of a great state. Thus, the great state holds a higher degree of power over the smaller states which are in a constant condition of quarrel with one another.³⁶

³³ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁴ Stephen Walt, "Offshore Balancing: An Idea Whose Time Has Come." *Foreign Policy Magazine*, November 2011, accessed May 13, 2014.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Christopher Layne, "America's Middle East Grand Strategy after Iraq: the Moment for Offshore Balancing Has Arrived." *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, (January 2009): 11.

What remains troubling for the U.S. is that the longer it remains on top of the scale of geopolitical primacy; it will continue to generate unwanted attention from other states that fear for their own safety when such a large and powerful actor is present. At the same time, rising powers such as China are becoming capable of challenging America's hold on global power and it is becoming apparent that the days of U.S. supremacy are numbered.³⁷ Furthermore, smaller states are using strategies such as soft balancing in order to mitigate the current control the U.S. holds on the international system. The attempts conducted by Germany, France, Russia and China to deny the United States U.N. Security Council approval for invading Iraq is one perfect example of how states are utilizing other methods other than hard power to limit the actions that the U.S. can take.³⁸ States which cannot engage in soft power methods to deny the U.S. opportunities to exploit the international system, must rely upon asymmetrical strategies such as state sponsored terrorism, or nuclear arms in order to deter the United States from taking action.³⁹

Currently as it stands the offshore balancing approach would allow the U.S to further enhance its means of settling Iran's nuclear program. Rather than being forced to confront Iran militarily on this issue, by employing this strategy it would allow the U.S. to continue pursuing a diplomatic solution or a grand bargain.⁴⁰ If only a military option is considered, much in the same nature that the Iraq invasion was conducted, it too would be doomed to failure for very much the same reasons. The offshore balancing strategy seems to incorporate the lessons learned from the Iraq experience and seeks to capitalize on the gains made by engaging in the region from a distance. Offshore balancing provides an alternative avenue for diplomacy to function, and it provides the U.S. with options which do not require the use of force.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁰ Christopher Layne, "Who Lost Iraq and Why It Matters: The Case for Offshore Balancing." *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 3, (Fall 2007): 43.

The world is becoming a multipolar system once again and if the U.S. intends to survive, it must be willing to work within a system which has shared control. Even a state as powerful as the United States must be willing to accept that inevitably great powers will rise. Layne argues that the only way forward is for the U.S. to adopt a non-threatening posture towards other regions, and must refrain from pursuing imperialistic or hegemonic goals.⁴¹ This is the type of strategic mindset offshore balancing employs in order to mitigate the negativity directed at a hegemonic state and provide it with the necessary means to ensure its survival in a multipolar world. Despite the decree for the United States to usher in a new era of global strategic management, it would not be the first instance where America has employed the use of offshore balancing as a means to define its greater strategic mindset.

John Mearsheimer in his work titled “The Tragedy of Great Power Politics” uncovers a series of historical accounts in which the United States utilized an offshore balancing strategy, in order to preserve its global power in a multipolar world. The most noticeable accounts of this are the U.S. policies in Europe during the First and Second World Wars. Mearsheimer explains that according to the theory of offensive realism, it would be in America’s best interest to dominate all corners of the globe, upon achieving the level of primacy in 1850-1900. During this time it was essential for global powers to remain protected and a state could never have enough security, becoming larger and more powerful was the only means to absolutely ensure state survival.⁴²

Yet as Mearsheimer unveils, the American mindset was actually quite the opposite. The U.S. instead focused on maintaining its strategic placement within the Western hemisphere and relied upon the European powers to check and balance their own continent, which would prevent the emergence of a regional hegemon. With the outbreak of the First World War, the U.S. relied on the Triple Entente Alliance to restrict German expansion. When this strategy ultimately failed and it became apparent that

⁴¹ Christopher Layne, “America’s Middle East Grand Strategy after Iraq: the Moment for Offshore Balancing Has Arrived.” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, (January 2009): 8-11.

⁴² John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001): 252.

Germany was powerful enough to dominate Europe, only then did America decide to send its military. This was done for the purposes of denying Germany a victory, so as to remove its great power status.⁴³ When the war ended, American forces did not stay in Europe and hold claim to the lands, but America withdrew rather quickly from the European theatre, and sunk into a period of isolationism. Even when it became apparent that World War Two was inevitable, America refrained from sending forces to Europe once again, and instead relied upon the region's makeup to create a system of power balance.⁴⁴

Mearsheimer's work has shown how the exercise of constraint over not achieving domination, allows the U.S. to maintain its power status during times of intense conflict. Relying upon traditional balance of power methods, permits great states to develop a non-threatening posture, which is essential to their prolonged survival. When the time comes necessary for the great state to intervene in order to thwart the rise of another power, they can rely upon other regional actors to weaken the rising adversary, while they bide their time and wait for the critical moment to deliver the striking blow.

The main aims of the offshore balancing strategy are all driven towards the maximization of state power, while reducing the costs involved. Another strategy which compliments and often serves the purposes of offshore balancing is that of wedge strategies.

2.4 The Use of Wedge Strategies in Relation to America's Grand Strategy.

Seeing as how wedge strategies have a noticeable role in shaping how large and powerful states seek to maximize their strength. It is necessary to further examine the role wedge strategies have within the Syrian War and also how they better serve the purposes of America's grand strategy. Timothy Crawford a wedge strategy theorist defines it as being, a state's attempt to break up, prevent, or weaken a threatening or blocking alliance at an acceptable cost. The dividing state can gain a great advantage when using this

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 252-253.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 254.

strategy, as it reduces the number of opponents it faces, and it can also generate huge power shifts by turning rivals into neutral parties or even allies.⁴⁵

There exist essentially two different methods of how states use wedge strategies, the first is through reinforcing wedge strategies, which encourages a target to do what they would normally do. The second is countervailing wedge strategies, which asks an opponent to do something that otherwise would not be done. Countervailing attempts are not as successful, but they are the most capable in terms of altering the current power structure.⁴⁶ When it comes to dividing adversaries, states rely upon selective accommodation and confrontation strategies. Crawford argues that when a wedge strategy is utilized for the purposes of countervailing opponents, states will likely pursue selective accommodation over confrontation, because it has a higher degree of success.⁴⁷

There exists much controversy over when it is appropriate for states to select accommodation over confrontation. Yasuhiro Izumikawa, another scholar of wedge strategies, inducts that when states cannot exert influence over their adversaries, they will have nothing to gain by using selective accommodation methods of wedging.⁴⁸

Selective accommodation strategies require a divider to approach an opponent with a mix of sticks and carrots, or rewards and penalties, in order to create divergent pressures on members of an opposing alliance. It specifically aims to lure one intended target away from the group of other rivals, whom are dealt with in a much different manner.⁴⁹ To be successful, countervailing strategies which utilize a selective accommodation approach must satisfy three criteria; these being the incentive provided by the divider towards the intended target must be considered by the opponent to be an area of interest, the divider must only have influence and not exclusive control over the

⁴⁵ Timothy W. Crawford, "Preventing Enemy Coalitions: How Wedge Strategies Shape Power Politics." *International Security Studies*, Vol. 35, No.4, (Spring 2011): 156.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 159-160.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁴⁸ Yasuhiro Izumikawa, "To Coerce or Reward? Theorizing Wedge Strategies in Alliance Politics." *Taylor and Francis Group, Security Studies*, Vol. 22, (2013): 501.

⁴⁹ Timothy W. Crawford, "Preventing Enemy Coalitions: How Wedge Strategies Shape Power Politics." *International Security Studies*, Vol. 35, No.4, (Spring 2011): 160-161.

benefits which the target is to receive, and lastly the other rivals must not be capable of presenting a viable alternative for the intended target, or be capable of outbidding the divider.⁵⁰

If successful, the countervailing strategies will effectively break the opposing alliance, as the intended target will be encouraged to remain neutral or separate from the hostile alliance. Furthermore, the reward system can aggravate old or existing tensions between members of the opposing alliance, and with the use of the selective accommodation strategy, the threat posed by the divider remains well hidden.⁵¹

According to Crawford, when a confrontation strategy is utilized it is intended for one specific purpose, and this is to expose any weakness in the opposing alliance. By demonstrating power and intimidation, the dividing state hopes to generate an internal panic within the hostile alliance. This makes each member fear for their own interests and limits their abilities to cooperate, which ultimately results in alliance breakdown.⁵² This strategy will be successful so long as one member remains weak, and is capable of breaking from the alliance. However, more often than not, confrontation strategies will pit the divider squarely against the alliance and allow for no room to manoeuvre with concessions. The direct threat creates further justification for the opposing forces to unify, which in turn strengthens the alliance. This results in a blowback situation for the divider where they now face a much stronger opposition force, which is highly fused in its cause. The main incentive for dividing states is to avoid confrontation strategies, unless it can accurately determine that the strength of the opposing alliance is weak, and that their combined strength would not pose a significant threat.⁵³

When assessing how wedge strategies impact international relations, Crawford indicates that wedge strategies can be utilized for either defensive or offensive purposes. These two intentions provide both powerful and small states, with a means to capitalize

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 161.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 161-162.

from a power balancing system. Defensive wedge strategies serve as the preferred means to break up aggressors, and to isolate and weaken threatening parties.⁵⁴ In particular, defensive strategies allow small states to employ soft balancing measures, which helps explain why for many states, defensive wedging remains one of the preferred methods of strategic balancing. Since a nation like the U.S. holds a vast network of alliances across the globe, and has an overdeveloped armed forces, smaller states that are involved in an altercation with the U.S., must seek out other means to maintain the balance of power. These states focus on isolating the U.S. or some of its allies, in order to break the strength of American power in the international system. Any adversary to the U.S. is well aware that it cannot rival America's military power, nor can it compete with vast alliance network. Thus utilizing defensive wedge strategies remains the most effective means to balance against the U.S.⁵⁵

Conversely, states which are targeted by defensive wedging can develop offensive wedge strategies which aim to break apart counterbalancing alliances. The costs of balancing against a great power state produce a system known as buck passing, where each state inside the alliance attempts to offset the costs of matching the collective threat, by passing the responsibility onto another state.⁵⁶ Offensive wedge strategies aim to capitalize on this inherent weakness of defensive alliances.

Crawford argues that the primary means available for offensive minded wedge strategists is to utilize selective accommodation. This will divide the defensive alliance in either two ways. The first is through the nature of the alliance itself. It is vulnerable to fragmentation based on the domestic factors of each state involved, and the conditions of the alliance and how it operates. For instance, if there is a condition which calls for collective action against the intended target, it is possible that not all actors would agree on the necessity for collective action.⁵⁷ The second is by means of bribes and incitements,

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

coupled with a threat that the opposing power has already placed on the counterbalancing alliance, which causes its collapse. Crawford highlights the example given by Richard Rosecrance and Chih-Cheng Lo, in which these authors argue that the main reason why Napoleon could not be counterbalanced. Through use of an elaborate system of bribes and bullying, and by emphasising the sheer threat that France posed to every nation, Napoleon successfully thwarted every attempt from Europe to collectively act against him.⁵⁸ For this reason, offensive wedge strategies aim to maintain the status quo because it is likely that the counterbalancing alliance will be forced to break apart, due to its inherent structural flaws. Therefore as Crawford asserts, it is in the best interests of the powerful state to reinforce the current state of affairs and not to engage in countervailing measures, as it will likely produce the same outcome but would risk further confrontation.⁵⁹

This necessity for a great power to maintain an unthreatening posture and to not press with a show of force when confronted by a hostile of counterbalancing alliance, is reflected in the offshore balancing approach. However when a great power is challenged by an opposition, in which it has little means to enact upon an accommodation strategy, what alternative measures can allow for a great power to place further duress upon a target state or alliance? To answer this question, it is now appropriate to consider the argument laid forth by Yasuhiro Izumikawa.

Izumikawa argues that coercive wedge strategies are a viable form of statecraft, despite the arguments laid forth by Crawford indicating that reward strategies are more successful. Izumikawa stresses that when a state faces a credible security threat coming in the form of another alliance, and yet it has little influence or means to divide a target, it must rely on coercive wedging in order to thwart the unfriendly alliance. Furthermore, he

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 182.

stresses that Crawford has overlooked some of complexities that arise, which form a state's decision to utilize either an accommodation or a confrontation approach.⁶⁰

As Crawford has explained, accommodation type strategies are often more beneficial than confrontation ones, as they do not highly risk generating a counter wedge strategy known as balancing blowback. Although Izumikawa agrees with Crawford on this point, he argues that coercive actions cannot be simply ruled out of the equation because they incorporate a certain amount of risk. Only a coercive or confrontational type of wedge strategy will be able to highlight crucial insecurities, which plague the alliance a divider state is targeting.⁶¹ By striking at these key insecurities, the divider can essentially force a target state to fear the risk of entrapment within the alliance, which could yield a beneficial outcome as it makes the target state feel more insecure.

Furthermore, if the divider state remains firm on a target state which is not currently part of the hostile alliance, the divider can dissuade the target state from joining the alliance in the future by pressuring it.⁶² It should also be noted that these hard line strategies will produce ripple effects as third party observers may be motivated to remain neutral and not join the alliance after having observed how much pressure has been exerted by the divider state over the target state when it attempted to join the alliance.⁶³

Even if a coercive strategy does produce balancing blowback, the strategy can still limit the target's relationship with the alliance over the long run. If the divider does not have much influence on the target state, it can utilize the pressure generated through the coercive strategy as a means to offer a concession to the target state. This is done by exchanging a reduction in coercive pressure for an increase in cooperation or a desired behaviour.⁶⁴ Moreover, having witnessed how important the issue is to the divider, and how much turmoil had been generated by the divider pursuing a coercive strategy, the

⁶⁰ Yasuhiro Izumikawa, "To Coerce or Reward? Theorizing Wedge Strategies in Alliance Politics." *Taylor and Francis Group, Security Studies*, Vol. 22, (2013): 501-502.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 503.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 503.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 503.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 503.

target may refrain from engaging in such action in the future.⁶⁵ By inducing such pressures on the target state, coercive strategies will force the target to become trapped in a dilemma as to how it should respond. The target can request that its alliance partners come to its aid, and depending on their response or lack of, this could disrupt the security apparatus of the alliance by reinforcing the fears of entrapment or that the partners do not have the best interests of the target state in mind.

Izumikawa's work further establishes that coercive wedge strategies can often be successful in dismantling threatening alliances, especially when the divider has little influence or concessions to offer which are of any value to the intended target. The negative consequences of coercive strategies can be offset by the relative gains it makes on dismantling an opponent's alliance. Even if the gains are modest, coercive strategies still allow the divider to employ an array of economic and political pressures, which put strain on the alliance and can allow for future negotiations or behavioural changes.⁶⁶

Given the fact that Crawford's theories on wedge strategies emphasize the need for a powerful nation like the United States to maintain a low threatening posture in order to maximize gains, is it feasible for the United States to take coercive action where necessary? Izumikawa argues yes, and the use of coercive strategies can often benefit the U.S. in regions where it does not hold much sway or political clout.

What the combined works of Crawford and Izumikawa have demonstrated is that in order for wedge strategies to be successful, it is necessary for a powerful state such as the U.S. to act in ways which can appear to be threatening towards some actors and catering towards others. This is especially true in situations where there exist multiple

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 504.

⁶⁶ Izumikawa largely bases his findings on a case study based on the American Administrations of Truman and Eisenhower and their foreign policy approach towards the Sino-Soviet Alliance. Izumikawa finds that Truman relied much upon the same strategy that Crawford has defined as the more cost effective approach which resulted in the U.S. accepting the status quo. Under Eisenhower however, the U.S. was able to employ a strategy which helped to diminish the strength of the alliance. Izumikawa argues that the coercive approach that Eisenhower utilized was instrumental in producing this outcome as it was able to capitalize on the rivalry and some of the internal weakness of this alliance. Although Izumikawa does agree with Crawford that selective accommodation strategies are often more applicable, he stresses that one cannot rule out the importance coercive wedge strategies hold within international relations theory. *Ibid.*, 530.

targets, which have their own geopolitical and strategic goals. Nonetheless, when a nation as large and as powerful as the U.S. feels that its national interests are clearly being threatened in a conflict, it has the full right to defend these interests. In fact this is what the offshore balancing strategy reiterates. The working aspects of coercive wedge strategies and the offshore balancing approach are made clearer through an observation of U.S. policy in the Middle East region in regards to Iran. A brief but effective overview of what America's interests are in the conflict when compiled with evidence indicating a need to break Iran's critical influence, will serve as an appropriate means to further illustrate this point.

As U.S. Ambassador R. James Woolsey acknowledged in his congressional testimony on April 11, 2013, that Iran and Syria have been regional allies for decades. Currently as it stands, Syria remains a critical component of the Iranian security network, and it remains the only avenue for Tehran to directly supply Hezbollah. North Korea has also developed a stark interest in this conflict as well, utilizing it to conceal its own ambitions of countering American efforts to dominate the region, more specifically in its aims to provide both countries with nuclear capabilities. China and Russia also remain important providers for both Syria and Iran and not only for weapons, as China remains one of the premier transshipping points for Iranian exports.⁶⁷ For Syria, Iran provides the means subsidize arms contracts between the regime and Russia. Syria then returns the favour by outfitting the different factions of Hezbollah, along with its own armed forces with modern military equipment from Russia.⁶⁸ The elaborate trading network thus poses a great security threat to the United States and its global partners, not just because of the threat an armed and capable Hezbollah carries, but also the real consequences and game changing dynamics a nuclear armed Syria and Iran could impose on the Middle East.

⁶⁷ R. James Woolsey, "Breaking the Iran, North Korea and Syria Nexus." (Paper presented at the Joint Hearing before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Middle East and North Africa, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, and Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, Washington, DC, April 11, 2013.): 1-2.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

Woolsey expresses that the U.S. objective in Syria is simple and straightforward, and that is to break apart this linkage between Iran, Syria and North Korea. The main strategic goal is to separate Assad from Syria, and if Assad's Regime does fall, it would be a great loss to Iran, as it loses its primary ability to fund Hezbollah. Furthermore by separating Iran and Syria, the U.S. could achieve greater isolation of Iran allowing it to exert more pressure on its economy. Woolsey advocates that by arming the opposition and taking a lead role in this manner, combined with further economic sanctions imposed onto Syria, and freezing financial assets of the Assad family, the United States could essentially break this alliance.⁶⁹

Syria does present itself as the weaker link in this alliance. With the correct amount of pressure exerted by the U.S., it could take advantage of the failing domestic situation in Syria, and separate Iran from a key regional ally. Yet achieving such an objective is not an easy process for America. Syrian and American relations have been in a steady decline since the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Syria was highly critical of the U.S. motives for invasion and has helped fuel the sectarian violence and has made efforts to set back America's advancement in Iraq by providing refuge to foreign fighters and allowing a free flow of insurgents across the border.⁷⁰

It is certain that America has little clout in Syria's regional mindset. In order to divide Syria and Iran, the U.S. must rely heavily upon coercive strategies in order to exploit Syria's weakened position. Since Syria and Iran cannot directly challenge U.S. coercive power in the region, as they do not have the necessary capabilities to deter American involvement, the United States can afford to adopt a rather eased approach to exercising some of its coercive capabilities. Utilizing economic sanctions and supporting the Syrian opposition as a means to dismantling the Assad Regime fits well into the offshore balancing strategy. Furthermore, by implementing a wedge strategy such as this, it further fits the purposes of America's grand strategy, by denying two regional actors

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

⁷⁰ Bente Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*. (London: C. Hurst & Company, 2013): 58-59.

from emerging with capabilities that could threaten the balancing dimensions of the Middle East.

Even with such a small example of how this regional conflict carries global implications, the ways in which offshore balancing and wedge strategies help further the objectives of American grand strategy becomes more fathomable. What has been the stark undertone of this chapter is that great and powerful states such as the U.S., will not tolerate the emergence of other hegemonic competitors or rivals who wish to destabilize the balance of power system. Although the offshore balancing strategy does allow for a multipolar system, it does not accept a system without power balance. The hegemon must take action to restore the balance of power once the scales of power have been tilted in a regional conflict. What wedge strategies provide to the American grand strategy are more avenues to exploit their position of power over regional adversaries, to ensure that they cannot collectively gain the upper hand. Thus offshore balancing theory and wedge strategies do complement one another in the sense that they both seek to ensure that the large state remains the most dominant actor, and they both allow for a variety of different means to ensure that this condition remains constant.

2.5 Coercive Diplomacy as a Means of Exercising Offshore Balancing.

The final theoretical concept which will be discussed is that of coercive diplomacy. I deem it to be one of the central mechanisms through which the offshore balancing strategy can be applied. Since offshore balancing is a far-reaching approach for managing a large state's security objectives, it is necessary to narrow down the focus slightly and provide a series or set of conditions in which a diplomatic track of offshore balancing can be successfully utilized. This is exactly what coercive diplomacy intends to offer to this study. Since to this date there has been no upscale military action or intervention taken in Syria. One can only deduce that driving for a diplomatic solution remains the primary avenue for which the U.S. will continue to pursue its interests in the conflict.

To analyse the characteristics of coercive diplomacy and the means in which it is used, it is appropriate to turn to the works of Alexander George. In his work titled “Forceful Persuasion”, George describes coercive diplomacy as a strategy which is taken by policy makers in order to reach a peaceful solution to a serious dispute.⁷¹ To secure a peaceful and diplomatic settlement, coercive diplomacy requires three fundamental components. These being a firm demand, which is matched by the presentation or exertion of force and a set timeline for compliance. The intent behind issuing a demand is that it is to halt an opponent from continuing a course of action, or which may occur in the imminent future. The threat or show of force helps to reinforce the demand and reassures the target that if the demand is not met, consequences will follow. Time is the final and perhaps the most critical component, as it backs the two previous acts. It is not sufficient in itself to present to an opponent a demand, accompanied with a show of force which holds no set timeframe for compliance. Furthermore, the element of time heightens the sense of urgency for an opponent and thus increases the amount of pressure an opponent feels.⁷²

The real trick behind coercive diplomacy is for an initiator to successfully present to the target a credible threat, which the target deems to be a substantial penalty for noncompliance. This in turn, forces the target to give into the demand. The purpose is to not beat an opponent senselessly for crossing a line, or to solicit a strong set of demands, but rather to persuade an opponent that compliance is in their best interests.⁷³ This strategy is separate from deterrence, as deterrence is exercised for the purpose of preventing an opponent from taking action. Coercive diplomacy specializes in preventing an opponent from continuing to act in this unfavourable way once an action has taken place. Once an opponent has taken action, the deterrence strategy has failed and can no

⁷¹ Alexander L. George, *Forceful Persuasion: Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War*. (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1991): xi.

⁷² Tom, Sauer, “Coercive Diplomacy by the E.U.: The Iranian Nuclear Weapons Crisis.” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 3, (2007): 614

⁷³ Alexander L. George, *Forceful Persuasion*. (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1991): 4-5.

longer be of any use, yet a coercive diplomacy method can still function under these circumstances.⁷⁴

The methods for persuading an opponent are usually styled around bargaining, signalling, and negotiation. When carried out in such a manner, persuasion techniques will provide the target with an opportunity to weight their options, and step aside or back away from the action before the initiator has a chance to strike. As George highlights, the methods of persuasion remain an attractive strategy for policy makers, because it can allow for the achievement of strategic objectives without reliance upon swift military measures.⁷⁵ Such tactics require little economic investment, reduce the risk of escalating the crisis, lowers the psychological and political costs of commitment to a strategic objective, and allow for a continued system of dialogue between the initiator and opponent.⁷⁶

Alexander George further exhibits that coercive diplomacy, much like wedge strategy, can allow for a carrots and sticks and selective accommodation approaches. Building on the efforts of the persuasion technique, the initiator can gain an even greater advantage by offering an incentive for compliance, which would further drive the target towards a mindset of cooperation.⁷⁷ Yet just as in wedge strategy, pursuing a demand which is in the strategic interest of the target, will likely not yield a positive agreement.

If an initiator is made aware of what the target deems to be important, then they can take full advantage of the persuasion and accommodation tactics. The initiator must also be fully aware of the physiological and political costs that the target will face when giving into such a demand and the demand must be reflective of this.⁷⁸ Another crucial element is the ability of the initiator to properly convey and demonstrate to the target, the severity of the devastating actions that will follow if compliance is not met. If the target

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

has reason to believe that the threat will be followed through with its utmost ability, then it will feel a greater need for compliance.⁷⁹

Furthermore, once an initiator has begun to utilize a coercive diplomacy strategy, they also develop a commitment to seeing this strategy through as they have undoubtedly assumed some cost in pursuing such a strategy. Reputation, motivation pride, identity, and prestige all play a vital role in determining the commitment factor of the initiator. This makes it difficult for the initiator resist taking immediate action once the adversary has turned down the demand.⁸⁰

It is also appropriate to discuss some of the factors which limit the chances for the coercive diplomatic approach to be successful. Firstly, the level of provocation in the crisis determines the effect coercive diplomacy can have on managing the situation. If an incident is minor, then the action can be easily reversed. Yet if the action taken by the opponent is so large and damaging, then it is likely that coercive diplomacy will fail.⁸¹ The second consideration is that applying pressure and coercive tactics on a target state can be easily accomplished if the state has no surrounding allies or alliance partners. Consequently, if the target state has many partners who are willing to provide military, economic and political support, it increases the means for which the target state can resist the initiator.⁸² Lastly, if the initiator lacks the support of its citizens, or if the country is unwilling to go to war or enforce the demand, then the initiator cannot establish a credible threat.⁸³

Of course the measure for success or failure of coercive diplomacy is not solely determined by the presence of these variant factors. For coercive diplomacy to be successful, much of it relies upon the nature of the demand made, along with how strongly inclined the adversary feels towards accepting an offer for compliance. If the

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 71, 79.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 71, 79.

demand is quite substantial, then the initiator can expect little to be achieved. In contrast if little is requested by the initiator or the demand is accompanied by accommodations, then consequently this will allow for a more positive agreement. Thus as George underlines, coercive diplomacy will be much more successful if the initiator sticks to a demand which is only structured around their immediate interest.⁸⁴ If secondary or even multiple objectives are throw in with the initial demand, then the target will feel the costs of compliance are too heavy to burden. So long as the initiator holds reasonable expectations as to what the coercive approach can yield, then it is likely that the two parties will converge on an agreement.

Coercive diplomacy corresponds nicely with the methods of both offshore balancing and wedge strategy. Given the fact that many different state actors are present in the Syria War, the situation in itself does not leave many options for American involvement. Thus America must seek to capitalize upon whatever strategic gains it can broker between all of its rivals that are involved in the conflict. Coercive diplomacy allows for an alternative approach to for states to further their interests in conflicts. It also provides a tool for which offshore balancing and wedge strategies can utilize in unison with one another. The combined approaches, allow the U.S. to structure its grand strategy around a system which seeks to maximize the benefits of remaining detached from a conflict.

By building on key alliances, and having the capabilities to thwart rival alliances, the U.S. can maintain its dominating position of power. Accepting a multipolar international system allows for a world of stable balancing, in which the U.S. can easily maintain their posture, without succumbing to the harmful effects of counterhegemonic balancing. Lastly when there is a need for America to be present in a conflict setting, much like the situation in Syria today, the U.S. can deliver upon its security aims by cooperating with other states and engaging with its adversaries in diplomatic measures.

Chapter 3. Theoretical Conception and Research Methods

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

3.1 Presenting the Theoretical Model

What has been outlined in the previous chapter is a composition of the major conceptual elements that focus on the shifting of American strategic thinking. These theoretical approaches describe how the U.S. can maximize its effectiveness from a power balancing system. Given the fact that great powers will generate counterhegemonic effects, it is in the primary interests of the U.S. to act in a manner which diminishes these countermeasures. Furthermore, as Iraq has demonstrated, it is imperative that the U.S. act in forceful ways only when its interests are directly threatened.

Therefore the theoretical model I intend to put forth reflects this development. The theoretical model and corresponding empirical analysis, will aim to establish that the world is once again becoming a multipolar system, and it will do this by focusing on a number of causal mechanisms, which have influenced America's response and efforts. It will also emphasize that the U.S. is employing measures which are inherent to all three previous discussed theories, in order to make gains on its strategic interests.

The aim of this research is to test if these theories do hold a presence within the American strategic mindset, as it relates to Syria. Upon collective evidence on how influential these theories have been in securing American interests in Syria, it will then be possible to test how representative these theories are of America's grand strategy. I emphasize that coercive diplomacy is the instrument in which the offshore balancing approach manages the region and protects America's immediate security interests, and that wedge strategies form the basis of America's global grand strategy.

The starting point of this theoretical model is to elaborate on the conception that the United States primarily acts in its own interests. That being said it seems logical that the U.S. would be reluctant to step into a conflict zone, when it has very few immediate security interests within the dispute. To be active in a small conflict where very few

interests are present, would contradict the goal of remaining isolated from the contestation, so as to reap the benefits of the natural balance of power. Even with the presence of many actors in a conflict setting, to merely challenge the interests of other states is an insufficient means for America to further its involvement.

What further deters U.S involvement in a conflict is when many other actors become involved and are willing to fight over their particular interests at hand. Championing for power and influence in setting becomes too atrocious, even for such a large and powerful state. In such a situation, the U.S. would most likely allow for the status quo. It would favour a power balancing system that allows for continuing conflict between its allies and adversaries, so that the U.S. could maximize its gains and minimize the subsequent risk of failure that intervention entails. In fact, as the theory of offshore balancing puts forth, it is likely that when confronted by this scenario, the U.S. would best be served by only engaging in the conflict to maintain a power balance. This would ensure that no state gained an upper hand in the quarrel.

It is likely that when engaging in a conflict zone, the U.S. will generate a considerable amount of blowback from the other states which are involved in the conflict as well. Even for the actors whom are considered to be allied with the U.S., they too may be weakened from further U.S. involvement, as many of the groups which provide regional support for their preferred actor, may not tolerate a U.S. presence. Although it is a very powerful state, the U.S. cannot effectively manage all of its interests globally as it is weakened by its own posture atop of the global podium.

The single determinant for U.S. to enact in a conflict setting, remains to be when a threat emerges that can directly damage their security interests. Yet it may refrain from acting in forceful manners so as to avoid the counterhegemonic penalties of engaging directly with military force. Thus if the diplomatic option exists, America will likely pursue this option, as it will allow for it to secure its immediate interest. Such a policy favours rewards that come with a low risk of involvement and with a lesser monetary cost than an armed invasion. America's strength can also be its weakness, as it relies on its

power and global reach to influence any manner of conflict, no matter the location. Yet in order to maintain its global influence, it must rely heavily upon its regional partners and proactively engage with the world, so as to not risk generating counterhegemonic effects. By limiting its unilateral capabilities, allows America to remain dominant and also permits it to isolate states that are considered to be rivals. This policy is essential for maintaining power balance and minimizing the negative costs attributed to being the global power.

Pursuing a strategy which epitomises an offshore balancing mindset further helps the process of diplomatic settlement in a conflict. When the U.S. acts upon its interest in a forceful manner, it raises the stakes for all the other players involved in the conflict and limits the capabilities of states to offer concessions with one another. When one state acts forcefully to secure its interest, it sets the tone for the other actors to engage in the same manner to secure their individual aims. Therefore, the U.S. acting in such a manner will only increase the likelihood that other states will respond, in fear of losing over their interests. Pursuing a policy which downplays the use of force will strengthen the resolve for the diplomatic process. In turn, this further reduces tensions between the different actors, which can downplay the escalation of the conflict and reduces the risk of the U.S. becoming entrapped.

Allowing for a diplomatic process to take course will further strengthen the capabilities of wedge strategies when selective accommodation type strategies are necessary. If coercive means are already implemented, then it will reduce the potential for a diplomatic solution to emerge. If coercive tactics are necessary, based on lack of influence that the great power has with the target state, it can still benefit from a diplomatic course, so long as the coercive strategies taken have not involved military measures. For instance if sanctions are applied by the great power on the target state in order to strike a behavioural change, the diplomatic effort can be strengthened, as these sanctions provide the basis to begin a negotiated settlement. None of this is attainable if the great power relies solely upon military means to manage conflicts.

Another key element which can limit the course of action the America can take is the internal dimensions of the conflict itself. When a domestic situation is highly fractured, such as the one being witnessed in Syria today, the U.S. has an opportunity to influence certain groups and to aid in their ascension to power. Yet the ideological contention between vast arrays of players makes the process of projecting one group's ascendancy over the others quite a difficult task. In fact, the more involved the U.S. becomes with some of these groups, the more the local population will act in ways which run counterproductive to the interests of the United States.

This phenomenon is discussed at great length by Mark L. Haas, where he asserts that shifts in power between conflicting ideological groups in a domestic context create profound international effects.⁸⁵ Haas claims that the U.S. holds a stake in domestic contentions for power, when one or more political fractions support their ideological beliefs. To expand upon this argument, the U.S. does hold an obligation for supporting these select groups, but only so long as they have a measurable amount of power within the local population and are endorsed by a significant proponent. If these conditions are not present and yet the U.S. does share ideological similarities with political fractions that lack domestic support, it is unlikely that the U.S. will pursue any action which would strengthen this group's resolve to take control. There would be a high cost compiled with a high probability of failure, and there would be no benefit for the U.S. to pursue this type of action. Yet as Haas reassures in his theoretical approach, the higher the contestation for power in a domestic situation, the more interest there is for external powers to intervene. The reward is that in such situations, the external actor whom wishes to gain favour with these ideological groups, can in fact influence key events and outcomes, so long as there remains a high level of domestic power in flux.⁸⁶

However with this argument, and with the case of the Syrian War, I will assert that when there is a high level of political and civil fragmentation in such a vital region and in

⁸⁵ Mark L. Haas, "Missed Ideological Opportunities and George W. Bush's Middle Eastern Policies." *Security Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3, (2012): 422.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 423-424.

a country which holds the interest of many actors, the more difficult it becomes for states to influence their ideological partners. When so many groups find themselves in a contestation for power, and all varieties of ideological affiliations are put forth by different political fractions, one finds that many foreign actors now have some claim to the managing of Syria's domestic situation. These different groups all believe that they have a right to power and their combined strength alone is capable of making the regime yield its authority. Yet because of their individual ideological hostility towards one another, and suspicion of each other's aims, makes it difficult for these fractions to share power, and collaborate with one another.

This is made further complex when going back to a previous notion that the presence of a foreign actor collaborating with certain groups over others, will drive the other fractions of the local population to undermine the aims of the foreign actor. This notion is also touched upon by Haas, where he notes that in such situations where one foreign actor provides benefits to only some and not all domestic parties, it is likely that the local population will sway its support from the group which is receiving foreign aid. They would deem it to be a traitor, or acting in the interests of foreign powers. Such an outcome will not benefit the situation and in fact will help to legitimize the efforts of the regime. The regime could bolster its internal strength, by declaring that it is the advocate of nationalism and identity and is resisting the foreign powers.⁸⁷

This notion becomes entirely problematic for the United States, as it would be in favour of supporting the Syrian opposition, but doing so comes at a substantial risk. Thus one finds that America's options in Syria are very limited. The only way that foreign powers can minimize the risks associated to direct involvement within domestic contestations, is to adopt strategies which allow for influence in indirect and unobtrusive ways, such as those found in stick and carrot strategies, or selective accommodation.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 425.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 425.

In order to make use of such a situation, the foreign power must hold significant leverage over the target state both in the form of economic and military reach. These assets can be used in either positive or negative ways, but aim mostly to drive a wedge between the different competing groups. These wedges can come in a variety of forms such as managing economic incentives, providing humanitarian aid, trade, and security agreements in order to reinforce behaviour and in order to change it, more coercive tactics such as bankrolling and assassinating specific leaders can be implemented.⁸⁹ This provides the foreign power with a means to reward those whom favour their ideological desires and to exert pressure on those whom do not share similar views.⁹⁰ Utilizing such methods promotes a behavioural response from domestic fractions and detracts all parties from engaging in unfavourable ways, so as to be rewarded for their actions. Thus the U.S. can influence a highly political fragmented Syria without having to risk backlash from the local population, as it would not be seen as capturing the revolution from them.

It seems as though the more distant the U.S. projects itself from the conflict the more apparent the room for maneuvering becomes. By not becoming hastily involved in a conflict setting, the U.S. can maximize hegemonic resources to their fullest potential. The U.S. can rely upon selective accommodation and coercive strategies to influence key events and target specific outcomes, while remaining on the sidelines far away from the fray. Essentially as this theoretical model emboldens, the best incentive for the U.S. is to limit its direct involvement in the conflict, in order to mitigate the risks associated with intervening. However, it can still effectively influence events in the conflict, by means of utilizing its selective accommodation and coercive resources to their fullest extent. Smaller, regional adversaries must engage directly with a conflict to protect their interests, but the offshore balancer has the distinct advantage of not having to play the same game.

3.2 The Process Tracing Method

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 425.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 424-426.

Since the developments in Syria are unique and very recent occurrences, it necessary to foster a qualitative analysis which investigates how a series of casual mechanisms, occurring within a specific sequence, ultimately determine the course of action for U.S. involvement. The fact that the Syrian War is still an ongoing process and has yet to be determined, makes conducting a scientific study on it a rather difficult feat. Compiling on this problem further, is that there is no means to provide values or measurement to the variables. Syria is very much an outlier when compared to other cases which have experienced interventions, as it does not fit to a particular category. In order to further understand Syria's significance, and the implications this case carries for understanding developments in international relations, it is necessary to engage with Syria in a qualitative study. This will allow for all dynamics of the conflict to be given their due notice.

In order to achieve this outcome, this research design will rely heavily upon contextual evidence and deductive logic to reconstruct causality within this case. This method of analysis is what John Gerring refers to as process tracing, "in which multiple types of evidence are employed for the verification of a single inference".⁹¹ Gerring notes that individual observations are not comparable, and usually result in the researcher developing a long causal chain, in order to deduce how the causal variable of interest influences the outcome. This is essential for single case study research, which produces inferences based upon observations. In the natural world it is not always possible to replicate scenarios for the purposes of generating treatment and control cases for the variables of interest, while all other variables remain constant. Furthermore due to the nature of observational studies, there is a number of confounding causal factors which cannot be separated by the research design.⁹² Thus such case study research warrants a process tracing method.

⁹¹ John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 172-173.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 173.

When constructing social scientific research it is appropriate to acknowledge the method put forth by King, Keohane and Verba in their work, “Designing Social Inquiry”. This combined piece has become what is the benchmark tool for social scientists conducting methods research. Interestingly enough, these authors have been quite critical of the validity of the results that a process tracing method produces. More specifically towards the ways in which observing causal mechanisms requires causal inferences. Each causal mechanism requires its own definition and estimate as to how it relates to the effect. This can become quite difficult in cases where there are infinite measures of causal steps. The problem lies in having to identify the series of causal linkages, defining the causality of each variable in the sequence, and to identify the linkage between any two variables and any connections between their corresponding pair of variables. Thus as King, Keohane and Verba describe this system leads to an infinite regress, and fails to provide a definition for causality between any one cause and effect.⁹³

However process tracers Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, do not fully agree with the concepts proposed by King, Keohane and Verba. In the work titled “Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences”, George and Bennett argue that these authors have established limits on other forms of method research by ruling that there is only one logic of inference, which in stating such produces methodological injunctions for single case studies and for the process tracing method. The methods outlined by King, Keohane and Verba are excellent systems for collecting data and testing hypothesis for a series of cases in which the study is quantitative in its nature.⁹⁴ George and Bennett emphasize that there is no linear logic of discovery, yet through theory development, historical explanation of specific cases, hypothesis formation, and

⁹³ Gary King and Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994): 86.

⁹⁴ Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2005): 11.

hypothesis testing; it is possible to produce procedures for generating new theories for deviant and outlier cases.⁹⁵

In fact single case study methods hold inherent strengths over statistical methods in key areas. Selecting case study methods or qualitative methods allows the researcher to develop conceptual validity, meaning that there is a more appropriate means to identify and measure the specific indicators that a researcher intends to observe. Some variables such as government, power, and state strength are notoriously difficult for statisticians to measure, and require a detailed mapping of their own contextual meaning which is a frequent occurrence in case study research.⁹⁶ Although statistical methods can prove to be an invaluable tool for testing and measuring the validity of a hypothesis, it will more often than not fail to generate an explanation or new hypothesis for the cases which remain deviant of the theory.⁹⁷ What is important to note, is that qualitative methods allow for a more in depth exploration of causal mechanisms. Since a single case study requires a researcher to immerse themselves in a large pool of intervening variables, this allows the researcher to observe any unexpected aspects of the operation of particular causal mechanisms and identify what conditions are necessary to activate a causal mechanism.⁹⁸ Further expanding upon this, George and Bennett explain that a key advantage of the qualitative approach lies in its abilities to accommodate complex causal relations such as those of equifinality, complex interactions and path dependency. Case studies which embark upon unveiling such interactions and complex paths require a substantial amount of process tracing evidence in order to document the complexity of the interactions in order to legitimize their claims.⁹⁹

Seemingly however there are a number of pitfalls with managing a process tracing method within a single case study. In reference to the advantage just made about the use of process tracing in a qualitative study, generating a method of inquiry in this manner

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

when there is equifinality present within the case study will make more general claims, meaning that the hypothesis presented will be more vague and prone to counter examples, as it is possible that more than one causal pathway could explain the outcome.¹⁰⁰

Selection bias is also a prominent occurrence within single case study methods, and such problems arise when the researcher specifically selects one case over others. Bias can also occur when the researcher unknowingly selects a case which is more tailored for the dependent variable than other possible cases. However in some circumstances, the researcher selects a case specifically for the particular outcome it holds in relation to the dependent variable. In such conditions, researchers argue that cases selected on the basis of the dependent variable, are appropriate when determining the necessary and sufficient conditions for yielding a specific outcome.¹⁰¹

King, Keohane and Verba also stress that the problems related to single case study research, is mostly based upon their reliance on one observation and their inability to generate theories that can make precise predictions in the real world.¹⁰² Very few explanations require a dependency upon one causal variable to explain the outcome and doing so allows for the emergence of alternative explanations to arise. The measurement conducted on the variable of interest is not precise, making it a likely subject for measurement error, in which case the true hypothesis may be rejected.¹⁰³ Lastly, random errors are a frequent occurrence in single observation case studies, as they rely on a deterministic process. The real world process is not deterministic and as such the presence of omitted variables can lead to a different result. Thus there is no basis on which to evaluate if the observation confirms or disconfirms a theory or is the result of an unexplained factor.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁰² Gary King and Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994): 209.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 209-211.

Nevertheless, I have decided to construct my research method based on one particular case study with the employment of a process tracing method to produce a causal chain of mechanisms, which will analyse the particular outcome on the dependent variable. The case of Syria is a very unique case and I consider it to be an outlier in many ways, due to the innate interests of different countries within the conflict settling. There is a subsequent failure of large powers or of the international community to intervene directly, a trait which is not shared by the cases of Iraq 2003, and Libya 2011. Thus the only means to observe and explain the dependent variable, which is America's recent shift in strategic thinking, relies upon selecting a case study which corresponds to this dependent variable accordingly. Furthermore although there is a measure of selection bias based on this approach to developing a hypothesis, I would like to remind the reader that Syria is the most recent development in the context of international relations crises. Thus any theory derived from the ways in which the U.S. has responded to the conflict, would in fact be a valid conception as to how America's methods of engagement in international crises has evolved.

What George and Bennett claim is that for the researcher to negate the possibility of having varying observations along the causal path, a condition known as the degrees of freedom problem, they must present alternating theories which make different predictions of the causal path, this combined with evidence from process tracing and or congruence testing will provide the necessary means to reject many plausible alternative theories.¹⁰⁵ So long as the process tracing method yields a substantial amount of evidence which supports the observations made along the causal path, and no alternative theories are supported by the evidence, then a strong case can be made that with logical reasoning the causal mechanisms at play, allow for the hypothesis to hold validity.

The utilization of process tracing within this study will be primarily based upon its abilities to assess the prediction made by the initial hypothesis and of the theory. George

¹⁰⁵ Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2005):28-29.

and Bennett assert that this method is capable of testing if the observed process among the variables in the case, match with those predicted by the theory.¹⁰⁶ However as the authors stress, many theories have not been developed to their fullest extent in order to make predictions of casual pathways. Under such circumstances process tracing can identify causal processes which have not been identified by the theory. Thus, process tracing does not necessarily test how well the theory predicts the case's outcome, but rather aims to further develop the theory which explains the case.¹⁰⁷

The specific advantage in using a process tracing method is that it aids in affirming the validity of the case study. Single case studies which engage in theoretical testing can limit the amount of competing hypotheses, or at the very least exclude some of the alternative explanations if many hypotheses exist.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore single case process tracing designs are not as prone to measurement error as other types of studies or designs, which encompass a variety of case examinations. This is because the measurements conducted in single case studies are on only a limited number of selected variables along several qualitative dimensions, rather than having to measure different variables across any magnitude of cases.¹⁰⁹

Given the advantages of process tracing put forth, I remain highly confident that the findings unveiled in my research process, will further add to the existing theory. With a process tracing analysis, it is possible to generate a high degree of understanding of how the causal variables of interest shape the causal path, which in turn structures the ways in which the U.S. can assert its power in the conflict. Such a research method will hold validity so long as there is evidence that deduces logical reasoning for supporting the proposed hypothesis.

3.3 Identifying the Variables of Interest.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, 217.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, 217.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, 220.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 220.

Now having provided the theoretical component of the model, it is imperative to provide specific variables of interest. These can better describe the relationship between the causal mechanisms, their respective path, and how the presence of these different factors all coming in unison form, what has become a precarious situation for American interests. Firstly, a more in depth look at each nation's stake in the conflict along with their interests are needed to be considered, before outlying the causal chain of events in its entirety. This is necessary so that a greater appreciation can be given to the efforts of what America has been able to accomplish strategically thus far, and to further emphasize that all observable courses of U.S. action involve a high amount of risk. Preceding this assessment will be the process tracing analysis.

To begin, the following variables are of significant importance because they all play a role in shaping the reasoning as to why the U.S. has not responded with a military intervention in Syria. Furthermore, the combination of these variables operating in sequence and being taken into consideration has, and as I argue, shifted the American strategic mindset towards a system, which maximizes the potential gains and minimizes the risk of managing security objective in a very volatile geopolitical setting.

The first variable that should be mentioned is the continued resistance by Assad to the international and domestic pressures. This should also be considered along with the response generated by his house towards the rebellion, and the ways in which it vests its power structure solely in a small diaspora of the population to maintain control. A second important factor is the current stature of America-Iranian relations and the negotiation process for the procurement of Iran's nuclear program. Seeing as how Iran has such high stakes in the Syrian War, it is wise for America's negotiation process to avoid risking further tension with Iran over interests in Syria. Another consideration is that of Russia wanting to reduce the course of action which America can take through the United Nations, thus making any direct intervention in Syria an unsanctioned action by the international community. Another important cause is the development of the armed opposition forces and their repeated failures to unify.

The final two causes that will be identified are the inability of the Syrian opposition to effectively unify, and the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Assessing the threat posed by these chemical weapons to America's greater strategic interests, as well as accounting for the impact foreign fighters and Islamist groups have on the opposition, are all fundamental components which shape America's motives in Syria.

4. Investigating Key Actors and Their Interests.

4.1 Identifying the Principal Actors in the Conflict.

Although a brief description of the different actors involved in this conflict was provided in the introduction chapter, I find it necessary to expand upon certain elements that many of these nations regard as being their interests at stake. This will provide a deeper understanding of how the actions of one actor influence the decisions made by another, along with the interconnectedness of certain developments. This process is what begins the sequencing of measures along the causal path.

This chapter will begin by underlying the interests of the larger powers at play and will proceed to analysing the necessity for involvement by the smaller regional players. This synopsis from the international to the regional level of competing interests, should provide a sufficient framework for understanding how these causal events, influenced their corresponding outcomes.

4.2 America's Involvement with Syria.

America's immediate interests in the Syrian War are derived from the concerns over the potential spillover effects that could transpire from a destabilized Syria, and the consequences this would have on the region. Furthermore, as the situation in Syria continues to deteriorate, more and more Syrians feel the urgent need to flee the country, putting a strain on all of Syria's neighbours. Currently over one million registered Syrian refugees have fled the country, half are sheltered within Turkey and Jordan, and their

growing numbers further solidify this predicament.¹¹⁰ Another difficulty for the U.S. is that many state and non-state actors remain willing to support Assad, despite all the atrocities. Iran remains the most vital supplier of arms into Syria. Iran has also provided members of its Revolutionary Guard to help train and even fight alongside Assad's forces, and there are elements of Hezbollah within the Syrian Army. One of America's regional partners, Iraq, has continued to allow Iran to fly weapons through its territory, with final destinations in Syria. Countries such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia are already directly arming the opposition, and the traditional allies of Britain and France are looking for means to further arm the opposition.¹¹¹

The rise in violence and the forceful methods that Al-Assad imposes upon his people to sustain control continues to alarm the American Congress. In response, the underlying objective of American action in this conflict has been to initiate a regime change. Some members of Congress have argued in favour of the U.S. pursuing a more hardline approach to dealing with Assad. Yet many caution the use of force and the negative impact an abrupt intervention or regime change could have on stability in the Middle East and Levant.¹¹² Another major concern is that of the increasing presence of extremist groups, whom seek to exploit the power vacuum within Syria generated by the deteriorating situation. There have been reports of Islamists fleeing in mass from Iraq to Syria, and holding influence within the Syrian opposition. This further complicates matters for American interests in the conflict.¹¹³

America's greatest security interest in the conflict is the chemical weapons surplus that Assad has at his disposal, and the threat this poses against global security and stability. Israel has already acknowledged that if these weapons are to be transferred to elements of Hezbollah or to other terrorist groups, it would consider such actions as an

¹¹⁰ "Crisis in Syria: The U.S. Response." Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives 113 Congress, Presented in the First Session, Serial No. 113-10, (March 20, 2013): 2.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, 2-3.

¹¹² Jeremy M. Sharp and Christopher M. Blanchard. "Unrest in Syria and the U.S. Sanctions against the Assad Regime." *Congressional Research Service*, (March 26, 2012): 8.

¹¹³ *ibid.*, 7

act of war. As stated earlier, the Obama Administration has already taken a similar stance on such a matter however, determining the location and ultimately securing these storage facilities in Syria is a very difficult and daunting task.¹¹⁴

The American response in return, has come in the form of procuring a diplomatic solution, through supporting the efforts of the United Nations and by exerting further pressure on Assad. America has demonstrated a willingness to support initiatives, such as the Annan Plan, which aims to relieve the humanitarian disaster by imposing a ceasefire. Furthermore, the U.S. has taken action by enforcing sanctions on Assad, which have had a significant impact on the regime's stability and finances. These sanctions have mostly taken effect on the oil and business sector, which has thus far cost the Syrian Regime approximately one third of its annual income.¹¹⁵ In order to help bring about a successful transition in Syria, the U.S. has actively engaged with the Syrian opposition. They have offered training and equipment to the opposition's local leaders and activists, while at the same time encouraging dialogue in hopes to unify the Syrian rebels. The U.S. anticipates that these efforts will be instrumental in facilitating a regime change in Syria.¹¹⁶

This is just one of a series of actions that America's Ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford, has outlined over the course of the conflict. Ford indicates that America's response to the Syrian War, has come in its effort to provide humanitarian assistance whenever applicable. Currently the U.S. stands as the largest donator of humanitarian aid to Syria, at an estimated 385 million dollars. It continues to be actively engaged with multilateral agreements that provide humanitarian assistance and relief for the Syrian refugees. However as Ford's testimony acknowledges, the U.S. has not taken a further role for fulfilling the needs of the opposition, only providing non-lethal aid, humanitarian assistance and training. It is in the maintaining of this system that the current U.S. Administration feels is the best chance to maintain a pursuit of a diplomatic settlement.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

¹¹⁵ "Syria: U.S. Policy Options." Hearing on Foreign Relation United States Senate 112 Congress, Presented in the Second Session, (April 19, 2012): 8-9.

¹¹⁶ "Crisis in Syria: The U.S. Response." Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives 113 Congress, Presented in the First Session, Serial No. 113-10, (March 20, 2013): 8.

Quite similarly, the message which Robert Ford reiterates to Congress is that a political transition through negotiation remains to be the ideal end to the conflict.¹¹⁷

Despite the willingness of the Washington to maintain a moderate approach in the developing conflict, some policy analysts and advisors have stated the potential pitfalls of such a strategy, especially when the circumstances on the ground are taken into account. Jon B. Alterman in his testimony before Congress emphasized that a short and rather orderly political transition in Syria is a highly unlikely development. The longer the engagement is fought on the ground, the more emboldened the Assad Regime will be to maintain its survival. Assad's partners will be in greater support of Assad's clinging to power, and the opposition will become more fractured, as different sects would be concerned for their own survival.¹¹⁸ Alterman further explains how a lengthy engagement will only further benefit Assad's strategy as recent historical events in Syria have demonstrated. Furthermore, the opposition parties have had their greatest success against Assad when they remained peaceful and questioned the legitimacy of his rule. Now that the opposition is armed, any conflict that is generated between Assad and the opposition forces, only helps to legitimize the actions taken by Assad to maintain control. This plays directly into the hands of Assad, as his forces hold a tactical advantage over the armed opposition.

It should come as no surprise that the U.S. has taken a subordinate role in the conflict, allowing for the United Nations to pursue a negotiated end to the Assad Regime. The U.S. has seemingly avoided any opportunity to intervene directly and has tied its hands by linking its objectives to those that are matched with a U.N. consensus. In past events, the U.S. has demonstrated that it has no clear desire or need to act within the boundaries of a U.N. mandated mission. Yet for whatever the reason, the current Administration feels that it is necessary to act within certain limitations, perhaps as a

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, 10.

¹¹⁸ Syria: U.S. Policy Options." Hearing on Foreign Relation United States Senate 112 Congress, Presented in the Second Session, (April 19, 2012): 14.

means to preserve the possibility for a diplomatic settlement.¹¹⁹ However, this brings into questioning how long the U.S. can afford to sit on the sidelines of a conflict in which it and its partners have so many compiled interests, and will diplomatic and economic sanctions be enough to force Assad from power? Dr. Murhaf Jouejati provided a stimulating insight into how the diplomatic pursuit through the U.N. will ultimately fail. He argues that the Annan Plan has no means to pressure Assad through meaningful consequence. No matter how powerful or daunting the amassed amount of sanctions against Assad are, he will always find a means to ensure his regime's continued survival as he has demonstrated time and time again. Sanctions alone are not sufficient enough to force Assad's cooperation; there must be a threat of force as well.¹²⁰

There is no doubting that America has the capacity to influence events in Syria. Yet it has continued to conduct itself in a manner which refrains from using its asymmetrical powers to force events on the ground. It instead relies upon the Syrian opposition to carry in this effort along with the United Nations. Perhaps the U.S. has acted in ways which avoid direct intervention in Syria, in favour of pressuring Iran to negotiate for a nuclear weapons agreement. In order to better grasp America's involvement in Syria, it is necessary to further examine America's relations with Iran, as both of these states are unequivocally linked in this conflict.

4.3 America's Dealings with Iran.

For America, Iran has always been a challenge, as it has continuously directs its foreign policy with the objective of weakening U.S. regional power, while at the same time aims to establish itself as the regional hegemon. Iran has done this in a number of ways such as forging alliances with regional partners, expanding economic and security arrangements, sponsoring terrorism and rebellions, and pursuing a nuclear weapons

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, 8. This argument was built upon the testimony provided by Murhaf Jouejati before Congress.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, 9.

program.¹²¹ America views Iran's efforts as a direct threat to the region's balancing features, and to the stability of the global energy market.¹²²

Iran's missiles and potential for developing a nuclear weapons program has become a significant concern for the U.S. and Israel. Firstly such a development will allow Iran to compromise the security structure already in existence in the Middle East. This capability will allow Iran to pressure Israel on its Arab relations, which will cause further hindrance to the Arab-Israeli Peace Process. Lastly, a nuclear armed Iran could deter U.S. action in the Middle East and possibly within Europe as well.¹²³ Another concern America has, is that Iran is continuing to clamp down on the freedom of naval access into the Gulf, with a special emphasis on closing the Strait of Hormuz. Such action will hinder any U.S. naval forces operating within the Gulf along with any third party commercial vessels which rely on this passageway.¹²⁴ Thus Iran's current policies pose both significant security and economic challenges for the U.S. and its partners.

The American response to Iran's development of a nuclear program is oddly similar to the ways in which it has responded to Syria. These efforts of course have been to remain relatively passive and rely upon sanctions and diplomatic efforts to force an agreement. Currently as it stands, diplomatic talks and negotiations between Iran and the permanent members of the U.N.S.C., remains the most viable means for the U.S. to end the strategic competition between itself and Iran.¹²⁵

In order to force Iran to the negotiating table, the U.S. has imposed a variety of harsh sanctions which target the financial as well as the oil sectors of Iran's economy. Key businesses that operate within Iran's banking network, petrochemical and oil industries, as well as any company that was linked to Iran's nuclear development

¹²¹ Anthony H. Cordesman and Bryan Gold and Garrett Bernstein, "The Gulf Military Balance Volume I: The Conventional and Asymmetric Dimensions." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, (January 28, 2014): 21-22.

¹²² *ibid.*, 21-22.

¹²³ *ibid.*, 22.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, 22.

¹²⁵ Anthony H. Cordesman, "The Gulf Military Balance Volume II: The Missile and Nuclear Dimensions." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, (December 9, 2013): 126.

program, were also heavily targeted by these sanctions. Following the U.S. model, the E.U. took similar measures against Iran, unfortunately many of these new measures were not taken prior to 2010. Much of what is being seen now are only the recent strains that Iran's economy has had to deal with, as the full weight of the U.S. sanctions has yet to be determined.¹²⁶ What is crucial to take into account is the fact that these sanctions have forced Iran into a further isolated state, which has compelled it to take part in the negotiation rounds. Its foreign investment market was crippled, and Iran is struggling to effectively produce oil, develop new sites and export the product. Not surprisingly this has led to an increase in inflation and unemployment within Iran, thus providing Iran with an even greater incentive to approach the negotiating table.¹²⁷

4.4 The Strategic Importance of Syria for Iran; Where American and Iranian Interests Collide.

Iran has made its interests in Syria very clear, which is to preserve the state of Syria and to ensure the continued survival of Assad's Regime. Iran has shown no restraint in its efforts to influence events in Syria. These efforts include providing direct aid and financial support for Assad, providing diplomatic support and guidance, supplementing the Syrian army with fractions of its own Republican Guard, and continuing to channel weapons into the country.¹²⁸ However Iran's influence in the region has been in decline, due in part to the spread of sectarian violence and having to utilize its resources to outfit Hezbollah. Yet Iran has to carefully balance its resources and cut its foreign aid to other proxies, so that it can immediately provide support to Assad. Iran ultimately stands to lose more if Syria and Assad falls.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Anthony H. Cordesman and Robert M. Shelala and Omar Mohamed, "The Gulf Military Balance Volume III: The Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, (January 2014): 2.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9-18.

¹²⁸ Anthony H. Cordesman and Bryan Gold and Garrett Bernsten, "The Gulf Military Balance Volume I: The Conventional and Asymmetric Dimensions." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, (January 28, 2014): 154.

¹²⁹ Aram Nerguizian and Nori Kasting and Anthony H. Cordesman, "U.S.-Iranian Competition in the Levant Volume II: The Proxy War in Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories & Syria." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, (January 10, 2013): 32.

Perhaps the greatest interest Iran has in Syria is its geostrategic location in the Middle East. Syria provides a vital access point for Iran to influence Lebanon and pressure Israel. If Iran loses Syria, not only does it stand to lose a strategic alliance which has endured for decades, but it will effectively close off the corridor to the Levant which will further isolate Iran's geostrategic position. Therefore Iran does not back Syria because it chooses to, but rather it backs Syria because it must and failing to achieve this will detach it from its most important partnerships.¹³⁰ Preserving the continued rule of Assad remains the top priority of Iran's strategic endeavour in Syria. However, the list of potential calamities that would transpire from an intervention force in Syria, has caused Iran to weigh its options if it cannot continue to support Assad. Therefore, Iran's second option has already begun with constructing dialogue between the different fractions of the Syrian opposition; all in an effort to ensure that a Sunni Muslim dominated state will not emerge from the ashes of Syria.¹³¹

What the developing crisis in Syria entails for both Iran and the U.S. is that they both face the fears of a long sectarian war enveloping the region. Although driving a wedge between Syria and Iran fits America's foreign policy interests for many different ideological reasons, it does not do anything to diminish the risk of a potential spillover. Iran on the other hand would rather welcome a prolonged revolution in Syria than to see it fall into the hands of pro Sunni forces.¹³²

America's response to the conflict and the way it manages its interests, reflect the idea that it has very little sway on matters inside Syria. Iran on the other hand is highly active and bold with its approaches, noting that it has significant leverage over how the Assad Regime continues to survive. Iran can press much harder with its aggregate powers

¹³⁰ Riad Kahwaji, "Syrian Uprising: Its Impact on Iran and Possibility of Civil War: Analysis." *Eurasia Review*, December 21, 2011, Accessed May 13, 2014. <http://www.eurasiareview.com/21122011-syrian-uprising-its-impact-on-iran-and-possibility-of-civil-war-analysis/>

¹³¹ Aram Nerguizian and Nori Kasting and Anthony H. Cordesman, "U.S.-Iranian Competition in the Levant Volume II: The Proxy War in Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories & Syria." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, (January 10, 2013): 32.

¹³² Aram Nerguizian, "U.S. and Iranian Strategic Competition: The Proxy Cold War in the Levant, Egypt and Jordan." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, (March 2012): 84.

of influence than the U.S. can achieve by acting alone, and Iran is willing to accept the risks associated with managing sectarian violence, simply because it has no other option but to do so. Thus in order for the U.S. to empower itself further, it must cooperate with the forces that can garnish influence with the situation on the ground in Syria, so as to effectively counter Iran's measures.

4.5 Russia's Role in the Syrian War

Russia is yet another state whose importance cannot be ignored when examining this conflict. Russia views itself as a major international player which offers up an alternative to managing global crises, and opposes the solutions offered by its western counterparts. With its veto power and permanent member status in the U.N.S.C., Russia presents an opportunity for the U.S. to bring a steadfast diplomatic solution to the conflict, so long as the interests of Moscow and Washington converge.¹³³ However Russia has a strong motivation to counter American global influence. The U.N.S.C. provides Russia with such an opportunity, and the aims of Moscow are to ensure that the integrity of the United Nations is maintained by protecting state sovereignty and promoting international peace.¹³⁴ Although Russia does recognize that there is a just cause for action in Syria based on the humanitarian disaster alone, it feels that this should not come at the cost of embellishing what the strict aims of an intervention are in the first place. Adopting a U.N. mandate to further one's own objectives for regime change or to justify mission creeping are actions which are strictly taboo for Moscow's principal views of state sovereignty.¹³⁵

However what is to be considered, is that Moscow has its own interests in mind when making these claims and expecting such a conduct from the international community. Firstly, Russia views the Syrian War as an opportunity to stand against what has been done in Yugoslavia, Iraq and most recently Libya. It is about deciding who can

¹³³ Dmitri Trenin, "The Mythical Alliance: Russia's Syrian Policy." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, (February 2013): 3.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

do what, what type of force can be used in the international system, what actors can become involved in an international conflict and under what circumstances.¹³⁶ Russia mainly fears that without its efforts to resist, the U.S. can willingly pursue its interests without being constrained. By upholding the right to territorial sovereignty within the United Nations, Russia is essentially protecting its own interests in ensuring that the U.S. cannot intervene directly in areas near the Russian border, or even inside Russia.¹³⁷ Libya served as an experiment to gauge how the international community would respond to a humanitarian crisis in an internal state conflict. By abstaining to vote for U.N. intervention in 2011, Russia allowed for the U.N. to pass a mandate which was to be a humanitarian operation in Benghazi. However, the actions taken by N.A.T.O. were in Russia's eyes a violation of the mandate and the eventual result was the overthrowing of Gadhafi.¹³⁸ Russia thus has been careful not to make the same mistake twice and has become hardened against any effort by the international community or the U.S. to directly interfere with events in Syria.

The second major interest Moscow holds in Syria is the historic relationship between both countries. After falling out of Damascus' favour after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow has been making a comeback in the region and regards Syria as a partner of particular importance. Trade between the two countries remains relatively modest, especially when compared to the economic ties that exist between Russia and Iran. Yet arms sales remain a particularly unique and important aspect of the Syrian-Russian relationship, with current arms contracts valued at approximately 2.5 billion Euros.¹³⁹ Furthermore there is also the matter of the Russian naval base in Tartus. Although Tartus serves more for a symbolic purpose rather than strategic to Moscow, nonetheless the base has accommodated and serviced Russian ships since 2011, despite it only having a quantity of 50 personnel. The symbolic value of the base for Russia is

¹³⁶ Dmitri Trenin, "Syria: A Russian Perspective." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, (June 28, 2012).

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Camilla Committeri, "When Domestic Factors Prevail Upon Foreign Ambitions: Russia's Strategic Game in Syria." *Istituto Affari Internazionali*, (October 2012): 3

unmatched, as it is the only facility from which Russia was able to showcase to its domestic populous and to the world that after a twenty year hiatus, it has once again set sail in international waters.¹⁴⁰

For the most part Russia's efforts in Syria are well and good to re-establish Russia's historical ties and presence to the region. However, this policy has more to do with Russia's relations with Iran than for the strategic and symbolic relationship Syria serves for Moscow. Iran and Russia share a very unique and strategic relationship. Iran provides a likeminded ally for Moscow, in which it can utilize to resist American hegemonic influence in the Middle East. Furthermore, Russia is a major oil exporter and relies upon Iranian oil to diversify its global energy market.¹⁴¹ Thus Russia is willing to risk colliding with America's sanctions on Iran, because it is in its best interests to do so both from an economic and political standpoint. Iran can depend on Russia for support against American pressures, to provide a steady flow of armaments, provide technological capabilities and purchase its oil products. The most recent measures indicate that Russia's exports to Iran are an annual measure of 3.3 billion USD and rising.¹⁴² Russia can afford to take this hard line approach against America's interests in Iran because it is powerful enough to absorb any potential blowback and can isolate itself. However, Russia's growing global trade network has found it making more profitable dealings with Europe, Israel and even the U.S. so for these reasons it remains concerned over Iran's ambitions to acquire nuclear capabilities.¹⁴³

Although Moscow has supported sanctions against Iran in 2011, as of late they have become very critical of the recent sanctions, claiming that it only serves America's ambition to isolate Iran's economy, strangle its population, and throw it into a state of

¹⁴⁰ Dmitri Trenin, "The Mythical Alliance: Russia's Syrian Policy." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, (February 2013): 12.

¹⁴¹ Anthony H. Cordesman and Robert M. Shelala and Omar Mohamed, "The Gulf Military Balance Volume III: The Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, (January 2014): 67-68.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 67-69.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

domestic turmoil.¹⁴⁴ However Moscow has not let this undermine their relationship with Washington, in fact their strategy is to continue to pursue a favourable position with both sides. America knows it needs Russia's favour to influence Iran, and Iran is extremely dependent upon Russian trade, for dodging the imposed sanctions so as to continue its economy.¹⁴⁵ It is for this reason why the situation in Syria benefits Russia the most, it can continue to play on this strategy where both camps depend on its support to further their individual desired outcomes. So long as Russia can successfully forestall any international action from occurring in Syria, it can profit from Iran's economic dependence and any concessions America is willing to offer in exchange for Moscow's participation.

4.6 The Gulf States and Syria: Looking In From the Periphery.

There is no question that the breakdown of Syria threatens the regional stability of the Gulf. Yet the Gulf States remain divided on the issue of intervention, even though they all share a common security interest. The individual responses from the Gulf States towards the developing crisis vary deeply. Iran's strategy which has already been described, is to support the Assad Regime no matter the cost. Lebanon remains fractured on a federal level, thus any decrease in their internal stability could derail their political structure. Jordan must also walk a very fine line in the Syrian War, as it too shares similar political qualities to that of Lebanon.¹⁴⁶ With the acceptance of Iran, there is little support for the Assad Regime amongst the Gulf States. This has transpired for a number of reasons, most notably is the continued use of Lebanon as an arena to promote destabilization in the Gulf and to pressure Israel. Although Iran is very much responsible for this occurrence, Syria as an alliance partner to Iran is considered to be just as guilty by the other Gulf actors.¹⁴⁷ Despite the shared hatred for Assad and Iran, the Gulf Cooperation Council cannot come to terms on sharing interests between the Gulf States,

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 69-70.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 69-70.

¹⁴⁶ Emile Hokayem, "Syria and its Neighbours" *The International Institute for Strategic Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 2, (April–May 2012): 7.

¹⁴⁷ Emile Hokayem, "The Gulf States and Syria." *United States Institute of Peace*, (September 30, 2011): 1-2.

which has severely weakened the Council's ability to influence developments in Syria.¹⁴⁸ Another development which has fractured the unity of the Gulf States is Assad's resilience to maintain power, despite their combined efforts along with Turkey to denounce Assad's rule and augmenting the amount international pressure that the regime faces. Furthermore the emergence of a proxy war enveloping Syria, has given rise to many difficulties and uncertainties in determining to what extent the Gulf States should increase their role and to what cost.¹⁴⁹

Turkey has found itself in an interesting predicament in determining the correct course of action. In the beginning of the conflict, Turkey demonstrated some modest support for Assad, yet this quickly faded when it became apparent that Assad was not interested in reformations. Turkey finds itself situated on the front lines of the conflict, with its population in large support of the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁵⁰ Yet despite having the means to aid the Syrian opposition in a regime change, Turkey remains cautious and relatively passive, given its geographic proximity to both Iran and Russia. Turkey fears that competing against the interests of its neighbours will only further isolate itself from the region.¹⁵¹

Another staunch supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood is the state of Qatar. Qatar's support for the opposition forces came as a great surprise and upset for Assad, who once considered the small actor to be one of the Syria's closest allies within the G.C.C. Assad's response came in the form of an assault on Qatar's embassy in Damascus, as well as threatening to seize all of Qatar's assets in Syria. Qatar responded in kind by freezing its economic projects in Syria and forming a consensus against Assad both within the G.C.C. and the Arab League.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 1-2.

¹⁴⁹ Emile Hokayem, "Syria and its Neighbours" *The International Institute for Strategic Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 2, (April–May 2012): 10.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 10-11.

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, 10-11.

¹⁵² Emile Hokayem, "The Gulf States and Syria." *United States Institute of Peace*, (September 30, 2011): 3-4.

Saudi Arabia on the other hand has been a historical rival of Assad for many years, and the downfall of Syria, presents a unique opportunity for Saudi Arabia to capitalize on its interests in checking the regional power balance against Iran. By removing Syria from Iran, Saudi Arabia can match Iran's influence in the Levant and make up for loss of losing Iraq's power vacuum to Iran.¹⁵³ Yet Saudi Arabia's influence in Syria is quite limited, as it must manage its interests alone and can expect no help from its Gulf partners due to their combined distrust in Saudi Arabia's agenda and its special relationship with the U.S.¹⁵⁴

The complexity that the Syrian challenge poses towards the Gulf States becomes embroiled with Saudi Arabia and Qatar arming elements of the opposition, which best serve their own ideological preferences. Qatar's disposition towards the Muslim Brotherhood, has it supporting some of the extremist fronts of the Syrian opposition with weapons.¹⁵⁵ Saudi Arabia has also been funneling weapons to the opposition and has only shown support for those groups which can further its ideological and strategic gains.¹⁵⁶ The question remains for the Gulf States not if Assad will fall, but whose party will be left holding the keys to Damascus following Syria's collapse?¹⁵⁷ The divisions that exist amongst the Gulf States are highlighted by this uncoordinated response to the common security interests at hand for the Gulf, which entail the removal of Assad and the containment of this sectarian violence. The process of having two key states participating in a proxy type of engagement against Iran's efforts to maintain Assad's power, only further fractures the opposition forces. Remaining fearful of each other's intentions and checking each other's power of influence in the conflict, denies the G.C.C. the ability to come to a consensus to force Assad out. The Gulf States have also failed to provide the opposition with a safe haven to conduct their operations in. Thus far only Qatar has

¹⁵³ Emile Hokayem, "Syria and its Neighbours" *The International Institute for Strategic Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 2, (April–May 2012): 12-13.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

¹⁵⁵ Simon Mabon, "The Middle Eastern Great Game." *International Relations and Security Network*, August 12, 2013, Accessed on May 13, 2014. <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?lng=en&id=167806>

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

shown a modest interest in allowing for small meetings within its territory, while Turkey on the other hand has provided much of the staging area for the Syrian opposition to coordinate itself.¹⁵⁸ Consequently due to their combined lack of effort, the Gulf States possess little influence on Syria's outcome.

Chapter 5. The Causal Pathway in the Syrian War.

5.1 Identifying the Causal Pathway and its Influence On U.S. Action and Response.

Having identified the interests of all the major players in this conflict, it is now possible to investigate the variables of interests previously mentioned. These all share a role in gauging U.S. action, either by forcing it to reconsider engagement, initiating a response through other means to lessen the degree of blowback, or by enforcing a coercive strategy to procure a strategic interest. As mentioned earlier these variables follow a specified pathway where the outcome of one determines another and so on and so forth. This kind of sequencing of events does follow a linear and somewhat historical approach to understanding the conflict. What is most important to note is that the nature of one variable creates a condition for action, and this condition specifies an outcome which can either hinder or advance the interests of the United States, depending on the causal variable at hand.

5.2 The Assad Regime.

To begin, the first variable of interest is the very nature of the Assad Regime and how its internal features make it resilient towards international and internal pressures. Since the time of Hafez Al-Assad, Syria has remained a brutal dictatorship, yet the regime has managed to develop ways to depict itself as being necessary in its cause. The Assad Family had never demonstrated the desire to be as ruthless as Saddam Hussein or to be as dangerous to international security as Iran or North Korea. Instead the regime's

¹⁵⁸ Emile Hokayem, "The Gulf States and Syria." *United States Institute of Peace*, (September 30, 2011): 5.

message has always remained that its actions are necessary, based on the instability which plagues the region entirely.¹⁵⁹

Syria has tried to portray itself as the promoter of Arab solidarity. Hafez Al-Assad believed that ideology would restrict his regime's flexibility, thus by valuing public opinion over ideological motives has allowed the regime to avoid previous pitfalls and crises.¹⁶⁰ Ethnic diversity and freedom of religion have served as the cornerstone for Syria's internal stability. By exhibiting itself as secular, the regime has been able to advance its interests amidst all the internal divisions of the modern Syrian Society. Approximately seventy percent of the population is Sunni Muslim, with the Christians, Druze, Kurds, and Alawi representing the minority.¹⁶¹ Syria's foreign policy has recently been driven by its motivations to curb U.S. interests in the region as well as treat Israel as an aggressor state. This standpoint has been fundamental for the regime to legitimize itself amongst the Syrian public, whom incorporate themselves within a greater Arab identity.¹⁶²

The Assad Regime's structure of power is vested highly into the Alawi, whom are of the Shia Muslim sect. Following the decolonization of Syria from France in 1946, the Alawi became a strong base of political power in Syria during this time as the French bestowed power to the minority groups in Syria, favouring their rule over the continued dominance of the Sunni majority. The rise of the Ba'ath Party coupled with the increasing importance of the military within the Syrian governmental structure in 1950, allowed the Alawi to ascend to power. This is due to the fact that a majority of the military force in Syria was represented by minority groups, with the Alawi being the most prominent.¹⁶³ When Hafez Al-Assad took power through a series of military coups in the 1960s, he promoted Alawi officers who were closest to him, thereby nesting his

¹⁵⁹ Emile Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant*. (New York: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2013): 30.

¹⁶⁰ Bente Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*. (London: C. Hurst & Company, 2013): 18.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 25-26.

¹⁶³ Emile Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant*. (New York: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2013): 31.

rule on top of one particular sect of Syria's minority. This provided the Alawi as well as the other minority groups, with a profound sense of power over the Sunni majority, and in exchange for their eternal support, the Assad Regime would ensure their protection.¹⁶⁴

Now what has become an interesting development is the ways the Assad Regime has responded to the revolution set against it, and this carries certain predicaments for U.S. involvement. The Syrian Revolution was not a unified movement, many of the grievances felt by the revolutionaries predate the rule of the Assad Family, and other revolted based on the regime's poor policy decisions. This is very much a reflection upon the variety of internal divisions that exist within the modern Syrian society.¹⁶⁵

What this entailed for the regime, is that since no unified social movement was in existence during the time of revolution in Syria, Assad only needed to carefully adjust some of his social policies to accommodate the interests of the Alawi. In some cases, even securing the neutrality of the Christians and Druze was sufficient enough to ensure Assad's continued ruling.¹⁶⁶ Assad was able to do this with some moderate success, which allowed him to further depict those against him as being foreign radicals determined to undermine his rule and send Syria into an uncontrollable downward spiral. This media war provided further justification for Assad's actions and portrayed him as being a saviour to his people. Behind the scenes, Assad met with many local leaders, businessmen, judges, and even prominent Sunni religious figures to ensure their loyalty, which furthered his longevity.¹⁶⁷ When the fighting spread to uncontrollable levels in the summer of 2012, Assad had to adjust his rhetoric accordingly and announced that Syria was now in a state of war.¹⁶⁸ This was immediately followed by a series of patronage appointments to the Alawi within the security sector. More minority groups were also given authority within the local community self defense networks. These developments plotted Christians, Shia Muslims, and Alawi together on one side, and they had now

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 31-34.

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 43.

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 51.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 51-52.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 52-53.

become united in stopping the rising wave of Sunni violence.¹⁶⁹ The minority groups, the Alawi especially, feared regime cleansing and retribution if the Sunni Muslims were successful in overthrowing Assad. For all the minority groups in Syria, their very survival and way of life became inescapably linked to the regime's continued existence.¹⁷⁰

The very nature of the Syrian divide allows Assad to maintain his power structure. There are certain complexities which emerge from the fact that the revolution cannot be based upon an Alawi-Sunni clash alone. The transfusion of interests across varying sects of class, political clans, regions, and religious identities further augments the difficulties in managing a social upheaval for either Assad or the opposition forces to gain momentum in the conflict.¹⁷¹ For the business classes, those living within Damascus, and the minority groups, all of which remain on the periphery, Assad remain the lesser of two evils. They will not shift their support either way because they remain fearful of the alternative, and these groups will not change their political disposition until it becomes apparent that Assad will fall.¹⁷²

In fact when looking at the very nature of the situation on the ground, it becomes clear that Assad holds a slight advantage over the opposition forces. Despite the obvious facts that Assad has lost much autonomous control over the entire region of Syria, Assad still holds one enduring advantage over the opposition. This being with the remaining forces Assad commands, he is able to put forth a unified force both in ideology and in cause, that are committed to forestalling the fall of the regime. The entire mentality of the

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

¹⁷⁰ International Crisis Group (2011). "Uncharted Waters: Thinking Through Syria's Dynamics." November 24, 2011, Accessed May 13, 2014. [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Syria/BO31%20Uncharted%20Waters%20-%20Thinking%20Through%20Syrias%20Dynamics](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Syria/BO31%20Uncharted%20Waters%20-%20Thinking%20Through%20Syrias%20Dynamics), 3.

¹⁷¹ Smyth, Phillip. "Syria's 31 Percenters: How Bashar Al-Assad Built Minority Alliances and Countered Minority Foes." *MERIA Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 01, (March 2012).

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

Assad force and for the minority groups is this, if the Assad ship is to sink or float, it all depends on the unity of their combined efforts as one.¹⁷³

The same cannot be said of the opposition forces whom remain plagued by the interests of large power states, which do not hold the same values or interests of the Syrian people. The opposition has no unified leadership, requires external actors to provide an area for them to coordinate and conduct their efforts, and their military force, under the so called Free Syrian Army, cannot effectively pressure Assad without resorting to similar acts of violence that the regime conducts.¹⁷⁴

The extents of the Syrian Regime's military efforts were initially to crush the opposition forces and demonstrations with an overwhelming show of force. When it became apparent that the opposition's numbers were growing and with an increase in defections within the Syrian Army, Assad began defending key areas of political and economic importance such as those of Damascus and Aleppo.¹⁷⁵ By ignoring other areas allowing the opposition forces to hold ground, Assad has been able to counter with artillery, aerial bombardment, and Scud missiles. The application of this strategy has seen Assad's Regime continue to test and cross the boundaries of international norms and red lines such as the use of tanks on civilians, artillery, cluster bombs, airpower, and eventually chemical weapons.¹⁷⁶

Despite the overwhelming detrimental effects the war has had on Syria's domestic situation, economy, and toll on human life, so long as there remains no international action against him, Assad believes that he can continue his cling to power. His military force still remains the most effective apparatus in the country, the defections which have grappled his military to its core, have left him with a more committed and unified fighting force. If he remains unchallenged in Damascus, Assad will remain the epicenter

¹⁷³ Bassam Haddad, "Syria's Stalemate: The Limits of Regime Resilience." *Middle East Policy Council*, Vol. XIX, No. 01, (Spring 2012): 3.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁷⁵ Emile Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant*. (New York: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2013): 57-58.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

of political power even in a highly fractured Syria.¹⁷⁷ The real question then becomes in the face of such blatant atrocities, why has the international community continued to tolerate such actions without feeling the need for reprisal against Assad?

5.3 The Russian Factor in Syria.

After having outlined many of Russia's foreign policy objectives in the Syrian War, there can be no doubt that Russia's fingerprints are all over the interworking of this conflict. During the onset of the domestic upheaval in Syria, Russia announced publically its staunch support for the Assad Regime. Moscow advised Assad to adopt some levels of domestic reforms, in order to ensure that it appeared he was making some effort to address the needs of his populace to avoid the same fate as Gadhafi.¹⁷⁸ When the Western powers met with Russia and China in the U.N.S.C., Russia vetoed resolutions on three separate occasions. This derailed all measures of international intervention in Syria, including such measures as Resolution 1973 establishing a no fly zone.¹⁷⁹ Russia even protested certain measures proposed by the U.S. and E.U. to impose trading sanctions and arms embargos on Syria. This is something which Moscow heavily criticized its Western counterparts over, for being not entirely honest about the West's intentions, and for denying that the opposition shares any responsibility in the violence in Syria.¹⁸⁰

Russia immediately followed this defiant act on the international stage by sending warships to the port of Tartus. This held the purpose of symbolizing the important strategic relationship Syria held with Russia, one that Moscow was indeed attempting to over-signify. The other reasoning for this act was to reinforce the arms contracting commitments that Russia intended to uphold to Assad. Moscow argued that continuing such arrangements with Assad were perfectly legal in international law, as Russia clearly

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 61-63.

¹⁷⁸ Marek Menkiszak, "Responsibility to Protect Itself: Russia's Strategy Towards the Crisis in Syria." *The Finnish Institute of International Affairs*, 131, (May 2013): 8.

¹⁷⁹ Camilla Committeri, "When Domestic Factors Prevail Upon Foreign Ambitions: Russia's Strategic Game in Syria." *Istituto Affari Internazionali*, (October 2012): 6.

¹⁸⁰ Marek Menkiszak, "Responsibility to Protect Itself: Russia's Strategy Towards the Crisis in Syria." *The Finnish Institute of International Affairs*, 131, (May 2013): 3.

opposed any effort to enforce an arms embargo on Syria. Russia cannot be bound by the terms of the U.S. and E.U. embargos on Syria, because these arms commitments are in part a continuation of old agreements signed between Bashar Al-Assad and Moscow in 2005.¹⁸¹

Russia defined its interests and expectations from the international community during a ministerial meeting in Geneva in June 2012. Moscow was successful in removing three key sections from the draft document proposed by the U.N. Special Envoy. Russia overturned the following requests; a suggestion for Al-Assad to step down and not allowing his ministers to partake in a new Syrian government, a demand for the Syrian Army to remove its forces from the cities immediately, and the adaptation of the U.N.S.C resolution which included options for imposing sanctions on Syria.¹⁸² Despite showing a lack of resilience on Syria, Russia has been supportive of the Arab League's peace initiatives in 2011 and twice endorsed the Kofi Annan's Peace Plan in March 2012. Yet the subsequent failures of both these initiatives, came at the expense of Russia not pressuring Assad to the full potential of the provisions within these measures.¹⁸³

As mentioned earlier, Russia's intentions behind such actions are primarily to prevent the emergence of another Libyan context, and denying the Assad Family a similar fate. Despite Russia's agreement with the principle meanings behind responsibility to protect, Moscow feels that such actions cannot undermine the very foundations of international law. However under the surface there are other self-motivated interests behind Moscow pursuing such actions. The Arab Spring could not have hit Moscow at a more inconvenient time than that of 2011, when it was faced with its own domestic embattlement between Medvedev's pro liberal voices and those held by the Putin camp. What the Arab Spring signaled to the Kremlin and the victorious Putin

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*, 4.

¹⁸² *ibid.*, 5.

¹⁸³ *ibid.*, 5.

elite, is that an uprising in Russia was a very real possibility, and that a domino effect could very well unfold if Bashar Al-Assad was to fall.¹⁸⁴

It is clear that Russia's defiance in the face of heated Western temperaments towards Assad's continued rule, is a clear obstacle for enforcing any level of international intervention in Syria. So long as Moscow remains committed to this effort, the West must look for other avenues to exploit Assad's weaknesses to force him from power. However, with Russia in firm control of the international context surrounding Syria, it would appear that any effort conducted at the international level to garnish a diplomatic solution is a foolish endeavour. America simply engaged on this level and vested a heavy interest in the Annan Plan because it was the only option that existed outside of direct military intervention at that time.

5.4 Measuring the Effects of America's Immediate Response to the Syrian War.

With the Syrian Regime receiving external support and with Russia protecting it at the international level, Assad had the opportunity to pursue his hardline policies of dividing the political opposition and ramping up his military efforts. There was very little that the U.S. Administration could do to directly alter the situation in Syria, apart from engaging in a direct military intervention which would not be sanctioned by the international community. Thus the U.S. responded to Assad's atrocities by implementing a coercive approach, which existed outside the reach of Russia's vetoing power. All in order to force Assad into a conceding position.

Following the Russian vetoes, the U.S. responded with a rash of sanctions over the course of 2011, which target key sectors such as energy and banking. These sanctions further complied upon a list of previous sanctions established against the Assad Regime in 2004. The 2004 sanctions prohibited the sales of U.S. goods to Syria and imposed an arms restriction embargo, and aimed at preventing Syria from further aiding in state

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*, 8-9. This theory is also supported by Camilla Committeri when she states that it is for these intended purposes that Moscow aims to invoke such measures. Being firm on Syria solidifies the domestic political base in Russia and denies any potential revolutionaries the idea that their efforts to damage Russia's internal structure will not be supported by international action at any level so long as Russia has a claim in the matter.

funded terrorism.¹⁸⁵ In 2006 under the Patriot Act, the banks of Syria were considered to be money laundering institutions which financed global terrorist cells, thus all ties between Syrian banks and the American government were completely cut.¹⁸⁶ The sanctions passed in 2011 hit at the individual level, where it was prohibited for any U.S. citizen to invest, export, or sell, either directly or indirectly in Syria's petroleum sector. Furthermore, any Syrian assets, either publically or privately owned, within the U.S. were immediately frozen by the Treasury Department, if they had been used to bypass the prohibited U.S. business dealings within Syria.¹⁸⁷ The E.U. followed suit and put a ban on travel to Syria, an asset freeze, and an arms embargo. This mainly targeted individuals and businesses involved in the financial sector and energy market. Yet it is worth noting that the E.U. even targeted dual usage goods as an attempt to impact the amount of chemical products being exported to Syria, so as to deny the regime's ability to manufacture such weapons.¹⁸⁸

To what extent these sanctions have had on Syria is difficult to measure, as the war for the last three years is also demolishing the Syrian economy. However looking at some of the measurable statistics and indicators of economic decay, it is clear that the sanctions have had a tremendous impact on the energy sector of the Syrian economy. With the analysis conducted by the Syrian Center for Policy Research, their figures indicate that 28.3% of Syria's annual G.D.P. from 2011 and 2012, an estimated 6.8 billion USD, was removed from Syria strictly due to these U.S. sanctions on the oil market. Syria's oil trade has declined by 82%, with an overall decline in trade standing at 52%, which translates to a sharp devaluation of the Syrian Pound.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, the Humanitarian Development Index of Syria has declined by 15%, this measurement taken

¹⁸⁵ Nasser, Rabie and Zaki Mehchy and Khalid Abu Ismail. "Socioeconomic Roots and Impact of the Syrian Crisis." *The Syrian Center for Policy Research*, (January 2013): 61.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

from the onset of the crisis until 2013, which translates to a loss of 5.38 years in life expectancy.¹⁹⁰

The overall humanitarian impact this crisis and the imposed sanctions have held on the Syrian population is staggering. The devaluation of the Syrian currency, along with an inflated heating and gas price due to the economic sanctions on the oil market, has shown an average reduction in private consumption by 10.7%. The lower Syrian households have lost 14.8% of their annual consumption power, while the higher echelons of Syrian society have experienced a drop of 8.3% in their respective households.¹⁹¹ I remind the reader that these are the measured effects of the sanctions placed on the oil market alone. The greater humanitarian impact of these sanctions and conflict is the fact that an estimated 4 million Syrians are in need of immediate humanitarian assistance. The U.N. only has 184 million USD readily available for managing its activities in Syria. Furthermore, the U.N. has only managed to collect 337 million USD, out of a required 488 million needed to support the Syrian refugees, as the U.N.'s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs indicates.¹⁹²

Thus one can observe that the sanctions are having a direct impact on the Syrian Regime. Not surprisingly however, it is the greater populace which is being hurt the most by these sanctions and not Assad himself. However these sanctions have certainly limited Assad's methods for managing the conflict and fighting the opposition forces.

5.5 The Scope of Iran's Response and Greater Involvement in the War.

Given the grave interests at stake for Iran in the Syrian War, it comes as no surprise observing how rapidly Iran responded to Assad's immediate needs. Iran first began its aid to Syria by sending advisors, steadily increasing its weapons supply to Syria and even sent elements of its own national guard.¹⁹³ Iran has also been helping Assad finance his Russian arms deals, by providing Assad with an avenue to offload some of the

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 54-55.

¹⁹¹ *ibid.*, 65.

¹⁹² *ibid.*, 65.

¹⁹³ Bente Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*. (London: C. Hurst & Company, 2013): 166.

Russian arms contracts that Syria can no longer afford to fully commit to. Thus Russia does not have to terminate these previous arms contracts, so long as Iran is willing to accept some of the cost of the agreement on Syria's behalf.¹⁹⁴

Furthermore, Iran's relationship to Russia has been extremely effective in re-establishing the dialogue and support lines from Moscow to Damascus. With the help of Iran's dealings with Russia on Syria's behalf, Moscow has cut Syria's previous trading debt by 73% and has agreed to finance Syria with 300 million USD over a three year period starting in 2008.¹⁹⁵ Although Russia has increased its ties and role within Syria, these efforts have yet to overshadow the role Iran continues hold in the evolving conflict. Iran has agreed to finance a large portion of a 730 million USD deal between Moscow and Assad, which will bring 50 Russian made short air defense systems to Syria.¹⁹⁶

In addition to providing Damascus with the means to access Russian arms supply routes, Iran has provided Assad with its own lucrative arms supply utilizing both land and air transport to Syria via Iraq. The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) has identified a number of Iranian airliners, YAS Air, as well as other cargo and airline flights with links to Iran and YAS Air, with carrying weapons that had final destinations in Syria. The transportation manifests of these flights detailed that the goods in transit were medical supplies and spare parts, however upon further inspection these crates were found loaded with Iranian small arms, artillery shells, rockets, and anti-aircraft guns.¹⁹⁷ Although there are no specific figures on such dealing or estimates on how many flights Iran utilizes to flush weapons into Syria. There is enough evidence on these illicit dealings to indicate that Iran is holding a steady hand in shaping events in Damascus.

¹⁹⁴ Aram Nerguizian and Nori Kasting and Anthony H. Cordesman, "U.S.-Iranian Competition in the Levant Volume II: The Proxy War in Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories & Syria." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, (January 10, 2013): 24.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁹⁷ Will Fulton and Joseph Holliday and Sam Wyer, "Iranian Strategy in Syria." *AEI Critical Threat Project & Institute for the Study of War*, (May 2013): 16.

What compiles on this evidence further is that Iran has also demonstrated an intention to not only arm Assad but also the pro Assad militia groups such as Jaysh al-Sha`bi and Shia-Alawi opposition forces with munitions as well. The aim in this effort is to increase the resistance of these groups and provide them with a chance to continue fighting against the Sunni forces, if Assad was to suddenly fall from power.¹⁹⁸ Hezbollah has also provided training and personnel to some of Assad's forces and militia networks. Hezbollah forces are very robust well trained and well-armed, and hold the same strategic mindset to that of Iran. In order to preserve their arms supply routes from Iran to Lebanon, Hezbollah must continue its presence in Syria to ensure that Assad will not fall.¹⁹⁹ Again much like determining the extent of involvement of Iran's Republican Guard in Syria, determining the scope or status of Hezbollah operations in Syria is a difficult variable to measure. However the mere fact that both of these elements are present in the conflict, represents the greater extent to which Iran's interest in Syria are real and are being threatened.

In response to American sanctions and international pressure placed on Assad, Iran has demonstrated its abilities to help Assad navigate through an extremely unstable situation and is fully accepting the risks of maintaining dealings with the regime. Through its financial and military capabilities as well as its close ties to Moscow, Iran has essentially become a mediator for Assad's continued survival. Iran's increased dealings with Assad in response to America's efforts to isolate Syria, have offset some of the pressures produced by the sanctions. Iran being coupled with Russia's further engagement in Syria, significantly limits America's abilities to manipulate the reality of the situation. Being unable to fully implement the severity of the financial and arms restrictions sanctions does come as a major blow to U.S. interests. It also further prolongs the course of war in Syria, yet it also presents a unique opportunity for the U.S. to exploit an Iranian weakness. This matter will be discussed further following the breakdown of the Syrian opposition.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

5.6 The Fractured Opposition and Emergence of Foreign Fighters.

While Iran and Russia continue to supplement Assad's efforts to remain in power, the development of events on the ground in Syria have enhanced this effort and have further restrained America's options in Syria. Elizabeth O'Bagy, provides an accurate assessment of such setbacks in her report on the Free Syria Army stating that, "The opposition movement in Syria has been fragmented from its inception, a direct reflection of Syria's social complexity and the decentralized grassroots origin of the uprising. This condition has plagued Syria's armed opposition from the beginning. A lack of unity has made cooperation and coordination difficult on the battlefield and has limited the effectiveness of rebel operations. It has also reduced the rebels' ability to garner international support and backing".²⁰⁰

Such a statement demonstrates how a lack of coordination has plagued the opposition, and has severely limited the ability and willingness of the U.S. to provide it with critical support. This lack of organization stems from the decades of authoritarian rule which denied any right in formatting any social or political movement within Syria.²⁰¹ Thus in the fall of 2011 when the Syrian National Council was created to encompass all the different groups and protestors against Assad, it lacked the political leadership necessary to unify all these different actors under one directorate. Furthermore the S.N.C. demonstrated that it could not exert any kind of authority over the rebel forces that had rapidly emerged and generated much of the rebellion's momentum during the early stages of the conflict. The S.N.C. also failed at every moment to incorporate local leaders within its inner circle of operations.²⁰²

What has ultimately transpired from all of this, was a tragic state of internal competition and divide between many different ideological fractions within Syria

²⁰⁰ Elizabeth O'Bagy, "The Free Syrian Army." *Institute for the Study of War*, Middle East Security Report 9, (March 2013): 9.

²⁰¹ Yezid Sayigh, "The Syrian Opposition's Leadership Problem." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, (April 2013.): 4.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 4.

opposition's forces. When the Muslim Brotherhood allegedly took hold of much of the internal power structure of the S.N.C. through its overrepresentation, this problem of internal competition was further compounded.²⁰³ What provided the S.N.C. with a strategic advantage over the other competing groups and coalitions, is that it had been quick to openly endorse the uprising in Syria. This action allowed it to gain a premature endorsement from the international community, as being the official opposition of the Syrian people.²⁰⁴

The consequence of providing the S.N.C. with such entitlement was that it enabled the S.N.C. to have the financial means and responsibilities to enact in all kinds of measures and provisions for local governments inside Syria. However it still lacked the coordination and ability to properly administer such authority. The events which unfolded during the spring of 2012 further demonstrate this. On April 1, 2012, the Friends of Syria, made up of a large number of international actors and states most notably the U.S. and U.K., declared that the S.N.C. would be the principle channel for humanitarian assistance in Syria. The S.N.C. received 40 million USD from Qatar, Libya, and the U.A.E. but only managed to spend nearly 25 million on humanitarian aid.²⁰⁵ The U.S. and U.K. combined donated 200 million USD to the S.N.C. during the same time period and noticed similar results. This caused the Friends of Syria to call into question the abilities of the SNC. Eventually, individual governments simply bypassed the S.N.C. when aiding the opposition, either by providing local opposition leaders with funds through a middleman or through donations to the U.N.²⁰⁶

The lack of central leadership is the direct cause of the Syrian opposition's inability to adequately finance their operations and to access arms channels. Unequal levels of funding among the different rebel groups have developed further disparity. Different governments, and organizations competing for influence in Syria will fund the

²⁰³ *ibid.*, 6-7.

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*, 6-7.

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*, 11.

²⁰⁶ *ibid.*, 11.

opposition forces in different ways, and will back only those groups which they see as ideological equals or as clear winners.²⁰⁷ The problem that such a system creates is that it encourages rivalry between the local rebel groups and unfastens the process of creating a unified opposition. More often than not, it is the extremist groups that receive the higher percentages of funding from the Gulf States, and there are many indications that terrorist organizations such as Jabhat Nusra have better equipment than the secular forces.²⁰⁸ The level of involvement and international support for such terrorist groups operating in Syria has served as a deterrent for the U.S. for supplying weapons to the rebels in fears that such weapons could be used against them, thus the U.S. has only directly supplied the opposition with non-lethal aid.²⁰⁹

Although the U.S. has not taken a direct role in providing the opposition forces with lethal aid, they have encouraged Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar to endorse certain groups and provide them with weapons. On a more covert level, the C.I.A. has had an active role in supporting the Syrian opposition's secular forces by laying the framework for a large arms pipeline to be constructed from Croatia to the Gulf States. These actions came to fruition in December 2012, and were an American response to the increase in the well-funded and well-armed Islamist force in Syria.²¹⁰

Almost from the onset of troubles in Syria, foreign fighters have amassed in Syria in hopes of overthrowing the regime. Many of these foreign fighters bring with them an expertise on how to wage an insurgency campaign, and have also proven to be a valuable asset for the local rebel forces in channeling more arms into Syria. Although figures on the amount of these fighters and their affiliations are difficult at best to measure, Iraqi officials have observe a sharp decrease in the amount of Al-Qaida linked insurgents

²⁰⁷ Yezid Sayigh, "The Syrian Opposition's Leadership Problem." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, (April 2013.): 32.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 32,

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

²¹⁰ C.J. Chivers, "Saudis Step Up Help for Rebels in Syria With Croatian Arms." *New York Times*, February 26, 2013, Accessed May 13, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/26/world/middleeast/in-shift-saudis-are-said-to-arm-rebels-in-syria.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

operating in Iraq.²¹¹ What is interesting to note is that Iran is an enemy of Al-Qaida, so their motivation for involvement in Syria to fight against Iran's interests should come as no surprise.

Thus far the only tangible proof of Al-Qaida's operations in Syria has been the U.S. intelligence report on the car bombings in Damascus on February 16, 2012, which concluded that the bombings bore a striking resemblance to similar Al-Qaida attacks conducted in Iraq.²¹² Although it is difficult decipher between which groups sympathise with Al-Qaida which ones do not, what is almost a guarantee is that the longer the war rages, the more likely Al-Qaida will become involved. Such a circumstance will pose serious risks to Syria's future stability, and will carry heavy implications for greater U.S. involvement in the conflict.

5.7 U.S. Response to Iranian Efforts in Syria and to the Fracturing Opposition.

In gauging the United States' response, I find it necessary to examine hearings from the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, for gaining a better insight as to how Washington's innermost circles view the current situation in Syria. It is the duty of these experts whom testify before the committee to thoroughly understand the situation, outline how and to what extent the U.S. is willing to respond, and to advise and influence key members of the American Administration on how to react to certain developments. Therefore, I regard their professional opinion on America's policy options and response to crises as being a credible source of information as well as a good indicator for determining where America's strategic interests remain.

When comparing the U.S. Senate Committee Hearings on Syria from August 1, 2012, and April 11, 2013, an interesting transition of dialogue emerges. In the summer of 2012, the mood on Washington was more relaxed, the U.S. was willing to engage with the opposition parties, but did not have to do so out of necessity as the opposition forces were showing they had all the momentum while Assad's forces were in retreat.

²¹¹ Joseph Holliday, "Syria's Armed Opposition." *Institute for the Study of War*, (March 2012): 33.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 33-34.

America's process in Syria was to build upon and enforce the sanctions as a method to oust Assad, while the opposition forces continued to pressure Assad internally.²¹³ Furthermore the attitude to Assad was also quite finalized, as it was a common impression among the committee members and testifiers that Assad's days were numbered, and there was no conceivable way that he would be able to hold power for prolonged period of time.²¹⁴

Developments over the next eight months such as the greater involvement of Iran, the breakdown of leadership within the S.N.C., the secular nature of the war, and the increased involvement of foreign fighters all contributed to altering the strategic discourse on Syria within Washington. Beginning with the opening statement in the committee hearing on April 11, 2013, Senator Corker stated that "Right now we really have no good options".²¹⁵ Such a statement is the embodiment of a U.S. policy in Syria that was loosely structured and highly influenced by events which unfolded both in the U.N. and on the ground in Syria. By assuming Assad's days were numbered, and observing the significant gains made by the opposition forces that summer, the policy makers in Washington deemed it unnecessary to directly involve the U.S. in the conflict. The Administration felt that it was best to remain on a diplomatic track to begin shaping what would be a post-Assad Syria.

The involvement of foreign jihadist groups, the fracturing of the opposition's forces, the development of a Syrian Civil War fueled by sectarian violence, and Assad's ability to maintain control with the help of his allies, all caught Washington by surprise. It became apparent that America's window for involvement in shaping the outcome of the conflict was rapidly closing. The mixing of all these different elements in Syria, left the U.S. with one policy option, which was to stay on the same course of action and hope that a diplomatic solution would emerge. Both Secretary Elizabeth Jones and Robert Ford

²¹³ United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Next Steps in Syria. Hearing before the 112th Congress, August 1, 2012. Testimony by Director of Foreign Policy Martin Indyk.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Testimony by Senior Fellow on Arab Politics Andrew Tabler,

²¹⁵ United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Policy Toward Syria. Hearing before the 113th Congress, April 11, 2013. Opening statement of Senator Bob Corker.

have endorsed the message that continuing along the diplomatic path is the best method to procure a negotiated settlement, which is a necessary condition for a peaceful transition in Syria.²¹⁶ Upon mentioning the necessity for a diplomatic solution, Ford carefully lays out America's interests in the conflict which are the prevention of the utilization or movement of chemical weapons, ensuring that Syria does not become a base for terrorism, and for supporting the influx of refugees to Syria's neighbours. The United States is supporting Syria's transition by supporting local leaders and councils and provides them with basic services. Providing such an effort is necessary to ensure that anarchy does not emerge, so as to deny radical groups the opportunity to hold regional influence.²¹⁷ Ford further explains how a negotiated political settlement remains a necessary condition, for ensuring that the minorities will not suffer repercussions from an opposition controlled government, and such a settlement is necessary to divide Assad from his support base.²¹⁸

Upon investigating America's response to Iran's deepening involvement in the Syrian War, it becomes evident that America's efforts against Syria are mirrored by its efforts to influence Iran. This is because as stated by Senator Mendez, "Iran still remains America's number one strategic concern in the region and quite possibly the globe as they wish to acquire nuclear weapons, support Hezbollah and other proxies, and provide aid to Assad."²¹⁹ Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman affirms that "Iran has set its mark as being a global leader, yet its policies contradict such efforts, the end to their isolation is based on their efforts and Obama has made it clear that he will not tolerate a nuclear Iran".²²⁰

Both Sherman and Under Secretary of Treasury David Cohen highlight key elements of America's response to Iran, following Iran's deliberate attempts to keep

²¹⁶ *ibid.*, Testimony by American Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford.

²¹⁷ *ibid.*

²¹⁸ *ibid.*

²¹⁹ United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Policy Toward Iran. Hearing before the 113th Congress, May 15, 2013. Opening statement by Senator Mendez.

²²⁰ *ibid.*, Testimony by Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman,

Assad afloat. Both Sherman and Cohen declare that the “dual track strategy”, which is to press Iran with sanctions as a means for establishing dialogue and negotiation, remains the best strategy for limiting Iran’s abilities.²²¹ These sanctions have dropped Iran’s currency value by 60% and have cut Iranian oil production in half. By continuing this process, America is driving Iran deeper into a state of isolation where it has few trading partners to rely upon. Currently only 6 nations continue to trade with Iran for its oil and the further Iran turns towards degradation, the more likely it will lose its remaining trading partners.²²²

In response to questions regarding the flight details of illicit cargo being flown into Syria from Iran, Sherman asserts that such effort make it clear how important Syria is to Iran not just as an ally but also to its security framework. “Many vectors influence Iran, our military presence, and our stance on Syria, and our efforts to ensure an opposition victory, are all having an impact on Iran’s economic and geopolitical capabilities.”²²³ Senator Tim Kaine builds upon this point further claiming that “The policy we have in Syria is directly reflective of our policy with Iran and because they are allies, loosing Assad would be a serious setback for Iran”.²²⁴ Although it has yet to be determined how effective these sanctions and the dual track strategy have been in bringing Iran to the negotiating table, it is clear that the U.S. has incorporated Iran’s increasing involvement with Assad into its calculus on Syria.

What Senator Sherman is hinting at, is that by maintaining the current course of pressuring Iran, the U.S. will in fact limit Iran’s ability to influence events in Syria and in the region. Although allowing Iran to continue funneling arms and money into Syria to bankroll Assad is a counterproductive strategy, it will increase the internal pressure that Iran is facing, as any finances it produce through its already crippled oil market will have to utilized to protect its interests in Syria. This will dramatically limit Iran’s ability to

²²¹ *ibid.*, Combined Testimony of Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman and Under Secretary of Treasury David Cohen.

²²² *ibid.*

²²³ *ibid.*, Testimony of Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman.

²²⁴ *ibid.*, Response given by Senator Tim Kaine on the Subject of U.S strategy in Syria and Iran.

finance and produce a nuclear weapons program. So long as the U.S. remains willing to support the opposition both financially and politically, it will be essentially able to drive Iran into further isolation and towards the negotiating table. Iran will overextend its abilities in this conflict and will bleed itself dry as it tries to keep its overloaded interests afloat. No doubt America's strategy in Syria is largely shaped by its interests in Iran and wanting to force it into isolation. However, developments in the of the Middle East are unequivocally linked to one another, and as mentioned by Martin Indyk the dividing of Syria from Iran is a strategic gain for the U.S. but it becomes a strategic minus when the destabilization in Syria spreads. If Iran loses Syria they will want to hit back at the U.S., and they will do this by trying to spread the sectarian violence to Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and ultimately to Bahrain, carrying with it significant geopolitical consequences.²²⁵

The dual track strategy approach to Iran and forcing economic sanctions in Syria both rely on a diplomatic settlement to end the crises. However maintaining the status quo allows Iran to continue funneling weapons and finances to Assad, which prolongs the wait and decreases the chances for a negotiated transition to occur in Syria. Having passed on the opportunity to directly shape events on the ground in Syria, has limited the options of U.S. strategic thinking in the conflict. Thus the U.S. has had to yield some of its decision making abilities to other states, whom hold more a prominent role in the conflict and have more pressing interests in Syria. In exchange for this, the U.S. has gained a means to exert further pressure on Iran without having to compromise on the current strategy to deny Iran nuclear capabilities.

5.8 Chemical Weapons Usage and Assad Crossing the Red Line.

Syria's chemical weapons program has posed a significant challenge to America's regional security interests and has required the West to exercise caution when managing the conflict. Although these weapons have been developed strictly to maintain a level of tactical parity with Israel's nuclear capabilities, the presence of these weapons in

²²⁵ United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Next Steps in Syria. Hearing before the 112th Congress, August 1, 2012. Testimony by Director of Foreign Policy Martin Indyk.

combination with the rapid deterioration of Syria, alters the very nature of this war. Official estimates are that Syria has in possession over a thousand tonnes of chemical weapons, a majority being a sarin nerve agent. This quantity of chemical weapons, according to Israeli Defense Chief General Ya'ir Nave, places Syria atop of the world's largest stockpile of chemical weapons.²²⁶

Much of the information concerning Syria's chemical weapons program remains classified within military and intelligence channels. Yet it is well documented that these weapons are housed across the country, making it more difficult to uncover their exact locations. The Syrian Army also continuously transfers these weapons from one facility to another in order to lessen the abilities of the Western intelligence agencies to track their whereabouts.²²⁷ In July 2012 a Syrian Foreign Ministry spokesman inadvertently acknowledged the existence and extent of these weapons in order to dispel fear that they would be used against civilian targets. It was stated that the development and deployment of these weapons are for a defensive purpose only and are stored by the Syria's forces under the government's direct supervision.²²⁸

Despite the serious ramifications chemical weapons usage and development entail, Syria reserves the right to develop and use these weapons as it has not signed the Chemical Weapons Convention which prohibits the use of such weapons. However, Syria has signed the 1925 Geneva Protocol banning the use of biological and chemical weapons.²²⁹ Regardless of having a legal means to permit further development and deployment of chemical weapons, the movement of these weapons indicates a

²²⁶ Mary Beth and Paul K. Kerr and Andrew Feickert, "Syria's Chemical Weapons: Issues for Congress." *Congressional Research Service*, (September 30, 2013): 5.

²²⁷ William Tucker, "The Problem of Syria's Chemical Weapons." *In Homeland Security*, December 4, 2012, Accessed May 13, 2013. <http://inhomeandsecurity.com/the-problem-of-syrias-chemical-weapons/>

²²⁸ Emile Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant*. (New York: International Institute for Strategic Studies), 2013: 181.

²²⁹ Mary Beth and Paul K. Kerr and Andrew Feickert, "Syria's Chemical Weapons: Issues for Congress." *Congressional Research Service*, (September 30, 2013): 4.

willingness to exercise this force.²³⁰ What is even more troubling is the concern voiced by the former head of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal Major-General Adnan Sillu, that these weapons would be used against the opposition's forces in the event that Assad lost a key region such as Aleppo.²³¹

Prior to the large scale attack on August 21, 2013, both the Assad Regime and the opposition forces were allegedly accused of using chemical attacks on a small scale on three separate occasions in during the spring of 2013.²³² Upon investigating the supposed actions, the White House announced on June 13 that a small scale of what was likely considered to be a nerve agent was used and resulted in the deaths over approximately 100 people. However, Washington deemed the intelligence findings to be assessments and could not be considered tangible enough evidence to warrant action against Assad for crossing the red line.²³³

On August 21, the Syrian Regime crossed the threshold mark of chemical weapons usage, as combined U.K., U.S. and French reports indicate that a large scale chemical attack had been carried out in Damascus which resulted in the deaths of an estimated 1500 people.²³⁴ The extent and sophistication to which the attack had been carried out, signaled a preplanned effort and surpassed the capabilities of the opposition forces, as missiles were used as the delivery system of the chemical agent. Thus the blame rested squarely upon Assad and his superior command for authorizing such an attack.²³⁵ The justification and motivation for initializing in this type of act fits perfectly with Assad's own personal willingness to maintain power and demonstrate a show of force. As mentioned previously, Assad has demonstrated a need to continually push and test the boundaries of international norms and conventions on fighting civilian

²³⁰ Marc Finaud, "Syria's Chemical Weapons: Force of Law or Law of Force?" *Geneva Center for Security Policy*, (October 2012): 2.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²³² Mary Beth and Paul K. Kerr and Andrew Feickert, "Syria's Chemical Weapons: Issues for Congress." *Congressional Research Service*, (September 30, 2013): 12.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 12.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

populations. The offensive pressure that the opposition forces mounted on Aleppo and Damascus, made it necessary for Assad to demonstrate that to the Syrians and to the world, that he was willing to exercise such extreme force in order to maintain his ruling.

5.9 U.S. Chemical Weapons Response and Subsequent Momentum Shift towards a Diplomatic Solution.

America's initial response followed upon the President's statement of a red line. Both the American Congress and the international community felt that Assad's use of chemical weapons, provided justification for military action. On August 28, Obama stated that "The international norm against the use of chemical weapons needs to be kept in place, we do have to make sure that when countries break international norms on weapons like chemical weapons that could threaten us, that they are held accountable."²³⁶ Although he gave no specificities on the measures or to the extent such military operations would entail, Obama did stress that the United States should take action against Syrian targets, and both his French and British counterparts had given their full support in changing the international calculus on how to respond to Syria's crisis.²³⁷

The request put forth by the 113 U.S. Congress for the authorization of the use of force in Syria, highlighted what the strategic purposes are in engaging in this kind of action against Assad. As stated by General Martin Dempsey, the necessity in the use of force rests in the fact that Assad has violated a norm which has been in existence since the end of the First World War. By responding directly to Assad, America is also sending a message to Iran and North Korea that such actions will not be tolerated, and that America is willing to act upon its international commitments.²³⁸ Secretary of State John Kerry highly emphasizes that the costs of inaction far outweigh any costs of action, as America must respond to its regional partners, and must respond to follow through on its

²³⁶ *ibid.*, 20.

²³⁷ *ibid.*, 20.

²³⁸ United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, The Authorization of Use of Force In Syria. Hearing before the 113th Congress, September 3, 2013. Testimony by U.S. General Dempsey.

interests and the values it wishes to protect.²³⁹ Responding with force also has a strategic intention as the aims of America's response will be to deter Assad's Regime from using these weapons, and degrade Assad's ability to carry out future attacks in this nature. Kerry asserts that when a method of attack is taken away from Assad, it has a profound effect on his military capabilities which ultimately serves into the purposes of a much larger grand strategy in removing Assad from power.²⁴⁰

Only seven days after the attack on August 21, U.S. warships began amassing alongside the Syrian coastline. Five destroyers armed with cruise missiles were ready and awaiting order to begin commencing, what would surely be a large scale military operation to destroy the chemical weapons facilities.²⁴¹ Russia responded to this immediate show of force by sending two of its warships, while Assad began deploying his Russian made S-300 surface to air missile systems, as well as other weapons systems, in order to further complicate any invasion.²⁴² America's response mirrors the exact parameters of the coercive diplomacy strategy. The original demand placed on Assad was to not cross this red line be it by use of chemical weapons or transferring them to other actors. However, when Assad passed this boundary, deterrence strategy was no longer a viable option for the U.S., and the strategy had to be adjusted in order to prevent Assad from using these weapons in the future.

The demonstration of force following the failure of the deterrence strategy opened a new window of opportunity for the U.S. to procure a diplomatic solution. Upon meeting in Geneva on September 14, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry began discussing the structure of a preliminary agreement that would set aside the building tensions in favour of a diplomatic solution that would see Syria

²³⁹ *ibid.*, Testimony by Secretary of State John Kerry.

²⁴⁰ *ibid.*

²⁴¹ Michel Chossudovsky, "U.S. and Allied Warships off the Syrian Coastline: Naval Deployment Was Declined "Before" the August 21 Chemical Weapons Attack." *Global Research*, September 2, 2013. Accessed May 13, 2013. <http://www.globalresearch.ca/massive-naval-deployment-us-and-allied-warships-deployed-to-syrian-coastline-before-the-august-21-chemical-weapons-attack/5347766>

²⁴² *ibid.*

hand over its chemical weapons to the international community. President Obama sanctioned this process by requesting approval for a strike in Syria through the U.S. Congress, thus delaying his intention to utilize military force. Russia's aim to cooperate openly with the U.S. on this issue, comes as a surprise given that on previous occasions it has made its discontent with negotiating on a multilateral level for a diplomatic solution in Syria quite well known. However, the motivation behind such actions is to prevent America's future use of armed intervention in Syria.²⁴³ For Washington, such an agreement is also beneficial, as it removes a key threat to international security and the procurement of these weapons is of grave interest to the U.S. Thus it makes logical sense that such a deal was endorsed quickly by both parties.

The agreement was put forth to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and on September 27, it was formalized by the O.P.C.W.'s executive council. This decision called for the immediate destruction of all of Syria's chemical weapons and set a deadline for completion to November 15, 2013.²⁴⁴ To further instate compliance from Damascus, the U.N. Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2118, supporting the measures of the formalized agreement provided by the O.P.C.W. and demanded that Syria agree to all measures within the agreement. Furthermore, Resolution 2118 requests that both the government and non-government actors comply with all the set conditions of the agreement. This specifically prohibits the transportation, distribution, acquisition or manufacturing of chemical weapons within Syria. In the event of non-compliance from any party, the U.N. will implore measures in Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter.²⁴⁵

As stated previously the U.S. has held two key interests in this conflict which are minimizing the risks of sectarian violence further destabilizing the region and the

²⁴³ RT News, "Chance for Syrian Peace Can't Be Missed: Lavrov on Kerry Talks." September 12, 2013. Accessed May 13, 2014. <http://rt.com/news/lavrov-kerry-geneva-syria-761/>

²⁴⁴ Mary Beth and Paul K. Kerr and Andrew Feickert, "Syria's Chemical Weapons: Issues for Congress." *Congressional Research Service*, (September 30, 2013): 21.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

procurement of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal. Having passed on the opportunity to directly influence events on the ground in Syria in favour of a diplomatic solution, Washington found it necessary to respond to such a severe violation of international norms and in doing so helped produce a diplomatic solution to procure such a vital interest. Furthermore, the actions taken in response to August 21, demonstrate that the U.S. was taking a coercive approach against Assad. The breaching of deterrence set forth the means to demonstrate to Assad that the U.S. was willing to implement a use of force without international approval to defend its interests. This established a new demand requesting Assad to hand over these chemical weapons or to face serious consequences. The O.P.C.W. agreement and Resolution 2118, are the linchpins of this strategy, as they establish a set deadline and reinforce compliance by authorizing an international response if Damascus does not offer its complete support. All three criteria of a successful coercive diplomacy strategy are met by this agreement, as it contains a direct request, a mandated and set timeline for compliance, and a demonstration of a willingness to use force to enhance cooperation. By demonstrating resilience and persistence in pursuing a diplomatic effort to secure its regional objectives, the U.S. has successfully secured one of its primary focuses in the conflict without having to resort to a risky and costly intervention.

Chapter 6. Findings and Closing Remarks.

6.1 Findings from the Empirical Analysis

Through this research paper, I have investigated several factors which influence U.S. posture and shape its actions in Syria, both in an internal and regional context. Combining evidence gathered on these different variables with the theory at hand, one can see that an interesting development takes place. The evolution of the Syrian War and the scope of its regional importance to several actors, has transformed this conflict into a war between different proxies. The presence of multiple players and the seemingly endless extent to which each individual actor is willing to become involved to protect their interests in the conflict, makes Syria a unique circumstance whose outcome is far

from being determined. One thing can be made certain, Iran with the help of Russia will not permit Assad to fall. As the theoretical model highlighted, when there is an influx of external actors in an internal conflict setting, many of these actors will divide the different domestic factions which best support their ideologies. With states such as Qatar, Iran, and Saudi Arabia supporting their preferred elements of the opposition forces, the S.N.C. has been driven towards redundancy. The opposition remains highly fractured due to the influence that these competing regional actors are forcing in Syria. Although such a condition does bode well for a system of power balancing, the direct interference of Russia and Iran operating in unison, has negated this delicate power balancing system in the Middle East. This carries profound consequences, as America is experiencing a limit in its abilities to influence key developments in Syria. At the same time it has been nearly impossible for the U.N. to facilitate a diplomatic solution. America has also limited the scope of its involvement in the conflict, by pursuing a negotiated diplomatic settlement.

Although acting in such a manner does produce strategic benefits for a great power, it seems that the benefits of such a strategy do not outweigh the costs. From favouring a diplomatic pursuit over all other options, the U.S. failed to capitalize on key developments during the spring and summer of 2012. By not responding to these developments, and instead focusing on the necessity to remain impartial towards the opposition forces, Washington allowed other states to fill the gap. By the time 2013 had arrived, it was already too late for the U.S. to change its strategy. The only remaining option for the U.S. was to continue its course for finding a diplomatic solution.

Now to its credit, the U.S. response in the form of sanctions both against Syria and Iran has paid dividends in garnishing an overbearing amount of pressure on both regimes. Yet in both cases, it has failed to deliver on regime change. However, it is worth noting that these sanctions have been establishing a means of dialogue with Iran and has even led to discussion on the negotiating table in regards to settling its nuclear program.

The loss in oil revenues in combination with the necessity for Iran to hold onto Syria, may provide the U.S. with enough leverage to sway Iran towards a settlement or

allow it to further bleed Iran dry in this conflict. This of course ties into the strategic thinking of how wedge strategies can shape international relations. So long as the sanctions on Syria continue to have such a detrimental effect on the Syria economy, it will be forever dependent on Iranian bankrolling and weapons. Thus by forcing sanctions on Iran, the U.S. can further drive a wedge between Iran and Syria, as Iran will have to come to the negotiating table in an effort to halt these sanctions. Even though the U.S. is blowing cold air on both Iran and Syria, it does not need to divide the two but simply force Iran into further isolation in order to limit its regional capabilities.

Although the reliance on the opposition forces to pressure Assad while working in conjunction with the sanctions, does appear to be a viable means for the U.S. to further its interests, there were other factors which it lacked the capacity to restrain. Russian vetoes for every major attempt to facilitate international intervention within Syria did come as a serious setback for the interests of the United States. Though Moscow has been unwavering in its efforts to undermine U.S. action in Syria, it has demonstrated that its relationship towards Iran is strategic, but Russia's relations with Syria are not of the same magnitude. Moscow favours Iran's economic dependency upon it, but its relations with Syria serve more as a means to prevent greater U.S. influence in the region. So long as Russia continues to profit from the conflict and other actors depended upon it to access Iran and Syria, then Moscow will continue its course.

What is also present in the analysis is that the events on August 21, initiated an American response which was highly successful in its end accomplishments. Although there is no substantial evidence indicating that Assad intentionally used these weapons, the sophistication of the technology in combination with the extent of the chemical attack, provided the U.S. with enough justification to warrant Assad's Regime responsible. The willingness to use force as pronounced within the U.S. Congress, provided Washington with enough leverage to assert its unsurpassed power, without fear of generating hegemonic blowback for initiating in this type of act. This was a justifiable response to Assad crossing an international norm. Furthermore, as I have emphasized, the

single determinant which beckons immediate U.S. action in a conflict, is when America feels its security interests are being directly threatened. The use of these weapons posed a significant threat to the region and was a game changer for America's strategy in the prohibition of nuclear armaments in Iran. A clear message had to be sent.

Russia's willingness to engage multilaterally on this issue and reaching both the America and the U.N. to establish Resolution 2118, came as quite a shock. Even though Russia did respond with a slight demonstration of its military's regional capabilities, Moscow developed a very constructive attitude when it became apparent that the U.S. was serious in its efforts to initiate in a military response. Moscow's cooperation with the international community, combined with the horrible developments in Syria, served as the backdrop for formulating Resolution 2118. Both of these conditions were necessary for formulating an agreement, and one can see how America's posture towards Syria is very much dictated by external factors and the ways in which they work in conjunction with one another.

It is interesting to note that with its first showing of assertive force in the region, America was given the opportunity to secure one of its major strategic interests in the conflict. This comes as a surprise given the theory which underlines that if a great power is to demonstrate its aggressive nature within a global conflict setting, it will be inviting severe counterhegemonic effects upon itself. The fact that America relied upon Russia's cooperation should not discount the overall success that a coercive strategy was able to create. America capitalized on an interval development in Syria, in which it could properly utilize its strategy and forceful abilities to procure its interest.

6.2 Testing the Hypotheses and Relating Evidence to the American Grand Strategy.

When comparing the findings and factual evidence in relation to the hypotheses stated earlier, certain elements uphold each of the previous hypotheses. For the first hypothesis, it stated that America could make good on its security interests in the conflict by operating indirectly by relying upon diplomatic measures to produce beneficial result.

Although the sanctions have not yet forced Assad to step down, they have had a profound effect on Syria's abilities to continue its daily operations. Similar methods have been instrumental for the U.S. in delaying Iran's nuclear ambitions, and have provided Iran with good reasoning to approach the negotiation table. The sanctions on Syria could have a similar effect, with the final goal being to forge a negotiated settlement to end the conflict.

Furthermore by weighing the risks associated with direct intervention, America has provided itself the opportunity to see the conflict evolve and can determine on its own accord when it is necessary to step in. Through keeping this offshore balancing approach, the U.S. has minimized the counterhegemonic effects that surely would ensue from being active in the conflict. It has demonstrated that when necessary it does not lack the effort to show its strength when its interests are being threatened, and from this process the diplomatic track has been a capable success. The only damaging evidence against this hypothesis is that the U.S. has not been successful in unifying the opposition, which is necessary to prevent the spread of sectarian war. This directs back to the null hypothesis and its viewpoint that the U.S. has not done enough to further its interests. Although there are several indications that the U.S. has acted in its own interests when it sees fit, the fact remains that the U.S. has been incapable of limiting Assad's abilities to feed off the nature of the sectarian violence. This hinders the overall effectiveness of the opposition, allows Assad to maintain support from the minority groups, and prolongs the war as it threatens to spread to other regions, making a negotiated settlement that much more difficult to obtain.

In regards to the third hypothesis or alternative, there is again evidence which supports that the America's level involvement has been limited by the presence of many other external actors, all of whom have their own interests in shaping Syria's future. Their preferred outcome to the conflict does not correspond to that of America's, and their active involvement makes American efforts appear to be that much shallower. Arguably, the more actors that are involved in a competition, the less room there will be

for maneuvering around their shared interests. Thus, America has found fortitude in remaining on the sidelines, and allowing its regional partners to achieve their own objectives. However, such a strategy does have a setback. America cannot fully commit to its own interests when using this strategy as it is very much at the whims of the other actors whom are aggressively involved and its policy becomes more of a reactionary effort.

Yet what the null and alternative hypotheses fail to predict or account for is the level of involvement America would take in response to August 21. The willingness to use force demonstrates that America's interests in the conflict are strong enough to warrant a military action. Furthermore if America's level of commitment was only determined by the scope of the other actors engaged in the conflict, it would not have had the means to generate such a high measure of response, which ultimately facilitated a deal protecting its interests. America's show of force did not ignite a powder keg of counterhegemonic effects, but in fact resulted in Russia's willingness to collaborate on an agreement which furthered the diplomatic cause. Thus in this regard the first hypothesis is supported by the empirical findings, while the null and alternative hypotheses fail to account for the events that led for the formulation of Resolution 2118.

Having discussed how the empirical data tests the validity of the proposed hypotheses, it is possible to answer the research question and to finally assert how America's policy in Syria is a reflection of its greater security strategy. To begin with, the coercive diplomatic track used following the attack on August 21, best exemplifies the means in which the U.S. can foster its security interests in a conflict, in which it has very little control over. What granted America the ability to engage in this conflict in such a manner and leave with an agreement, is reflected in the ways it has regulated its posture and involvement prior to the critical moment of response. By limiting its military involvement in the conflict and lessening the degree to which it would be associated to occurrences on the ground, it allowed the international system to balance itself, as regional players became more involved in the conflict for their own reasons.

When the timing became appropriate to demonstrate what America's primary security interest was, it had the aggregate power necessary to demonstrate this showing of force. This raised the stakes for all others whom were already involved, and forced their compliance on an important issue or they would risk losing the status quo. This same result would not have been achieved if America became more involved during the onset of the Syrian War, as the threat of American force would already have been presented. This relates to the greater strategic focus at hand as adopting a policy of offshore balancing, in regards to the Middle East, allows America to remain on its direct course of pressuring Iran. Iran is possibly America's greatest global security threat and Washington has devised a disposition on how to best handle this threat. By carefully using wedge strategies and balancing against Iran, the U.S. has been successful in imposing sanctions and certain restrictions on Iran and has driven it into further isolation, through driving a wedge between Iran and many of its trading partners. It is an imperative that America does not take action which hinders its abilities or forces a concession on its progress with Iran. This is why offshore balancing fits greater U.S. strategic objectives both regionally and globally. Such a strategy denies America from becoming caught in a compromising position and curbs the counterhegemonic effect.

Relying upon diplomatic measures, allows the offshore balancing approach to function. If military objectives became the standard bearer of protecting global interests, America would be consumed by an endless cycle of strife and having to fight against the constant wave of counterhegemonic balancing. Thus, diplomatic measures and offshore balancing remain mutually exclusive with one another. Offshore balancing allows the diplomatic track to function, while the diplomatic track ensures that U.S. strategic goals will be met by following the process.

6.3 Concluding Remarks

The overall attempt of this study was to contribute to the existing knowledge of what is readily available for understanding the Syrian War. The findings discussed here cross many theoretical reasons that explain why several actors are brought into a conflict

setting. Although I have accumulated an abundance of sources which all provided evidence as to what America's policy on Syria is, and how the unfolding of certain events determined America's involvement. There remains a substantial amount of detail which is not in circulation as it is classified. The factual evidence on American policy towards Iran during over the course of this conflict will be highly intriguing to study once it becomes unclassified. Despite not having access to such information, my level of analysis and use of sources should not discount from the findings of this research.

On a further note, in determining if this conflict marks a pivotal moment in U.S. strategic thinking, one can deduce from the findings of this study that America's course of action in Syria has largely been determined by other factors which are unique to this conflict. It would be far-fetched to conclude that the U.S.'s efforts in Syria were methodically laid out. This would be an impossible reality, as American policy in Syria has largely been conducted by observing and responding to events on the ground as they unfold. What is significant about Syria is not what it indicates about how America will procure its security interests in the future, but the ways in which it must now go about securing its interest amongst the presence of several international actors. Syria has shown that the U.S. must collaborate with Russia and China in order to further their greater interests, and this conflict has also exposed the reality that multipolarity is once again a key facet of the international system. No longer will China and Russia stay silent about their own interests nor will they accept being sidelined, and this will carry serious implications on how the West manages its global strategic aims.

Syria is an ongoing conflict and the final chapter is far from completion. It will be interesting to see if the combining of the opposition's forces with elements of foreign fighters and extremist groups, along with a future agreement between Iran and U.S.A. on nuclear proliferation, will ultimately hasten Assad's exit.

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