

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

Russia's military intervention in Syria is unprecedented, both in scope and scale. The action in itself has financial, military, and political costs. And yet, despite the expenses, the military intervention occurred and persist. **What causes Russia's continued military intervention in Syria?** This author argued that the answer to this question is; **due to the high intensity of the security dilemma in Russia's perception of the Syrian situation, Russia feels compelled to take action to protect its interests and prevent its opponent from gaining the further advantage.**

To answer the research question of this thesis, this author has discovered five key findings. This thesis utilizes Jervis' conception of Offense-Defense Theory to determine the intensity of the security dilemma occurring in and around the Syrian situation from 2015 to the present day. However, before moving into Jervis' theoretical framework, this author felt the need to discuss the context of how Russia perceives its security and how they react to the security dilemma. This was done in an attempt to unravel Russia's decision to militarily intervene—and stay—in Syria.

The **first** is regarding Russia's perception of security and how they react to the security dilemma. Based on this author's findings, there exists a common conception among Russian policymakers that have existed historically and

continues to exist to the present day. This phenomenon is observed by many political scientists and historians. Several of Russia's geopolitical motivations remains consistent for centuries; there's an apparent predicament with the Russian geography in which created a constant feeling of insecurity within the Russian state. More recently, present-day Russian policymakers have expressed grown concern towards NATO enlargement and interference into Russia's near-abroad. Based on the Russo-Georgian War and the Ukrainian conflict, this author argued that **Russia's typical response towards the security dilemma is use of force and coercion**. Russia believes in conducting first-strikes, to seize any opportunity before their adversaries' had the opportunities to. In the Russian rationale, this works as a preemptive. That their adversaries present an existential threat to Russia. Hence—in order to attain security—Russia must make the first move preempting external attack.

Second, Russia plays an increasingly important role in Syria, and their influence is not diminishing; it is arguably growing. In addition, Russia posits several key interests in Syria; in which their perceived 'adversaries' are actively involved as well as acts in contradiction to Russia's interests. These interests require Russia to maintain the statehood of Syria and its sovereignty.

Third, Russia isn't capable to distinguish offensive or defensive postures from its adversaries due to the complicated nature of the situation. This is exemplified by four cases. The NATO enlargement policy, perceived by Russia as a policy of containment; NATO's intervention in the Libyan civil war, perceived

by Russia as another Western attempt at overthrowing undesirable regimes; CJTF-OIR attacks towards Syrian government forces, inconsistent with their published mission statement; and Turkey's military invasion, which represents another conflict of interests and dangerous power play in the conflict. In each of these cases, Russia isn't able to determine its opponent's intentions as wholly benign or hostile, therefore increasing the security dilemma.

Fourth, in the Syrian situation, Russia's opposition possesses offensive advantages. Therefore increasing the likelihood of conflict. This is determined by two factors: technology and geography. Prior to the Russian intervention, Russia's adversaries possess significant geographical advantages with a comparable technological advantage. However, the proximity of Syria to Russia's adversaries' military bases and borders alone left Syria vulnerable to foreign incursion. In addition, after the Russian intervention, other actors proceed to deploy ground forces in Syria—which Russia deemed as illegal. The existence of ground forces undermining the Syrian government or protecting rebel-held areas presents a direct threat to Russia's interests—therefore increasing the likelihood of conflict.

Fifth, for Russia, the perceived security dilemma in Syria is doubly dangerous. Therefore, continued presence in the conflict is necessary to maintain the status quo and prevent losses. The findings concluded that because Russia is unable to conclusively discern its adversaries' intentions as wholly benign or hostile, Russia then needs to assume the worst to produce an effective response and prevent any possible losses. In terms of balance, its adversaries also possess a

significant offensive advantage due to factors of geography and technology. In the absence of an intervention, Russia then perceives an inherent threat to its interests and security.

When a security dilemma exists, Russia typically responds with the use of force—and seizing opportunities when they could. Based on this construct, it is within the Russian rationale to conduct a military intervention in Syria and continue their presence. Hence, this author argues, that so long as their adversaries retain offensive advantages with inherent interests in undermining Syria's sovereignty, the Russian military presence will continue indefinitely. Russia cannot afford the overthrow of the Syrian government, especially when the security dilemma persists. Accordingly, in a hypothetical scenario where the security dilemma decreases, we may be able to see a decrease in Russia's military presence.

With that, this author acknowledges the many shortcomings of this research. First off, the author possesses a limited understanding of the technicalities of weapon systems and their overall implications on the battlefield. This author is fully aware that one of the primary measurement tools in ODT lies in the technicalities of technology and weapons used. However, as a writer coming from international relations background, this author is more well-versed in policies and political implications—rather than technical military capabilities. Hence the emphasis towards policies and their implications in the research.

One of the fundamentals of our study has been primarily about how to prevent war and conflict. With this research, the author sought to rationalize Russia's decision to intervene in the Syrian civil war through an international relations theoretical perspective. Rationalizing Russia's decision to intervene and maintain a military presence in Syria is significant for the future of international relations. Russia has shown they are more confident in doing power projection into areas and territories from which they were previously absent from. Therefore, it continues to be relevant in international relations spheres. It is hoped that others could research the issue to develop a further understanding regarding Russia's rationale in military intervention.

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