

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

The Middle East is a strategic region with connecting between Europe through Bosphorus Strait in Turkey to Asia which most of Middle Eastern land were directly connected to Asia through border between Iran and Afghanistan. Although most of Middle Eastern countries were ethnically Arabs, it still has diversities on culture, dialect, tradition, and even ethnicity as well as religion (Shoup, 2011). Judging from the historical point of view, the existence of a kingdom and empires in the past that used to dominate this region does not rule out the possibility that countries in Middle East have something in common whether it be cultural or social behavior. In addition, this sub-continent also has diversity in term of politics, Middle East has several different political systems throughout its sub-continent such as Absolute Monarchy like Saudi Arabia, Parliamentary Republic like Lebanon and Iraq, Parliamentary Kingdom like Kingdom of Jordan, Republic under Socialist Regime like Syria and Algeria, and so on (Cairo, 2012). But in other side, this political diversity mostly tends to be an anti-democratic regimes that tend to be an authoritarian regime which later led to a mass demonstration across Middle East with demand of resigning the previous authoritarian government and change it into a democratic one which popularly known as “Arab Spring” (Maleki, 2011).

One of Middle Eastern state that got impact by the Arab Spring is Syria that started by a demonstration and opposition between the Syrian Arab Republic (de facto Syrian government) under President Bashar Al-Assad regime versus Syrian Opposition or widely known as Syrian Liberation Army (anti-government rebel) that wanted President Al-Assad resign from his office. The conflict in Syria, part of a wider wave of 2011 Arab Spring protests, grew out of dissatisfaction with the Syrian government and escalated into armed conflict after

protests calling for the removal of Assad were violently suppressed (McLoughlin, 2011). The war, which began on March 15, 2011 with major riots in Damascus and Aleppo, is being fought by several factions: the Syrian Armed Forces and its international allies, the loose alliance of most of the Sunni opposition rebel groups (including the Syrian Liberation Army), Salafi jihadi groups (including the al-Nusra Front), the Syrian-Kurdish-Arab Democratic Forces (SDF) Mixed Forces, and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Syria (ISIS), with a number of countries in the region and beyond who are directly involved or provide support to one or several other factions (Iran, Russia, Turkey, United States, etc.) (Abtahi, 2018).

Iran, Russia and Hezbollah support the Syrian Arab Republic and its Syrian Armed Forces militarily, with Russia carrying out air strikes and other military operations since September 2015. The US-led international coalition, established in 2014 with the stated objective of fighting ISIS, has carried out attacks air especially against ISIS as well as some against government and pro-government targets. They also mobilized special forces and artillery units to engage ISIS on land. Since 2015, the US has supported the North Syrian Democratic Federation and its armed wing, SDF, materially, financially and logistically. Turkey has been directly involved in operations against the Syrian Arab Republic government since August 2016, not only participating in air strikes against ISIS along with the US-led coalition, but also actively supporting the Syrian opposition and occupying large swathes in northwestern Syria while engaging in significant ground battles with SDF, ISIS, and the Syrian government. Between 2011 and 2017, fighting from the Syrian civil war spread to Lebanon when opponents and supporters of the Syrian Arab Republic government traveled to Lebanon to fight and attack on Lebanese soil, with ISIS and Al-Nusra also involving the Lebanese Army. In addition, although officially neutral, Israel has exchanged fire with Hezbollah and Iranian forces, whose presence in southwest Syria is seen as a threat. They have also

carried out repeated attacks across Syria since the start of the war, mainly targeting Syrian government forces and suspected Iranian and Hezbollah militants.

Prior to the Russian military intervention in Syrian Civil War, the Russian government admittedly aware that such military intervention would likely have adverse effects on Russia. However, the Russian government opted to continue and carry out its military operations in Syria as the Russian government consider that his military intervention has the potential to bring several benefits to Russia, especially in terms of economics and politics. In term of economic, this might sounds difficult to achieve since Russia bring its military to a warzone but Russia optimistic that Russia will get some economic benefits through buying and selling weapons. And for politics, Russia aimed to gain its influence in Syria and the Middle East by spreading its hegemony to Middle Eastern countries that does not tied nor influenced by the United States hegemony. (Trenin, 2016).

B. Research Question

Based on the background mentioned, this thesis has one research question:

“Why does Russia intervene militarily in Syria related to the escalation of Syrian civil war?”

C. Theoretical Framework

Based on the research that conducted, the writer uses two theories to answer the research question which are Alliance Theory and National Interest Theory. At this point, the Alliance Theory shows the mutual agreement between Russia and Syria as well as showing the benefit of the Russian military intervention for both Russia and Syria. While the National Interest Theory tend to show the benefit of Russian military intervention for Russia itself such as increasing Russian

economy through Syrian oil as well as spreading the Russian hegemony on Mediterranean countries. However, the National Interest Theory does have good impact for Syrian Arab Republic such as like helping the Syrian government combat against the ISIS and another rebel groups to regain the Syrian territory that been lost to the ISIS.

I. Alliance Theory

Alliance is an agreement by states to support each other mostly in term of military in the event of an attack against any member, or to advance their mutual interests. Alliance has several separate types includes bilateral or multilateral, confidential or open in general, simple or heavily organized, for short or long duration, and may be directed at preventing or winning a certain war or conflict (Hillen, 1998). The alliance itself is inspired from the phenomena of war, disputes and security. Forming an alliance is expected to strengthen the position of alliance group member countries in the international world. Alliance between countries also shows that each countries which these countries share the same goals and have something in common or in International Relations world known as "enemy" that must be faced. Despite its same goal in achieving the interests of a country, the country who share the same goal can use alliances to suppress its opponents.

While discussing about alliance, Russia has a long history of bilateral relations with Syria which later became an alliance between the two nations. Both Soviet Union (then Russian Federation) and Syrian Arab Republic establish a bilateral relations since the mid-40s during the end of French colonization of Syria which at that time the Soviet Union support the Syrian independence movement (Breslauer, 1990). The bilateral relations between the two nations became closer in 1971 when Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad allow the Soviet government and military to open its naval military base in the port town of Tartus for the Soviet military, which the naval base still on use by the modern Russian military until this day. On

October 8, 1980, Syrian Arab Republic and the Soviet Union signed the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation provides regular consultations on issues of bilateral and multilateral interests, the coordination of responses in the event of a crisis, and military cooperation which the treaty remains in force to this day that make Syrian Arab Republic as one of Russian Federation political, economic as well as military ally (Lea, 2001).

As the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation runs until this day, both countries which are signatories share each necessity and Russia has a huge hegemony on Syria especially the Ba'ath Party controlled-Syrian Arab Republic government. In other words, the two countries that have signed the agreement are dependent on each other, especially Syria who has huge dependency on Russia as potential superpower. The effectiveness of this agreement was proven when the Syrian Arab Republic government made a request to the Russian government for military aid to fight ISIS, the Syrian opposition, and also the Kurdish rebels who are fighting each other for independence and separating themselves from the country of Syrian Arab Republic (Sengupta, 2015). At the same time, the Russian president Vladimir Putin request for permission from Federation Council of the Russian Federation and the upper house of the Russian Parliament, to deploy the country's military in Syria which on the same day the Federation Council approved the use of military force in Syria in order to help the Syrian government's Army fight against terrorist groups, the ISIS in particular (Schechter, 2015).

II. National Interest

National Interest is the goals and ambition of a country, be it economic, military, cultural or otherwise that the main objective is to fulfill what a certain country need and want. This theory shows the desire of Russia of intervening the Syrian Civil War because Russia thinks that the asset that Syria has might bring benefit for Russia. Therefore, theory widely prove the Russian military intervention has a “hidden agenda” despite to ratify the ongoing the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation but also to fulfill the National Interest of Russia which Syria has several sector that might fit with it.

Russia protects President Al-Assad not only because of these two countries sign such bilateral agreement, but for two more specific reasons that might bring good benefit for Russia. First, for Russia the creation of military stronghold in Middle East might bring Russian hegemony for this territory since most of Middle East and Mediterranean Sea territories were under the US hegemony. And the other reason, Russia as one of the largest weapon producer in the world sees Syria as big opportunity to increase the Russian economy since Syria largely supplied with weapons from Russian Federation. Since September 2015, Assad's fate has become even more closely tied to Russian policy planning, and has forced the West to speak with Russia as a "Great Power", which is seen as forming international political rules such as the United States (Pieper, 2018). Thus, these two reasons will be explained below:

i In term of politics

Russia wants to remain in business, and secure an important military base in the western province of Latakia and a naval base in the port city of Tartus that give access for Russian Navy to the Mediterranean Sea to share Russian political hegemony through security (Michaels, 2015). Russian President Vladimir Putin also seems to want to increase the prestige and influence of

Russia in the Middle East at the expense of the United States where the US has military bases across Middle East such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, etc. that makes Putin feels that Russia has a legal reason to build military stronghold in Syria since the Russian military intervention in Syria was under request of President Bashar Al-Assad to assist his army against the Free Syrian Army, ISIS as well as Kurdish rebels (Hartanto, 2015).

ii. **In terms of economy,**

As Russia used most of its modern and upgraded weapons in Syria, Russia has a 'hidden agenda' where Russia actually tested these modern and upgraded weapons to show its powers in order to attract attention from other countries to buy these weapons. Thus, due to series of Russian weapons tests in Syria that proved to be effective, Russia has received a flood of orders from other countries that are lured in by these new and modern weapons, including from one of the NATO members, Turkey, who is interested in buying the S-400 air defence missiles. However, the Russian Defense Ministry has criticized the United States' decision, where the United States government has obstructing the Russian weapon sales through the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act or CAATSA in short where this act would deter Russian arms sales by threatening Russian arms customers with economic sanctions (Hasan, 2019).

In the case of the United States Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, this act almost distracting all arms deal that Russia made with other countries but Russia and its costumers still proceed the arms deal with finalized deal anyway (Mayakovsky, 2020). It is estimated that Russia got the economic

benefits of approximately tens of billions US Dollars through arms purchases from countries that are drawn from the power and effectiveness of Russia's new and modern weapons used in Syria (Musa, 2020).

D. Research Argument

Based on the background and theories mentioned above, the writer would like to share several arguments to proof that there are several reasons of Russian intervention in Syria that includes:

- i. Russia shares an agreement with Syrian government named as “Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation” which include security cooperation between the two signatories. From that agreement, Russia wants to reuse and reactivate the former Soviet Naval base in Tartus for the Russian Navy
- ii. The Russian government suspect and estimate that there are about 2,500 Russian nationals were fighting alongside with ISIS, which most of them were former Chechen rebels. Thus, President Vladimir Putin think that it would be better to fight them on Syrian soil rather than on Russia in order to reduce the civilian casualties in Russia.
- iii. Aside of deploying military troops in Syria, Russia also provide the Syrian Arab Army with modern Russian weapons. The purpose is to test the sophistication of the new Russian military weapons. These weapon tests were proved to be effective with Russia has received a flood of orders from other countries that are lured in by these Russian made new and modern weapons.

E. The Research Objectives and Benefits

This research aims to find how precious the Syrian Civil War for the Russian Federation by using military intervention on it. As Russian Federation and Syria share bilateral agreement called as “Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation”, and The effectiveness of this agreement was proven when the Syrian government made a request to the Russian government for military aid to fight ISIS, the Syrian opposition, and also the Kurdish rebels who are fighting each other for independence and separating themselves from the country of Syria. As well as Russia has National Interest on the Syrian Civil War by testing Russian modern and new weapons in order to promote these weapons that will be sold to other countries that might fulfill the necessity of Russia especially in Russian economy.

F. Research Methods

Research methods is a set of approaches, procedures or techniques in order to gather data or facts for study in order to discover new knowledge or to provide a deeper understanding of a certain topic. This research is using descriptive methods to describe the material. The methods used to collect the data sources were taken from books, scientific journal, reports, online news, and official websites. The data is being collected using the internet which is the modern advanced technology that can help to look for the late and updated information through online. The method that used by the writer will be mentioned such as:

- **Types of Research**

This thesis or research use qualitative research type that explains things that related to relationships, behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, ongoing processes and the impact of a certain phenomena (Neuman, 1991).

- **Location of Research**

The location for the research of this article is Syria and more specific in Syrian territory with several addition in Russia. Since the case that discussed in this article were located on Syrian soil, and for Russia is to gain the National Interest of Russia which Syrian Arab Republic provided.

- **Source of Data**

The source of data of this article were mainly obtained from books, scientific journal, reports, online news, and official websites. The author uses the aiming theory to explain a phenomenon why that phenomenon can occur. Analysis made will connect the theories used in writing this research using the method qualitative data analysis.

G. Writing System

In this article, the research systematic writing were divided into 9 parts. These parts were contained background of the issue, research question, theoretical framework, research argument, research objective and benefits, research methods, writing system, as well as outline.

H. Outline

- 1) Chapter 1: Includes a Background, Research Question, Theoretical Framework, Research Argument, Research Objectives and Benefits, Research Methods, Writing System, as well as Systematics of this thesis.
- 2) Chapter 2: Focused on the dynamics of bilateral relations between Russian Federation and Syrian Arab Republic, including the brief profile of both countries, history the bilateral relations, political control of Russia on Syria, economic relations, presidential trips with further deals between the two nations, as well as Russia's role in entering the early stages of the Syrian Civil War.

- 3) Chapter 3: Will answer Russia's intervention in Syrian Civil War by explaining what benefits that Russia wants to get in its military intervention in Syria in order to fulfill Russia's national interest from economic and political perspective of Russia.
- 4) Chapter 4: Contain of conclusion to conclude and close the whole thesis.