



CRITICAL REVIEW

The role of Russia, China, Iran and their foreign policies towards Syria on the Arab Spring”

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Abstract. This paper focuses on the main Syrian allies' foreign policies: Russia, China, and Iran. They maintain their policies not to intervene in the Syrian civil war. The paper also investigates Russia, China, and Iran's foreign policies towards Syria since the 2011 Arab Spring. The analysis and argument are based on a realism lens and apply the game theory to test the hypothesis. This research examines how game-theoretic analysis of externals' foreign policies have shown their national interests and strategic cooperation movement. Therefore, it has proven its interdependent strategies among the players (Syria and its allies). Thus, Constructivism theory is used to analyze the norms, beliefs, and ideas that shape a state's foreign policy. This research paper argues that Syria's external allies continue to support Syria to gain their common interests and play major roles in regional politics. Nevertheless, the relationship between Syria and its allies appears to be continued, and they will keep supporting the Assad regime. Finally, the research paper highlights the important motivations for policymakers of the Syrian allies that they are involved in the Syrian crisis acting on both regional and international stages.

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INTRODUCTION

The “Arab Spring” has shaken the global politics, and has brought many changes in the Middle East many states have become interested in this political phenomenon. The “Arab Spring”, or so-called the “Arab uprising”, began at the end of 2010 in Tunisia, has demonstrated the ongoing conflict between citizens and their governments, and resulted in the loss of huge number of casualties.

In Syria, the protests began in the middle of March 2011 when the protestors had called for government's reform and demanded for the political freedom, freedom of expression, and freedom of press. Dawisha (2013) reviews that the biggest protest took place in Daraa in the south of Syria. Gelvin (2012) states that there were protestors who called for the resignation of President Basha al-Assad, demanding for equal rights of Kurdish citizens and the end of long oppressive rule of Ba'ath party for more than three decades. There were claims that Assad's government used violent crackdowns against the protestors and

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killed innocents. Many states have had economic sanctions on Syria such as the United States and European Union. The Arab League also suspended Syria's membership on November 2011 and condemned Syrian government for using violence against their citizens (Kucukkeles, 2012). Empirically, while other states call Syrian government as a brutal government to use violence as crackdown and sanction on Syria, there are Russia, China and Iran who still support Syrian government. It is noted that Russia, China and Iran have policies to not intervene in Syria's political matter and are considered to be Syria's important allies.

The research question is that "What are the important factors that construct foreign policies of Russia, China and Iran to support Syrian regime during the Syrian uprising and civil war?" The purpose of this paper is to provide an analytical framework to understand the external motivations of involvement in Syrian domestic issues. This paper also presents the overview of the Syrian allies' role in the various aspects.

Aforesaid in view, this research examines the factors that Russia, China and Iran policies have been supporting Syria through the lens of Realism and by applying Game theory, and Constructivism to help clarifying the variables. Game theory takes part in the Realist approach. The theory is related to the study of conflict and cooperation that focuses on the strategic interaction between rational actors who can pursue either competitive or collaborative strategies towards each other (Baylis *et al.* 2011). Thus, coalition game can also be applied to analyze the case of this research. Coalition means one player is willing to cooperate on the part of another that can lead to a better outcome. Brams (1975, 78) states that "a coalition's ability to enforce an agreement seems clearly related to its power, and how it might be valued as defined by the characteristic function". Brams (1975) also states that a positive-sum game implies that player may have common interests in order to achieve the outcomes that maximize their total payoffs. The game theory focuses on strategic interactions to the central issues. The author will discuss how to use the game theory to understand the impact of Russia, Iran and China's foreign policies on Syria.

Constructivism explains the state's behaviour that is shaped by ideas, norms and values. The key of Constructivism is "concerned with human consciousness, treating ideas as structural factors, considering the dynamic relationship between ideas and material forces as a consequence of how actors interpret their material reality, and are interested in how agents produce structures and how structures produce agents" (Reus-Smit, 2013, 159). Alexander Wendt introduced the agent-structure problem to IR scholars about how to conceptualize the relationship between agents; states and structures; the international structure (Reus-Smit, 2013, 152).

The research methodology is qualitative method. Content analysis is able to conduct the analysis from newspaper articles, journal contents, speeches and also able to explore the data. The secondary resources were received from the related books, scholar's journals, articles and research. Elite interviewing is another selected useful research method to interview specific professionals who can provide information, ideas as well as suggestions to this research. The selected qualitative methodology is able provide an in-depth analysis and

information. Because the Syrian Uprising is a current issue, the need of experts' and scholars' interviews will ensure the reliability of understanding this issue.

Therefore, the first hypothesis is that the involvement of Russia, China and Iran responds to strategic concerns as in the game theory, they continue to support Syrian government to earn national interests. The second hypothesis is Russia, China and Iran's perceptions of respecting sovereignty and non-intervention are considered the most valuable and powerful factors to maintain the political regime in Syria.

The scope of time for this research is from 2011 to 2014. This research focuses on the states that are allies to Syrian government namely Russia, China and Iran and attempts to find out the factors that lead their roles and foreign policy to support Assad regime. The author is always aware that during the time of this study, there is the emerging of the ISIS or Islamic States of Iraq and al-Sham and their terrorist destructions to take part in Iraq and Syria, and cause the hardship for the world.

This research contributes to study the motivations of Syrian alliances to have the policy support and action support to Syrian government. It will help students in International Relations to be able to understand the involvement and supporting of the external actors into some domestic affairs.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this section, all literature reviews are related to the topic which the scholars have written about the relationship between Syria and its allies. Allison (2013) explains about the relationship between Russia and Syria that Russian position provides the most noticeably diplomatic shield for Syrian state with arms supplies (Allison, 2013). Thus, Allison (2013, 795) argues that "the Russian critique of past western-inspired interventions is insufficient by itself to explain its policy towards Syria". Therefore, the foreign policy concept ideas of Russia are "that are being implemented ... aimed at overthrowing legitimate authorities in sovereign states under the pretext of protecting the civilian population', efforts to 'manage crises through unilateral sanctions and other coercive measures' are a risk to world peace and stability" (Allison, 2013, 796). The author has observed the reasons that Russia was involved in Syrian conflict in which Nizameddin (2012) revealed that Russia used the new style in Middle East policy under president Putin. Arms trade and military were particularly the concerns which the United States are aware of. It is similar to Allison's argument about arms exporting concern of Russia that was one factor for its policy-making. Interestingly, he states "Russian mind-set for Syria was a means of stonewalling Western influence in southwest Asia...and Iran and Syria are Russia's two major friends in the region" (Nizameddin, 2012). The strength analysis by Nizameddin (2012) gave the insight idea about the relationship more deeply into personal affairs between both leaders.

The next journal is "Syria: What China had learned from its Libya experience" by Sun (2012). Sun (2012) considers China's veto in UNSC for Syrian resolution agreed with Holland's (2012) that China's veto power is very important and China reaffirms about its principle of Non-Intervention. Sun (2012) also discovers that China is developing its own strategy to handle Syrian situation which China chooses to "wait and see". The result of China's veto can protect Syria and Assad from military intervention. China has learnt from the

experience from Libya and now China considered that it would not be better if China voted for the UNSC Resolutions against Syria. In contrast, China's veto could recover Russia from being isolated in international stage. Therefore, China could gain Sino-Russia diplomatic cooperation. In sum, Sun (2012) concludes that China policy and the new strategies towards Arab Spring were getting more mature, flexible, and sophisticated.

Lastly, it is about the relationship between Syria and Iran and their strategic partnerships. Lawson (2007) discusses about the relationship between Syria and Iran by showing Syria's policies towards adversaries (Turkey, Iraq and Israel). If Syria government decided to conciliate with major adversary, Iran will be anxious that Syria will abandon it. He states that when Damascus assures to have policies that challenge its opponents, Iran can assume to be more confident and assertive (Lawson, 2007, 30). He further explains about Iran's role in Lebanon and the ties between Syria and Hezbollah. In sum, Lawson's study (2007) reviews that when one state (Syria or Iran) has used moderate strategies and policies with their opposed states, its ally will assume to have preliminary policy towards adversary too. The relationship between Syria and Iran can date back to the period of Hafiz al-Assad, the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and during the Iraq-Iran War in 1980s (Lesch, 2012). In addition, Iran is the sponsorship of Hezbollah, in both military and financial terms, which leads Syria to have further close relationship with Lebanon.

All in all, the literature review provides sufficient information and previous researches. Most scholars concern about policy maker and national interests that lead to policy decision. Therefore, this research will be conducted to find in-depth factors that contribute to Russia, China, and Iran to have supporting foreign policy towards Syria. The author has reviewed the literature and seen that the argument of Realist can explain best about the decision of Russia, China and Iran towards Syria. However, Constructivism school of thought can also be used to explain about ideas, norms and other ideological elements that can lead state to behave and shape their foreign policies. For Realism as explained by Lawson, (2007, 21) he states "the Structural Realists give the top priority to maximizing their individual well-being, and do their best to guard against being attacked, conquered, or otherwise exploited by others". He further suggests that when the states pursue for maximizing their own security under other states' anarchy, it will culminate in jeopardizing other states' interests. Besides, Constructivism can explain about the principles that states believe with opened perspective to look further than just material factors.

Syrian Important Allies and Their Relations

This research argues that the involvement of external actors who are Syrian good allies could play very influential roles for supporting the sovereignty of Syria and the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad. Their involvements can bring the significant changes to Syrian crisis. The methodology is qualitative method by using the documentary research, content analysis and elite interviews.

a. Russia and Syria relations

Russian government has been responding to the Arab Spring as one of important political actors. However, the choice of response has been mediated

by internal political factors, and by collective and individual perceptions. Allison (2013) explains that “Russian Foreign ministry’s foreign policy concept disdained the idea of implementing and aimed at overthrowing legitimate authorities in sovereign states under the pretext of protecting the civilian population”. In other word, Russian government does not agree with overthrowing the legitimate regime or government of one sovereign state. Bond *et al.* (2015) emphasize the negative perceptions of President Putin towards the public protests and opposition movements, the interpretation of and reaction to the Arab Spring. These responses should be deliberate on the Russia’s internal situations which are not simply through a regime change lens, because these movements could bring Sunni fundamentalist into power like those who are against Russia in the North Caucasus. While (Poonkham, Personal Communication, August, 2015) draws attention to the “Grand project” of Russia which is to be recognized as the world superpower, Russia acts to protect its close ally in the Middle East and also its neighbour’s issue such as Crimea.

Russia has multiple motivations towards the supporting Syrian regime. Russia and China share the common motivation which they does not allow Western-supported regime change in sovereign states. Donaldson and Joseph (2009) state that Putin criticized NATO-led intervention in Libya. Russian President believes that the humanitarian support should not result in the execution of Gaddafi and had led to the fall of the regime. Putin also insisted that there should not be the permission to operate intervention same as the Libyan scenario in Syria. Poonkham, Personal Communication, (August, 2015) emphasizes that the lesson of Libya is prominent for Russia and proves that humanitarian intervention could not always solve the internal affairs. Particularly, this was the reason Russia and China had vetoed UN Security Council resolutions that could lead to authorize armed intervention in Syria.

In comparison, Russia and China vetoed the U.S. and European-sponsored UNSC draft resolutions regarding Syria. Syria’s situation was very influenced by the situation in Libya. Russia fears that these resolutions would interpret to allow military intervention and regime change in Syria, as it happened in Libya. Tsygankov (2013) reaffirms that “the Kremlin instead pushed for negotiations between Bashar al-Assad and the military opposition. The BRIC summit held in April 2012 in India then further supported negotiations in Syria. As of May 2012, the Kremlin moved closer to accepting the possible removal of Assad, but not at the cost of dismantling the Syrian regime or losing Russia’s influence over it”. It can be said that Russia learned from the Libya case of military intervention that ousted the regime of Gaddafi, it does not want the same result to harm Syrian regime of Assad. Thus, witnessing Libyan regime got overthrown, Russia was careful about its vote and veto power in the UNSC about the resolution that could lead to intervention.

For trading aspect, Arms trade between Russia and Syria is very crucial. Russia and Syria have been trading for arms and military equipment since 1950s. The statistics show that in 1973 Arab-Israeli War (Yom Kippur War) Syria imported Russian weaponry for 4,000 tons to rearm Syrian and Egyptian army (Globalsecurity.org, 2013). There was a time when Russia suspended the arms trade with Syria in 1976 but they restarted trading two years later. After the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia resumed trade with Syria again. According to Bagdonas (2012), there was 78 percent of all arms trade from Russia to Syria

during 2007-2011. Although the arms market in Syria is not considered a large market for Russia, Russia still backs up for Syria due to many other variables.

Moscow and Damascus relationship is not reliant on economics alone, there are military relations that Moscow has an access to Mediterranean. From Military aspect, Russia has a naval facility base in Syria in the port of Tartus. The Tartus Naval military base was established in 1971 to practice military navy activities until 1991, it had no use for navy but instead it has been used for resupply of warships (Bagdonas, 2012). However, this Navy base is regarded as the important Russian navy base in the regions. Because of Tartus port, Russia is able to reach Indian Ocean and Red Sea via the Suez Canal as well.

b. China- Syria relations

After the Cold War, Chinese foreign policy focuses more on economic development as well as to create peaceful international environment. Chinese foreign policy was concentrated on moderation and integration. Basically, Chinese foreign policy towards the global politics concentrates on economics and development. According to Harris (2014), China's leaders employ its foreign policy as same as method that most countries do to use coercion (force or economic pressure), inducement (most commonly trade, aid and investment), or persuasion (including reputation, ideology and soft power more generally) to pursue their international objectives. Chinese foreign policy has shifted towards the multi-polar world, economic and military development. In addition, some argue that China's grand strategy attempts to see "peace and development" and "China's peaceful rise" (Harris, 2014).

China and Syria, in particular, are long diplomatic and trade partners. In 2009, Chinese Vice Premier Hui Liangyu visited Damascus and met with President Bashar al-Assad. Assad gave a speech to Syria, China will deepen the relations of mutual benefit and cooperation between the two countries in various fields, and to push the bilateral ties to a new height. The Chinese vice premier also presented China's determination to strengthen coordination and expand their relations too because they have diplomatic relationship with Syria for more than five decades (Roy, 2013).

During the Arab Spring, we have witnessed the role of UNSC in attempting to solve problems and provide resolutions to ease the conflicts. Libya was a notable case that has more or less effect on the decision of Russia and China about Syria. China did not veto for UNSC Resolution 1973 on Libya in 2011, but one year later, China's decision to veto the February 2012 Security Council draft resolution was taken that demanded that the Syrian President should step down (Harris, 2014). While China and Russia abstained and did not veto on Libya case, but they vetoed for Syrian case, it shows the important shift of their foreign policies and decision-making that with the similar events of Arab Spring, what are the important causes that lead China and Russia to react on voting differently? Nevertheless, China also talked to the Syrian opposition and attempted to be the mediator for solving the conflict (The Economist, 2015). The effort that China did on Libya was turned out to be negative and the West will look at China as "an undemocratic country with poor human rights record and the Arab States will always side with the West" (Sun, 2012, 2).

China has principles of non-intervention and takes action to promote the peaceful coexistence as its core of policy. During the crisis in the Arab Spring,

humanitarian intervention has been focused on and international community has paid attention to it. For China's action towards the regime change, Chinese government believes that the international interest in humanitarian intervention that includes regime change is a major concern to China's elites about the effects to China's allies. During Syrian crisis, Harris (2014) emphasizes that the UN resolutions that seek to change the leadership are the unpleasant principles among Chinese leaders and they also express concern about these ideas to the West, particularly about "reforms in domestic governance processes that involve human rights and democracy".

China is growing energy relations and trading with the Middle East. The Middle Eastern oil is a resource for China's energy oil supplies. Oil interests of China may be one factor to shape Chinese foreign policy towards the Middle East. The Economist (2015) indicates the statistics of oil import of China which show that more than 50 percent is imported from the Middle East. In 2014, China imported oil from Middle East up to 51.2 percent, and the rest was imported from Russia, Latin America countries and others in total import of 6.2 million barrels per day. In 2015, China became the world's biggest importer of crude oil, more than 3 million barrels per day (The Economist, 2015), which is more than the U.S. Syria is not the main oil-producing country, so why did China veto to protect Syrian regime? The Economist points out that in Egypt, Iran and Syria, the Chinese cars are the most famous and Chinese's cloths, toys and plastics too. In 2014, the CIA World Factbook (2015) reported that China shared 5.5 percent of total imports of Syrian import partners, which was less than in 2013 when it was 12 percent (\$690 Millions) (OEC, 2015). FAO.org (2015) reports that Syria imported Soybeans, Cotton Lint, Rubber Nat dry and palm oil from China in 2011. In 2010, Syria imported 9.95 percent from China and 4.92 from Russia (Economywatch.com, 2015).

After China vetoed for UNSC resolution on Syria, it is labelled as the Assad regime supporter that affects Chinese economic trading partner from Arab states. China- Saudi Arabia are also important trade partners and have good diplomatic relationship. Notably during the conflict, China can still maintain its role and relations with Saudi Arabia even though China is named to be Syrian government's supporter. Even though the Chinese economic conditions were impacted by the Middle East crisis, it does not impact Chinese world market as a whole. China still continues to be a strong and rising economic power.

c. Iran-Syria relations

Iran and Syria had built their alliance and have been maintaining their strong ties for more than thirty years. During the past couple of years, Iran has played the significant role during the Arab Spring especially in Syria. Tehran has been supporting the Assad government in Syria mostly in military aids. This part examines the relationship between Iran and Syria in four dimensions: political relationships, Iranian foreign policy towards Syria during Arab Spring, Hezbollah support and geo-political strategy.

Since the unrest in Syria began in 2011, the alliance between Iran and Syria has shown more correlations and common interests. Through the proof of Syria backed by Iran since the 1979 Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War (1980s), Syria becomes the closest Arab country and strategic alliance to Iran ever since. In particular, Iran has conducted a complex strategy with Syria with the three

main pillars of Iranian foreign policy. Bazoobandi (2014) indicates the main pillars of Iranian policy are; first is to maintain the strategic grounds of retaliating to Israeli military aggression; second is support and sustain its relationship with Syria and Assad regime; and third is to maintain the balance of power in the Middle East region. Certainly, Iran's military assistants in Syria had prevented the collapse of the Assad regime.

There are two types for foreign policy makers of Islamic Republic of Iran: the conservative and the moderate foreign policy makers. For the conservative side, Venetis (2011) states that Iranian foreign policy aims towards the Iranian nuclear programme and enhances relationship with Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. It is also the tool of countering US influence in the region. Whereas, the moderate foreign policy makers also support the tight relationship with Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, and also the rapprochement with the West. Their main arguments are also related to broaden geo-political development to build up Iran's power.

An interview with Savadi (personal communication, August 25, 2015) states that Iran and Syria have very close brotherly relationship. Since the Syrian crisis has begun, Iranian government has helped and assisted Syria through the advisory, diplomatic activities, and media. Savadi (personal communication, August 25, 2015) revealed that Iran has defended the Syrian nation against the terrorist groups and their satanic supporters. His view towards Arab Spring in Syria is that "Syrian case was different from other Arab Spring movements. In fact, some Western powers and the reactionary governments of the region tried to make use of those movements to overthrow the axis of resistance and the revolutionary government of Syria" (Savadi, Personal Communication, August 25, 2015).

Since the start of the Arab uprisings, there are several discussions about the role of Iran in regional politics and its strategies towards the Arab world. Erlich (2014) states that in 2011, the Iranian government sent riot-control equipment to the Syrian authorities, trained their police, and helped establish local militias. The Iranian authorities learned to control situation, cope with the protestors and suggested Syrian government to crush the movement early by striking hard. Iran has been backing Syria by sending military supplies including ground forces. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) of Iran is seen to be the powerful ground force. Iran sent the IRGC to assist Assad's counterinsurgency in the eastern and northern Syria in summer 2012. However, Fulton *et al.* (2013) claim that because of the involvement of IRGC and the strategic approach to control the insurgency, it led Syrian situation to civil war.

Considering the factor of Iran and her anti-US policy, the several attempts of Israel and the U.S. to try to break Syria away from Iran have come forward. But Syria has continued to be an alliance with Iran being one of the main justifications of Western attempts to overthrow Assad (Erlich, 2014). He also states that Iran also felt threatened by pro-US regimes in the Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Jordan. He affirms that if the regime of Assad falls, it would radically shift the geo-politics of the region and it is going to be difficult for Iran (Erlich, 2014). The U.S. itself already had tense relationship with Iran since the 1979 Iranian Revolution and Iran has the anti-US policy, which makes the Iranian-Syrian relation in the US perspective to be dissatisfied. The U.S. has one of the priorities as anti-terrorism whereas Iran and Syria were seen to be the state sponsors to terrorism like Hezbollah and Hamas.

Discussion of Alliances' Foreign Policies Towards Syria

This following figure is the framework to test the hypothesis by game theory of non-zero sum game, the players are Syria (*A*) and Russia (*B*). This figure is also applied for China-Syria, and Iran-Syria, by replacing China or Iran to Russia position of (*B*).

The figure 1 shows the game theory of two-person non-zero sum game with the applying of Russia and Syria as the player. This game shows how two players are better to cooperate. The first roll is cooperative which means when both players cooperate with each other, they get the result as (4,4) which implies that it is the "best" result. While the outcome of (2,3) and (3,2) is called Nash Equilibrium which mean when both players cannot improve upon unilaterally, then they follow the other player's recommendation to get the best outcome. The game always has the equilibrium point where all players choose their actions that are the best choice for them and provide choices to their opponents as well. Both countries wish to gain the best option for them.

		Syria (<i>A</i>)	
		Cooperative	Defect
Russia, China, Iran (<i>B</i>)	Cooperative	(4,4)	(2,3)
	Defect	(3,2)	(1,1)

Key (x,y) = pay off to A, pay off to B,C or D.
4 = Best; 3 = next-best; 2 = next-worst; 1 = worst

Figure 1. Game theory of non-zero sum game (positive sum game)

a. Russia and Syria according to the game, explaining from the elements of national interests and ideological interests

From the figure of non-zero sum game above, it analyzes the relations of Syria and Russia. Russian initiative actions clearly show that Moscow has asserted itself as a supportive "player" for Syria during the Arab Spring. To illustrate, when Syria is in the situation that Syrian government could not perform well or to cope with the international pressure, Syrian leader can follow the suggestions that Russia advises. For example, when Russia vetoed the draft resolution towards Syria in the UNSC, Assad followed the resolution but eliminating the chemical weapons (Allison, 2013). This shows that Syrian government trusts Russian leader and reacts according to Russian gives as advise. In fact, Russia utterly has more power than Syria in the global stage as in the position in P-5 of UNSC, as the influential state power, and Russia has capability to negotiate and veto. Furthermore, the decisions of Russia on how to deal with Syria are also best for Syria.

As seen from the game, both states are chosen to cooperate in their quests for big payoff. In Syrian crisis, Syria has the best choice to cooperate with Russia to gain supports and to gain the reinforcements from Russia in international aspects, and in Russian power in the global stage. Otherwise, in international intervention from NATO, the UN or the West could take place in Syria. Therefore, Russia has chosen the cooperative strategy to support Syrian

government who is Russian closest Middle East alliance. The best action for both is cooperative moves. However, one can argue that Russia can defect from Syrian civil war, so there will be international intervention to ease the crisis. This thesis argues that Russia does not agree with the Western-led intervention to Syria because it will repeat the situation happened in Libya in which Russia cannot afford to lose Syria and the regime of Assad, as well as to see the massive attack that could massacre civilians.

In October 2011 and January 2012, Russia attempted to cooperate with the Arab League in order to create the Peace Plan, calling Assad Regime to "withdraw armoured vehicles and stop violence against protesters, [and] release all political prisoners and begin a dialogue with the opposition" (Bagdonas, 2012, 59), but the Arab League failed and withdraw its observers from Syria. Trying to play a mediator role in the Syrian crisis, Russia was disappointed when the Arab League failed to negotiate with Assad. However, Russia has not given up to process the peace plan with the Arab League for Syria as the political resolution. It is agreed with Bagdonas (2012) that Russian's diplomatic activities only provide Assad the diplomatic shield from international pressure, and is not an applicable resolution for Syrian government to follow.

The relationship with Syria, regarding Russian interests, will remain in its present state. Russian foreign policy towards Syria helps promote peace and stability without intervention. Thus, Russian presence in Syrian crisis during the Arab Spring can be described as two main factors; material and ideological factors as followed.

The material factors that can be seen for Russia-Syria relations are the diplomatic relationship, the military cooperation, the economic relations and the position of Russia in the UNSC. Russia concerns about the relationship with Syria, notably the strength of diplomatic relationship between them. Therefore, it is convinced that the long-lasting diplomatic relationship between Damascus and Moscow is more considerable than other factors. Whereas the economic and military factors are concerned to be influential elements, both Russia and Syria have been depending on each other during the war time, the Cold war and crises. Syria would enjoy the great backing from Russia. Simultaneously, Russia cannot abandon Syria like other states because Russia has the military base in the Tartus port of Syria. Even though the port is not the full military base, it is the only Russian naval facility that is located in the Middle East and easy to access to the Middle East. If Putin government does not support Assad, Russians could probably lose Syrian alliance and lose the naval base too. Therefore, military equipment that Syria had purchased from Russia included the large amount of weaponry such as fighter jets and surface-to-air missile systems (Donaldson and Joseph, 2009). In 2011, the report shows that Syrian government purchased \$1 billion worth of arms (Globalsecurity.org, 2013). Likewise, Syrian army is greatly dependant on Russian military arms and weaponry. Syrian government will continuously need heavy support from Russia.

The ideological factors are according to the Russia's grande strategy to be the world superpower, to compete with the U.S, and the principles of non-intervention and respect of sovereignty. These ideological factors also contribute to the decision-making process of Russia to act as it does in the UNSC

and throughout the President interviews through media. The status of Russia in the international stage is also seen to be active and functioned as the world power state. The position of Russia in the UNSC seems to benefit Syria. Russia can negotiate and balance the decision of the UNSC resolutions not to be in American or Western favour. To compete with the role of the U.S., Russian president has attempted to balance the world power in the UNSC as mentioned above that Russia will not repeat the lesson of Libya and the Western-led intervention because of its beliefs in the principles of non-intervention. Putin's influential decisions to support Assad remain the important aspects that help Syrian regime, according to Monaghan (2013) who states that Russia has priorities in resolving global problems. It is also proved to other international actors about the Grande strategy of Russia to regain its superpower role.

It can be argued that the combination of material and ideological factors are resulted to be the supporting policy towards Syria. Without one of the factors, Syria would not have the strong and solid support from Russian government. Regardless the national interests that Russia and Syria will gain from this relation, it can be stated that Russia will continue to sustain relationship with Syria due to the historic and diplomatic relationship and also earn the Middle Eastern fellows in the global arena.

b. Iran-Syria relations according to the game

For Syria-Iran, the positive sum game also explains well to the situation why Iran has cooperated and supported Syria since the Arab Spring and throughout the Syrian crisis. The research looks closer at Iranian foreign policy and how Iran and Syria have their relationship and support during the Arab Spring. Since Syria is one of the most important allies of Iran among the Middle East states, therefore Iran under President Hassan Rouhani has to progress the support for President Assad.

This research has examined the factors and characteristics of Iran towards Syria. It finds out that Iran shares some of the common factors with Russia and China which are the long diplomatic relationship between Iran and Syria, their economic ties, their strong military cooperation, and the belief in principles of non-intervention and respect of sovereignty. Moreover, Iran also has another notable factor of the influential relationship among Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah. Iran helped Syria in terms of military aids, militants and the strategies that Iranian government used to handle the rebellions.

The game theory for Iranian foreign policy towards Syria can be explored by the positive sum game. The best outcome for Iran-Syria strategic move is of course the (4,4) which mean they are cooperative to each other. While the Nash Equilibrium are (2,3) and (3,2), which mean that they have to choose that what is the better strategy that could lead to the better outcomes. The Syrian government of Assad is extremely self-assertive with the Iranian support, according to the interview of President Assad that he was not afraid of economic sanction from the U.S, EU, Arab League or Turkey because he said that Syria was under isolation for 30-35 years and it was not something new to be worried about.

This point shows that Assad has strong characteristics that he was not dependant on other countries like the West because he has support from a true friend like Iran. Iranian strategy seeks to preserve Assad regime by assisting

politically, militarily and financially. Moreover, Iranian leadership has made the strategic decision to support Syria by providing physical aids such as militants, financial supports and also providing the intellectual suggestions to government, all are very crucial for Assad to handle the situation. Simultaneously, Iran is able to continue to deliver military equipment to Hezbollah as long as they can access through the Syrian border to Lebanon. It is agreed that Iran has not just considered Syria as key neighbour to supply arms to Hezbollah, but also to strengthen alliance with Syria to fight against terrorists. President Rouhani gave the interview to CNN (Krever, 2015) that everyone has accepted Assad that he must remain in the position to combat the terrorists and the ISIS.

Another important factor is that Iran and Syria both aim to prevent the influence of the U.S and Israel in the Middle East. As stated above that Iran's first priority about foreign policy is to support the status of Palestine, against Israel and U.S. support to Israel. Syria has the conflict of Golan height with Israel, Syria also supports Palestine and Hamas whom the U.S. views as terrorist groups (Lesch, 2012). It is concerned that both Iran and Syria have the same rivalry, therefore, the strategic move is for them cooperate to gain stronger ties and fight against the common enemy.

One can argue that the situation in Syria can be viewed as the zero-sum game because after the regime of Assad, there will be a challenging regime which could be difficult to Iran if the new president is pro-U.S. However, Savadi (personal communication, August 25, 2015) states that Iran's regional role will not be affected even though Assad falls because Iran is an independent state. It can be argued that there are more or less effects if Assad falls, Iran will lose one of the most important allies.

c. China-Syria relations according to the game

The next is China-Syria in the game theory explanation. China's main focus is on the economic involvement, as well as the role of China in the UNSC where China exercises its power on the UNSC draft resolution in Syrian case. The trade relationship between China and Syria is important to Syria, however Syria is not in the top-ten list of Chinese trade partners which means trading with Syria does not provide more interests to China to be engaged deeply into this conflict. Noted that China has strong belief in the principles of non-intervention, China's role in UNSC is examined by the game theory.

From the figure 1 of positive sum game above, when China uses cooperative strategic with Syria, the result is (4,4) which means it is the best outcome for both players. It shows the numbers of draft resolutions that China and Russia vetoed in order to oppose the international interventions to Syria. After China vetoed for Syria on the draft resolution in UNSC, China is labelled as the Syrian supporter which could affect the Chinese economy and its rising power, however, China chose to follow the main principle of peaceful coexistence. With Chinese's perspective, UNSC should not be an instrument for regime change because the regime change would not help reduce bloodshed. Harris (2014) further states that the Syrian policy is complex, has many political and religious interests competing for influence, and whose interactions with surrounding countries would lead to considerable regional instability. The game in terms of

Chinese diplomacy could be played to strengthen China's rising and existence while being regarded as the strong power in global politics.

Noticing that China also vetoed alongside with Russia in agreeing to protect Syria. It can be argued that China does veto to be in favour for Russia. According to Roy (2013), China will prevent intervention and let the conflict continue as an internal issue between Assad regime and the rebels. In Geneva II peace conference on Syria, Chinese Foreign Minister Spokesman Hong Lei stated "Syria's fate must be decided by its own people" (Thediplomat.com, 2015). However, even though China and Russia vetoed the resolutions on Syria, they do support the international community to "discard violence" and supported the mediators from the Arab League and the UN (Swaine, 2012). Considering their actions, it can be said that China attempted to be neutral in the global stage because China seeks no interests in the Syrian issue. The situation in the game falls on the Nash Equilibrium point of (3,2) which means China can defect and be neutral, while Syria is cooperative. However, it is not clear to say that the Equilibrium outcome will be the best because we can see the actions and behaviours of Chinese leader that they will continue to prioritize the principle of non-interventions and try to be neutral on this situation.

CONCLUSION

The research question is to find out what are the important factors that construct to foreign policies of Russia, China and Iran towards supporting Syrian regime during the Syrian uprising and civil war. The result shows that the important factors can be divided into two parts, material and conceptual factor. The result is as followed:

Material Factors

1. The diplomatic relationship between Syria and its three significant alliances Russia, China and Iran who have the longstanding historical and diplomatic relations with Syria. This factor is crucial for Syria during crises to have true, trustworthy alliances who can support Syrian government. Therefore, Russia, China and Iran also regard Syria as one of their significant alliances that they are going to assist Syria in time of crisis and support the Syrian regime of Assad to deal with the internal situation. Russian and Syrian Presidents are close and exchange their visits to each other, as well as the significant relations between Syrian and Iranian leadership and their friendships since the Iraq-Iran War in the 1980s.

2. The economic ties between Syria and the allies. Syria is one of the main trade partners of Russian military equipment and Chinese goods. Syria has imported a lot of Chinese goods and Russian military arms before and during the crisis. Russian's advanced in military could provide Syrian government with a lot of arms to protect and prevent the attacks. Russia has a larger economic tie with Syria and with Russian influences. It could be said that Russian presence during Syrian crisis can play a larger role in supporting Assad regime. Moreover, China is increasingly developing market sharing in Syria's import and continues to trade during the crisis. Iran has provided the financial aids to Syria during the crisis as well.

3. The military cooperation is another factor. Russia has the significant military cooperation with Syria. Russia send military arms to Syria and also has

the military base at Tartus port that can be used as a pathway to access the Middle East from the Mediterranean Sea. Iran also has a strong military relationship with Syria for both Hezbollah and the IRGC militants. The important geo-politics between Iran-Syria and Hezbollah is one of the important factors that Iran supports Syria. The Shia-alliance's strength and power helps to maintain the Shia political presence in the Middle East. According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), it shows the arms transferred from Russia, Iran and China to Syria from 2010-2014 consisted of aircrafts, air defence systems, missiles, and sensors. It indicates that Russia has transferred in total of 1,222 million USD, while Iran sent 171 million USD and China 20 million USD (Armstrade.sipri.org, 2015). It can be concluded that the three alliances have provided Syrian government the weaponry to fight against the rebels and the terrorist groups.

Conceptual Factors (Ideational, Ideological Factor)

1. The principle of non-intervention is clearly the main statement for Russia and China to veto for the draft resolution on Syria in the UNSC. They do believe that Syria, or even Libya, do not deserve to be eliminated by using military intervention to end the conflict within the country. Russia and China have learnt the lesson of Libya and they do not want the intervention to happen to Syria. Thus, they believe that Syrian civil war is regarded as the domestic affair in which the government should handle. However, both Russia and China have attempted to find the conflict settlement for Syria, without repeating the intervention to Libya.

2. The principle of respecting sovereignty is another factor that all three alliances believe in. Respecting of Syrian sovereignty means that internal conflicts caused and triggered by the people and government, should be solved by the government of Syria, not external states. It is true that the international community cannot ignore the intense situation in Syria and the humanitarian crisis, it needs the external organization to handle the problem such as the refugee crisis. However, the internal political chaos happened and the government of that specific country should be the first one to handle the situation, not the outside state. It links to the previous non-intervention principle too. While Iranian and Russian Presidents state clearly that the first priority now is to defeat the ISIS.

3. The common enemy: anti-US ideology is another pivotal point. Russia is competing with the U.S. to be the world leader and world superpower. Russia cannot allow the U.S. and the Western-led intervention to Syria like happened previously. Russia has to protect Syrian government from the unilateral act and there have been unsuccessful attempts in the UNSC regarding the authorization of UNSC resolution in Syria. China is also rising in economics and politics to be a strong state not only in Asia, but also all over the world. It also can be said that China presents itself in the global stage to involve in the Syrian affairs, in order to show its ability to promote the multilateral world. Otherwise, this Syrian issue could be a fight between the U.S. and Russia (Zhongying, 2013). Therefore, China has to be involved in this global stage as the Arab Spring is the global issue. Allowing the Arab Spring to be dealt with by the U.S. and Russia alone would belittle China.

Iran has also been under economic sanction by the U.S., remaining one of the biggest threats to the U.S., and having the issue related to the nuclear development program. Since the Iranian revolution, the U.S. has been viewed by the Iranian government as negative. Regarding Syrian crisis, the U.S. government called for the step down of Assad in order to provide the political solution to the crisis, however, Iranian government and foreign policy makers have been trying their best to protect Assad. Rouhani states clearly that Assad needs to remain to fight against terrorists with support from Iran (Npr.org, 2015). It is unsurprising that Iranian leaders decided to do so because Syria is the closest Middle Eastern ally to Iran and benefits Iran-Hezbollah and their Shia-alliance relationship. Also the main foreign policy of Iran is to support Palestine, the idea of anti-Israel influence in the region if there will be regime change in Syria.

All in all the involvement of these external Syrian alliances are essential to Assad and are bringing best outcomes to Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad to cope with the internal situation, to deal with Syrian oppositions and the ISIS, and to handle pressure from the international organizations. However, the involvement of these alliances means that they do not intervene in the Syrian domestic situation, these alliances help protect Syria by diplomatic protections such as in the UNSC stage. This has allowed the Syrian government a chance to deal with the domestic situation without intervention by international actors, with the protection from its allies. Assad has completed the promised presidential election and aims to figure out political resolutions.

It can be concluded that the Syrian alliances have been playing the crucial roles involving in the Syrian crisis up to 2014. They seem to be continuously engaged in the Syrian crisis and will continue to fight against terrorists. Their involvements have provided Assad the benefits to remain in the position, and to resolve the domestic affairs without international intervention like other Arab Spring countries. They have gained the positive sum game even though it is not definite win-win situation in some cases, they have the cooperative gains which is at the Nash Equilibrium point that suggests the fair strategic outcomes. Realism and constructivism find a common agreement; the actor regards the beliefs and norms of respect for sovereignty and non-intervention along with the national interests and material factors.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations for further research would include a multitude of topics related to the Syrian crisis, the ISIS group, current international involvement from the U.S. versus Russia and its consequences. The situation after 2014 is intense in Syria with a lot of terrorism destruction and international states' involvement. Therefore, the involvement of international actors into the Syrian conflict will also be beneficial for future study. However, there are limitations of sources that this research could not interview the Syrian experts. There are also not many publications from the Middle East journals that do not belong to the Western media, sometimes in some sources they are like one-sided perspective from the West towards the conflict in the Middle East.

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— This article does not have any appendix. —