

RUSSIA'S IDENTITY FORMATION: PUTIN'S PROJECT

*A Constructivist Approach to Russia's Foreign Policy towards the
Middle East under Putin*

International Studies
Thesis
Dr. A. Gerrits
Inez Hermes
S1447181
inezhermes@live.nl
Word Count: 10.706

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	3
THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK.....	5
Introduction	5
Realism in International Relations	5
<i>Balance of Power</i>	6
The Rise of Constructivism	7
<i>Structure/Agency Debate</i>	7
<i>Interest/Identity Formation</i>	9
Conclusion	10
RUSSIA’S POSITION IN THE MIDDLE EAST.....	12
Introduction	12
The Soviet Union in the Middle East	12
Russia’s Declining Power in the Middle East during Yeltsin’s Presidency	14
Putin Sets New Foreign Policy Goals for Russia	15
Putin’s Foreign Policy Towards the Middle East	17
<i>Tensions between Russia and the West</i>	18
Conclusion	19
SYRIA: THE ULTIMATE BALANCE OF POWER?.....	21
Introduction	21
Soviet and Russian Relations with Syria	21
Putin’s involvement in Syria	22
The Syria Crisis and Putin’s Endless Support Of Assad’s Regime	23
<i>Identity Formation Through an Open Letter</i>	25
CONCLUSION.....	27
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	29

INTRODUCTION

“A critique does not consist in saying that things aren't good the way they are. It consists in seeing on just what type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established and unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based [...] To do criticism is to make harder those acts which are now too easy.” (Foucault 1994)

This is a quote by Michel Foucault (ibid), who argues that it is important to be critical to assumptions and familiar notions that affect our way of thinking and seeing the world. Discourses and paradigms affect the way we understand and look at the world we live in. They can be seen as invisible boundaries that influence the way we see and understand certain events in international politics. Like discourses and paradigms, international relations theories offer us a certain lens through which we view the world and understand events within the world. Whereas theories can help us to understand certain events, to predict behaviour of states and to view events in a broader perspective, it is important to keep in mind that theories can also obstruct our understanding of the world. Theories can force us to view the world through a certain perspective, which makes our understanding of the world limited and restricted. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the paradigms, discourses and theories that influence and obstruct our way of understanding the world. Furthermore, it can be helpful to see things from a different perspective, by being critical towards dominant discourses and mainstream theories.

Apart from theories and discourses, events can also influence our way of understanding the world. One of the events in international politics that has strongly affected our way of understanding the world we live in is the Cold War. The Cold War had a massive influence on world politics. Scholars spoke of a bipolar world, in which the United States and the Soviet Union were the two most influential powers that dominated world politics (Nye 2011: 73). However, even after the fall of the Soviet Union, Cold War patterns of thinking were still visible. The relationship between the United States and Russia is often still described from this paradigm. Sawka (2008: 241) argues that “the category of Cold War remains so stubbornly entrenched in our understanding of international politics in general, and in relations with Russia in particular”. This Cold War paradigm is mainly based on realist assumptions that we live in an anarchic world; in which there is no higher authority; that states are responsible for their own security; and that states try to balance the power of other states by establishing alliances with other states. When Putin came to power, this Cold War paradigm became even more dominant. Russia's domestic and foreign policy were often

described from a realist perspective. Russia's policies under Putin are often described from a framework of *realpolitik*, based on power and material factors (ibid, 241-242). Although Putin himself seems to reinforce this idea, by forming alliances with states and acting confrontational towards other states, it is useful to critically analyse the Russian policies under Putin. Another perspective on Russia's policies can change the way we understand international politics, and it can raise questions on how policy makers, presidents and the media understand and react to events in world politics.

A theory that can give us another perspective of the world we live in is the constructivist theory. Although constructivism, like realism, takes the state as the centre of its research, constructivism offers different insights in world politics. By analysing Russia's policies through both theories, this research tries to offer new ways of understanding Russia under Putin and how Russia positions itself in world politics. This paper will focus on Russia's policies under Putin, because Putin made several policy changes in Russia on both a domestic and international level. These policy changes raised questions about how to understand Russian politics and position in the world. Whereas these policy changes are often explained through a realist lens, constructivism can offer new insights. Furthermore, this paper will focus on Russia's policies towards the Middle East, because the Middle East can be seen as a cockpit of confrontation in international politics between states. Events in the Middle East are often viewed from a realist perspective, which makes it interesting to shine a different light on the events in the Middle East. Consequently, the research question of this paper will be; "What does Russia's position in the Middle East under Putin reveal about how Russia positions itself in the world." However, there are a few limitations to this research. Due to the scope of the paper, it will focus on Russia's foreign policy towards Syria as a Case Study. Furthermore, because of a language constraint, Russia's foreign policy under Putin will be analysed by focusing on English sources. The goal of this paper is to give a new way of understanding Russia's policies towards the Middle East and how Russia tries to position itself in world politics. The first chapter will focus on the debate between (neo-)realism and constructivism. The second chapter will focus on the Russian policies towards the Middle East. And the last chapter will go deeper into Russia's policies towards Syria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The relationship between states in international politics has been a fundamental subject of discussion in the field of International Relations throughout the years. Several International Relations theories are built around different ideas of how states behave and interact on the world stage. Realism (and later neo-realism) has become one of the most dominant theories in the field of International relations. Realist scholars take the state as the centre of their research, and see the (sovereign) state as the most influential actor on the world stage. Political leaders and media tend to describe the world we live in through a realist lens. However, critical notes to the realist theory have arisen. This has led to new International Relations theories, and new ways to view the world. One of the theories that have a different view on the world we live in is the constructivist theory. The constructivist theory offers new insights in the relationships between states. Constructivism arose as a reaction to the (at that time) leading neo-realist theory. In order to get a better understanding of the debate between neo-realism and constructivism in the field of International Relations, it is first useful to go deeper into the key elements of realism. Although there is a lot of discussion among (neo-)realist scholars on different topics, the scope of this paper does not make it possible to go deeper into this discussion. This chapter will therefore focus on the main features of the (neo-)realist and the constructivist theory.

Realism in International Relations

Realism is one of the most dominant theories in the field of International Relations. Between the 1930s and the 1940s realism became a prominent theory in the field of International Relations (Schmidt 2011: 86). Furthermore, Schmidt (ibid) states that from 1939 to today, the majority of policy-makers and leading theorists see the world through a realist lens. Realism focuses on state interests of states rather than on ideology (ibid). Schmidt explains that realism is based on the doctrine of the *raison d'état*. The main focus of this doctrine is on the security of the state. According to this doctrine, the state must pursue power in order to guarantee the security of the state. Instead of focussing on morals and ethics in international politics, realism focuses on self-interests of states and argues that internationally, states and state leaders must distance themselves from traditional morality in order to guarantee the security of the state.

The following core elements on which realism is based need further explanation: *statism, anarchy, self-help* and *power*. Statism is “the idea of the state as the legitimate representative of the collective will of the people” (Schmidt 2011: 87). Domestically, statism makes it legitimate for the state to exercise authority within its borders. Internationally, realists argue that there exists anarchy. Realists see anarchy as the basic structure of international politics, in which the “independent sovereign states considers itself to be its own highest authority and does not recognize a higher power” (ibid). Within this anarchy, there is no central authority. This makes self-help the principle of action in international politics for realists. Self-help is the idea that every state is responsible for its own survival, security and well-being. If a state feels threatened or is anxious to lose its sovereignty, it is dependent on its own power capabilities.

The relationship between states in international politics is often analysed through power relations. The power of states and power relations between states are core elements of realism (Schmidt 2011: 86-88). Joseph Nye (1990: 177) states that “leaders and analysts try to understand the dynamics of major changes in the distribution of power among states”. Nye (1990: 177) gives the following definition of power: “power is the ability to achieve one’s purposes or goals.” On the one hand, Nye (1990: 178) argues that power is often measured by the “possession of resources” of a state. However, he argues that it is not easy to measure resources, and to determine which resources are most powerful in any particular context. Furthermore, he (Nye 1990: 179-180) argues that the sources of power have changed over time.

Balance of Power

The term *balance of power* is often used in the field of International Relations -and by political leaders- to explain and predict the behaviour of states. The term has been a basic assumption of how realists interpret international politics (Nye 1990: 184). According to Schmidt (2011: 88) the most common definition of the term is the following: “If the survival of a state or a number of weaker states is threatened by a hegemonic state or coalition of stronger states, they should join forces establish a formal alliance, and seek to preserve their own independence by checking power of the opposing side.”

Nye (1990: 184) argues that the term balance of power is based on two realistic assumptions of international politics. The first one is that the states live in a structure of anarchy. The second assumption of the idea of balance of power, is that political leaders main goal is to guarantee the safety of their state and that they will try to reduce the risks that might

threaten the independence of their states. Schmidt's (2011: 88) definition of balance of power focuses on the use of the term for practical purposes. In this case, political leaders use the term balance of power, to create a foreign policy and to predict the policy of other states.

The Rise of Constructivism

In the last twenty years, constructivism has become one of the most important theories in the field of International Relations. In the 1980s, neo-realism and neo-liberalism were the leading theories in the field of International Relations. Constructivism arose as a critical reaction to these two mainstream theories, and to neo-realism in particular. Although both constructivism and neo-realism take the state as the centre of their research, there are crucial differences between the two theories in understanding and researching the world we live in. Instead of taking the interests of states as fixed, constructivist scholars focus on the impact of ideas, knowledge, norms and rules on the identities and interests of states (Barnett: 2011). Constructivism is based on three claims: "(1) states are the principal units of analysis for international political theory; (2) the key structures in the states system are intersubjective, rather than material; and (3) state identities and interests are in important part constructed by these social structures, rather than given exogenously to the system by human nature or domestic politics" (Wendt 1994: 385).

Neo-realism is a contemporary or modern form of realism (Lamy 2011: 117). One of the most important neo-realist scholars is Kenneth Waltz. His theory of structural realism is one of the various versions of neo-realism (1959). Alexander Wendt's (1992) article 'Anarchy is What States Make of it' gives a critical constructivist reaction to Waltz structural realism. This paper will go deeper into the main features of both constructivism and neo-realism. Its main focus will be on the ideas of Waltz and Wendt.

Structure/Agency Debate

One of the essential differences between constructivism and neo-realism is how both theories define structure. One of the progenitors of neo-realism, Kenneth Waltz argues in *Man, the State and War* (1959), that the structure of the international system consists of three basic elements, which are interconnected. The first element is the anarchic nature of the international system. This anarchy leads according to Waltz (1959) to a self-help system, in which every state is responsible for its own security. This then leads to the distribution of power (ibid). According to Waltz (1959) states act the way they do -aggressive and suspicious-, because the structure forces the states to do so. Within this fixed structure Waltz

(ibid) describes, individualism and materialism play an important role. Barnett (2011: 151) explains individualism as “the view that actors have fixed interests and that the structure that constrains their behaviour derives from the aggregation of the properties of those actors.” Furthermore he (ibid) explains materialism as “the view that the structure that constrains their behaviour is defined by distribution of power, technology, and geography.” Neo-realists take identities and interests of agents (states) as given and the structure in which states behave as fixed. Waltz (1979) argues that the ‘balance of power’ is one of the main components of this fixed structure.

Constructivists do not agree with this neorealist analysis of the structure of the world system. Whereas neo-realism defines the international structure in material terms, and sees this structure as a constraint on states, constructivists focus on normative structure (Barnett 2011: 163). Instead of focussing on individualism and materialism in defining the international structure, normative structure focuses on collectively held ideas such as “knowledge, rules, beliefs, and norms”(ibid). These ideas do not only constrain states, but they also construct the interests and identities of states (Wendt 1992). Ideas are not fixed, and if these ideas change, the structure can also change. Furthermore, Wendt argues that structure is endogenous to process and interaction between states, and is therefore socially constructed (ibid).

Furthermore, Wendt (1992: 395) argues that the structure we find ourselves in is not fixed, but socially constructed. In ‘Constructing International Politics’ Wendt (1995: 73) argues that social structures are based on three elements. First, social structures are defined by “shared understandings, expectations, or knowledge”, on which the relationships between states are based (ibid). Second, Wendt argues that social structures include material resources. However, these material resources only affect human actions “through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded” (ibid). Third, Wendt argues that social structure only exists in process. He gives the Cold War as an example of how shared knowledge influences states and how this process can stop immediately when states share a ‘new’ knowledge (ibid).

Wendt does not agree with Waltz’s three elements that define structure in the international system. Although Wendt (1992) does not deny that we live in an anarchic world, he (ibid: 194) argues that “self-help and power politics do not follow either logically or causally from anarchy and that if today we find ourselves in a self-help world, this is due to process, not structure.” According to Wendt, Waltz’s explanation does not predict much about the behaviour of states. For example, it does not show us whether states will be allies or not, if they will recognize the sovereignty of one another (Wendt 1992: 396). The main difference

between neo-realists and constructivist on the matter of structure is therefore that the neo-realist see the structure of the world as fixed, whereas constructivists see the structure as socially constructed and agents can possibly even transform structures through interaction. Furthermore, neo-realists give less agency to actors in the world system, because they believe that these actors have to act in a fixed structure. Contrary, constructivists believe that interaction between states can change the structure, which gives actors more agency.

Interest/Identity Formation

Another key difference between neo-realism and constructivism is how both theories approach identities and interests of states in world politics. Neo-realists see domestic and factors as the most important determinants of the identities and interests of states. These domestic identities do not change over time, but are 'genetic'. Therefore, neo-realists see the identities and interests of states as fixed. On the other hand, constructivists argue that systemic interaction is equally important in the construction of identities and interests of states (Wendt 1992: 423). According to Wendt (1992: 398) interests of states define their behaviour. He argues that identities are the basis of these interests. Furthermore, in order to know what we want, we first have to know who we are (Barnett 2011: 163). These interests are not fixed, and they depend on the social context and the process of defining situations. Identities are not fixed, because they are produced through interaction and they are socially constructed (ibid). Wendt (1992: 398-399) argues that roles can define interests. For example the role of a state in the international society can define its interests. Contrary, the absence of a role can lead to identity confusion and can make it difficult to define interests.

Furthermore, Wendt (1992) argues that identities are based on self-other relations. In order to know who 'we' are, the 'other' has to be defined. Both the image of the 'other' and the 'self' are constructed and not fixed. In a world in which anarchy exists, identity formation is most concerned with the security of the 'self'. However, the security of a state depends on how a state sees the 'self' in relationship to the 'other'. According to Wendt (1992: 400) this can lead to a self-help system, but also to a system in which states cooperate in order to generate security for all states. How states than act in world politics depends on social relationship between states. The anarchic nature of the world-system and the self-help system to which this leads is according to Wendt (ibid, 410) not a fixed structure. Instead, he (ibid) argues it is "far from being exogenously given, the intersubjective knowledge that constitutes competitive identities and interests is constructed every day by processes of "social will formation" [...] is what states have made of themselves".

Wendt (1992: 405) argues that the interaction between states depends on a “social act”. He argues that the “process of signaling, interpreting, and responding completes a “social act” and begins the process of creating intersubjective meanings.” Furthermore, this social act creates expectation on both sides of how the other will behave. The ‘self’ will act based on these expectations. The interaction between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ will create certain ideas that will probably be confirmed. This can lead to relatively stable concepts of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ in the interaction between two actors. Within this relatively stable social structure, we then define our interests and identities. It is important to note that identities and interests of states are relationship-specific. Moreover, Wendt (1992: 409) argues that “states may be competitive in some relationships and solidary in others”. Although this structure can change over time, the structure is relatively stable. According to Wendt (1992: 423) the stability of the structure and identities and interests of states is what makes the realist and rationalist discourse reasonable.

Conclusion

Although both constructivism and neo-realism take the state as the centre of their research, they have different ideas on how states behave and interact in the world system. First, whereas neo-realism focuses on nature, constructivism focuses on nurture. By focusing on nature, neo-realists believe in a fixed structure that constrains actors within this structure. Furthermore, they believe that genetic and domestic factors are the most important determinants for the identity and interests of states. Contrary, constructivists focus on nurture. In other words, they see the structure as not fixed, which does not only constrain actors but also constructs them. Furthermore, identities and interests are according to constructivists socially constructed.

Second, neo-realists focus on materialism, and constructivists on idealism. For example, realists see power as the ability of one state to influence another state to do what it would otherwise not do. It focuses mainly on material resources that give a state power. Constructivists see power as more than material, and argue that power can also have an ideational meaning. On the one hand, the power of a state can also be measured in legitimacy. States need legitimacy of the international community to make their policies succeed. Barnett (2011: 157) explains that “the greater the legitimacy, the easier time they will have convincing others other to cooperate with their policies; the lesser legitimacy, the more costly the action.” On the other hand, according to constructivists, power includes “how knowledge, the fixing of meanings, and the construction of identities allocate differential rewards and

capacities” (ibid). If a state wants to get what it wants, the image that state has in the international community is important.

RUSSIA'S POSITION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Introduction

Constructivism and realism offer lenses through which world politics can be viewed. State behaviour and interaction between states can be understood in a different way through these theories. A region that has been a centre of state interaction throughout history is the Middle East. In order to get a better understanding of how state interaction and behaviour can be understood through the constructivist and realist theory, the Middle East is an interesting region to research. Kreutz (2007: 5) argues that the centre of tension between great powers is focused in the Middle East, because “it is located in one of the most central point in Eurasia, its enormous energy resources, and its political instability.” In order to understand how Russia positions itself in world politics, it is therefore interesting to take a closer look at Russia's position in the Middle East.

Russia has a long history of economic, political and geographical involvement in the Middle East. The Middle East is a close neighbour of Russia and Russia has strong and diverse ties with the different countries in the Middle East. However, Russia's involvement in the Middle East changed over time. Russia's domestic situation and its position in the world influenced its involvement in the Middle East. The involvement of Russia in the Middle East has changed a lot from the Soviet period during the Cold War to its involvement nowadays.

Putin's foreign policy towards the Middle East is often described from a realist perspective. Since Putin came into power, Cold War patterns of thinking became visible again in the discussion about how Russia tries to position itself in the world (Sawka 2008: 241). He (ibid) argues that the Cold War discourse is still present in our understanding of world politics. Dannreuther (2012: 543) calls this discourse the ‘Cold War Paradigm’ and argues that the media often describe the confrontations between the West and Russia in the Middle East through this paradigm. This paradigm is mainly based on realist assumptions of anarchy and balance of powers. This makes it interesting to shine a different light on these the behaviour of states and the confrontations between states in the Middle East. This chapter will focus on Russia's position in the Middle East. It will use the realist and constructivist theory to get a better understanding of Russia's foreign policy towards the Middle East, and how Russia tries to position itself in world politics.

Soviet Union in the Middle East

In order to understand the involvement of the Soviet Union in the Middle East, it is important to view this involvement in a broader perspective. After the Second World War, there was a

state of tension both military and politically between the United States and the Soviet Union. This tension had an effect on the general foreign policy of the Soviet Union and its foreign policy towards the Middle East in particular. According to Campbell (1978: 4) the foreign policy of the Soviet Union towards the Middle East must be seen as part of its global strategy. Campbell (1978) argues that the Soviet Union wanted to expand its power and saw the Middle East as a logical place to begin. Not only because of the geographical position, close to the border of the Soviet Union, at the centre of three circles “the Arab, the Islamic and the African” (Campbell 1978: 4), but also because of the presence and the conflicting interests of the West in that region. Furthermore, the conflicts in the Middle East offered a chance for the Soviet Union to pursue its interests.

The Soviet Union tried to gain influence at an economic, political and ideological level. The Soviet Union cooperated with governments and national liberation movements in the Middle East in order to become a stronger power in the region. Campbell (1978: 5) explains the involvement of the Soviet Union by arguing that the Soviet Union “built, piece by piece, a security system in which those states which joined will have their security guaranteed by, and dependent on, the Soviet Union. Political and social change will be encouraged in emancipated Middle East states in the direction of socialism on the Soviet model, thus establishing a firm basis for their staying tied to the Soviet alignment.” Although the Soviet Union tried to build close relationships with Syria, Iraq, Libya and Sudan and the Palestinian Authority, several factors made its presence in the Middle East difficult. The Soviet Union did not always want to take a position against Israel and support the aims of their Arab partners. Furthermore, there were conflicts between their allies, because of diverging interests. And the economic interests of the oil producers in the Middle East drew them to the West (Campbell 1978: 6). Whereas the influence of the Soviet Union was at its highest point between 1950 and 1960 (Kreutz 2007: 3), its influence decreased as the Soviet Union became domestically weaker. Kreutz (ibid) argues that “the First Gulf War and the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991 marked the end of the Soviet’s active role in the Arab World.”

By viewing the involvement of the Soviet Union in the Middle East, it seems logical to explain it from a realist perspective. The Soviet Union’s efforts to build strong relationships with several Middle Eastern countries could be easily explained through the framework of ‘balance of power’. Furthermore, in the Cold War, the West and the East tried to balance the power of each other by creating alliances with other countries, to create security of ‘the self’. Viewed from a realist perspective, it is logical that the Soviet Union

tried to create these alliances with material factor. The Soviet Union made several Middle Eastern countries dependent on a military and political level.

Although this realist perspective is highly reasonable, it gives a limited understanding of the Soviet Union's involvement in the Middle East. It does not pay attention to the ideological involvement of the Soviet Union in the Middle East, and the effort of the Soviet Union to guide Middle Eastern countries to the social model of the Soviet Union. From a constructivist perspective, the involvement of the Soviet Union in the Middle East can be understood as part of the social constructed bi-polar structure of the Cold War. The relationship between the United States changed after the Second World War, which affected the interests of the Soviet Union in the Middle East. Furthermore, the changed role of the Soviet Union as one of the two major powers in the world changed its identity and therefore its interest in the Middle East. From a constructivist perspective, the ideological involvement of the Soviet Union could be explained as part of a social construction of power politics, played by the Soviet Union (Wendt 1992: 403).

Russia's Declining Power in the Middle East during Yeltsin's Presidency

This constructivist idea that a role of a state effects its identity and interests, and that this role can change, becomes clearer after viewing Yeltsin's foreign policy towards the Middle East. The Soviet Union focused on increasing its influence in world politics, and tried to increase its influence in the Middle East. Contrary, after the fall of the Soviet Union, Yeltsin had to search for Russia's new role on both a domestic level and in international politics. It can be stated that Russia was going through a period of identity confusion during Yelstin's presidency. Stent (2008: 1091) argues that there were two movements in the Russian government. One movement wanted Russia to follow a unique Eurasian path, and develop an independent state system, and another movement that wanted to follow the lead of the West and eventually integrate with the West. The Russian foreign policy towards the Middle East was market a weak independent strategy (ibid). On the one hand, Russian oligarchs played an independent political and economical role in the Middle East. These oligarchs could operate independently from the Russian state (Kreutz 2007: 3). The fact that these oligarchs were very influential in different Middle Eastern countries, made it difficult for Yeltsin to pursue a Russian independent foreign policy towards the Middle East. On the other hand, Yeltsin's advisors "were predominately neoliberal and Western in orientation" (Kreutz 2007: 4). Andrei Kozyrev was the first Russian minister of foreign affairs, and promoter of this pro-Western foreign policy. According to him, Russia needed to break with its Soviet past and join the

Western civilized world (ibid). Yevgeny Primakov replaced Kozyrev in 1995, who was less pro-Western, and wanted to restore Russia's power and position in the world and in particular in the Middle East (ibid). However, Russia was still in crisis and was highly dependent of the West. The United States and Europe were Russia's principal donors (Rumer 2007: 14). This made it impossible for Russia to act as an independent power and forced Russia to follow the lead of the West. Russia could not pursue an independent strategy towards the Middle East, but had to follow the lead of the West.

Whereas realist and neo-realist claim that structures, identities and interests of states are fixed, the fall of the Soviet Union followed by Yeltsin's presidency seem to indicate the opposite. The world order changed from a bi-polar world, to a unipolar world in which the United States was the strongest power in international politics (Nye 2011: 73). This changed structure had an influence on Russia's influence in the Middle East. Yeltsin was forced to follow the lead of the United States on the world stage, and in the Middle East. Therefore, it can be stated that the changed relation between 'the self' (Russia) and 'the other' (the United States). Wendt (1992: 389-399) argues that "the absence or failure of roles makes defining situations and interests more difficult, and identity confusion may result." Furthermore, he (ibid) argues that after the Cold War, the former Soviet Union and the United States entered a period of identity confusion, in which both states were unsure of what their interests were.

Putin Sets New Foreign Policy Goals for Russia

The end of the Cold War seemed the end of the bipolar structure. However, since Putin became the president of the Russian Federation, Cold War patterns of thinking became visible again in the discussion about Russia position in the world (Sakwa 2008: 241). According to Sakwa (ibid), the Cold War discourse is still present in our understanding of international politics. Therefore, Russia's policies and confrontations between Russia and the West are often described through this discourse. Dannreuther (2012: 543) calls this discourse the 'Cold War paradigm', and argues that since the Middle East became a cockpit for the confrontations between the West and the East, the events in the Middle East are often described through this paradigm. Several scholars see Russia's renewed interest in the Middle East under Putin as an effort to counterweigh the hegemony of the United States in international relations. Freedman (2002: 2) for example argues that Russia and Iran work together to what they see as an effort of the United States to establish a unipolar world. Furthermore, Russia's policy in the Middle East, which supports anti-Western forces in the region (such Libya and Syria during the Arab Spring), is seen as evidence that the world is heading towards a new Cold War (ibid).

However, whereas this Cold War paradigm is based on (neo-)realist ideas of balance of power and fixed identities, structures and interests, Putin foreign policy towards the Middle East needs further explanation.

Whereas Yeltsin followed the lead of the West in international politics, Putin had a different idea for Russia in the world. Putin wanted Russia to act as a key player in international politics, and he did not want to follow the lead of the West anymore. In order to become a strong power on the world stage, Putin focused first on stronger state control. During Putin's presidency, Russia grew economically stronger, through the sale of arms, the rise of oil and gas prices, and by expanding business ties abroad (Freedman: 2002: 1). Its economic growth made it possible for Russia to repay its international debts (Rumer 2007: 24). Putin restored the power of the state, by recentralizing the foreign policy making. Due to these domestic changes, Putin was able to follow its independent foreign policy.

Apart from these political changes, Stent argues that Putin tried to restore Russia's identity, in order to re-unite the nation (Stent 2008: 1091-1092). He restored "Tsarist and Soviet-era symbols of Russian identity" (ibid). Putin redefined the Russian identity as it was under the Tsars "as based on the triad of Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality" (ibid). Putin emphasized the fact that Russia was different from the West and that Russia would follow its own unique path in the world. Putin wanted to show the West that Russia did not want to follow the lead of the West anymore in world politics. Furthermore, Vladislav Surkov's concept of 'sovereign democracy' became the basis for Russia's uniqueness in the world. With this term, Russia wanted to show that it sees itself as a democracy, but it wants to be let alone and make its own independent choices (Evans 2008: 905).

Putin's focus on these ideological changes in Russia can be explained through a constructivist perspective. Constructivists believe that identities and interests of states can be constructed and are not fixed. Putin tried to change the Russian identity, so he could pursue his interest to become an independent power in international politics. Furthermore, he tried to change the world structure, by changing the Russian identity. His goal was to become an independent key player in world politics, which he could only pursue creating a strong national identity. Putin tried to bring back the identity of the Soviet Union, because during the Soviet period, after the Second World War, Russia was one of the two key players in world politics. Furthermore, Putin tries to change the unipolar world structure. This effort of Putin to change the Russian national identity, goes against the (neo-)realist idea that identities and interests are fixed.

Putin's Foreign Policy Towards the Middle East

Putin was much freer in dealing with foreign policy issues in the Middle East than Yeltsin was, due to the elimination of political influence of the oligarchs. Under Putin, Russia's involvement in the Middle East increased. Russia's minister of foreign affairs Sergey Lavrov stated in *Foreign Policy* that "Russia feels more assertive than it has since the Soviet collapse, and can now pay more attention to looking after our legitimate interests" (Kenner 2013). Putin tried to restore Russia's presence in the region, and he tried to intensify Russia's bilateral relationships with Iran, Syria, Lybia and the Palestinian Authority among others in the Middle East (Freedman 2010). Russia's presence in the Middle East during Putin's presidency has different dimensions.

First of all, Putin wanted Russia to become a great power in international politics. In order to become a great power, bilateral relationships with countries in the Middle East were of importance to Russia. Close bilateral relationships would give Russia a stronger political position in the region and also in the world. Therefore, Putin wanted Russia to become a key player in the Middle East. During his presidency, Putin visited Middle Eastern countries several times. In 2005, Putin visited Egypt, Israel and the Palestinian Authority (Kreutz 2007: 7). Kreutz argues that the main goal of this visit was to "show the flag" and to demonstrate Russia's presence and renewed interest in the area" (ibid). Putin argued that this visit did not show a new direction in Russia's policy in the region, but instead "it continues past traditions and at the same time, it expands our contacts in the region", and that Russia wanted to make an end to the fairly cool relations that the Soviet Union had with for example Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Putin wanted to restore its influence in the region. It could be argued that this is part of a bigger plan to become a major power in world politics.

Another reason for Putin's renewed interest in the Middle East are economic interests in the region. Instead of focusing on domestic economic drivers, Putin had global economic ambitions for Russia. Therefore, Putin pursued an economic relationship with each country in the Middle East. These economic relationships, include "the consolidation of oil and gas resources under Russian State supervision; arms sales to Venezuela, Syria, and Iran" (Kreutz 2007: 1). Putin used his visits to make deals to cooperate more closely in the area of energy, gas and oil with for example Egypt and Syria. Furthermore, Putin stated that Russia wants to intensify its military cooperation with the Middle East. (Putin: Kremlin Transcript).

Third, there are domestic drivers. The Islamic community in Russia is a large minority that represents more than 15% of the Russian population (Kreutz 2007: 2). With its involvement in the Middle East, Russia tries to "counter the threat of secessionism in the

North Caucasus and the potential broader radicalisation of Russia's Muslim population” (Danneuter 2012: 543).

Tensions Between Russia and the West

The Middle East has caused tension between states throughout history. Several powers have different interests in the Middle East, and try to gain influence in this area. The Middle East has often been the centre of confrontation between the United States and Russia, in for example the Arab-Israeli conflict. Russia and the United States often had and still have opposing interests in the Middle East. (Kreutz 2007: 5). The partnerships of the United States and Russia in the Middle East with states that were often in conflict with each other caused tensions between the United States and Russia. Russia's allies Syria and Iran for example had conflicting interests from Israel and Russia supported the Palestinian Authority in several peace talks in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Russia supported political leaders in Iran, Iraq and the Syria with supply of arms, which was not in the interest of Israel (Freedman 2002). Furthermore, Russia's bilateral cooperation with Israel declined, while its relationship with the Palestinian Authority intensified. The political leaders of Russia's allies of Iran, Iraq, Syria and the Palestinian Authority often had divergent interest from the United States and its allies. Putin's effort to intensify Russia's relationship with Iran for example “was not received well in Israel of the United States” (Freedman 2010: 15). Contrary, the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 was not in line with Russia's economic interests. His regime owed Russia \$8 billion dollars, and Russia has strong business ties with Iraq (ibid). Another area of tension between the United States and Russia was Iran's nuclear program. Although Russia was initially helping Iran to build its nuclear plant on Bushehr, the United States wanted Russia to end all its support (ibid, p. 19).

These confrontations between allies has led to the idea of different scholars that Russia's tries to balance the power of the United States in the Middle East. Freedman (2007) for example argues that one of the main reasons of Putin's interest in the Middle East is to counterbalance the power of the United States in the world. According to him (Freedman 2010: 11), Putin tries to restore its influence in the region, in which the power of the United States is in decline. Cohen (2007) agrees with Freedman and argues that Russia is following the Soviet model of the Cold War “by playing to anti-Western sentiment in the “street” and among elites.” These are examples of the presence of the Cold War discourse in the discussion about Russia role in the Middle East.

However, the Middle East should not only be seen as a centre of confrontation between the United States and Russia. Although the interests of the United States and Russia in the region are clashing in several areas, they also tried to cooperate and to resolve political issues in the region. After 9/11 for example, “Moscow not only provided useful intelligence to the United States, but also initially raised no objections to the establishment of U.S. bases in Central Asia to fight the Taliban and Al Qaeda” (Freedman 2010: 15). However, this cooperation came to an end when the United States wanted to go to war. Putin did not support unilateral action of the United States without support of the United Nations. Putin stated that it would be “a direct violation of international law, and a major political mistake that could cause the International Security system to collapse” (Putin: 2003). In 2014, the United States and Russia tried to cooperate again on the nuclear issue in Iran. Eventually, they came to a deal on Iran’s nuclear program (Sanger: 2014). It is difficult to explain this cooperation through a (neo-)realist perspective. It could be stated that Russia and the United States try to cooperate as a way to maintain their power and pursue their interests in the region. However, it seems more reasonable to explain it through the constructivist idea that ‘self’/‘other’ relations can change for example through a change of structure. Whereas the Soviet Union and the United States stood against each other in the Cold War, confrontation between Russia and the United States is not always in Putin’s best interest nowadays.

Conclusion

The Cold War discourse is based on (neo-)realist ideas of how states interact. This discourse presumes that we live in a world in which anarchy exist, and that we live in a self-help system. Furthermore, it is based on the idea that states can only rely on themselves for their own security. The close bilateral relationships of Russia with for example Syria, Lybia and Iran are explained through the idea that Russia tries to balance the power of the United States. Moreover, Russia wants to balance the power of the United States and it tries to prevent the world from becoming a unipolar world in which the United States acts as a hegemon. Within this discourse, interests and identities are fixed. The discourse denies the change in structure after the fall of the Soviet Union. Therefore, it sees the interest and identity of Russia as the same as during the Soviet period. Putin seems to give sustenance to this discourse by using a confrontational language in his speeches. He does not only try to restore the Soviet identity of Russia, but he also uses confrontational language towards the West. Putin gave a speech at Munich Security Conference in 2007, in which he criticized the West, and the United States in particular, for making its democracy promotion in the world, for not respecting the norms

and laws of the international society, and for acting as a hegemon (Putin: 2007, Munich Security Conference). By acting this way, Putin seems to confirm the Cold War discourse.

However, Putin foreign policy towards the Middle East can also be understood from a constructivist perspective. Whereas the neo-realist discourse gives a good idea of why Putin acts as he does, it tends to overlook important issues. The Cold War discourse for example, does not pay attention to the period between the fall of the Soviet Union and 2000, when Putin became president. This period was marked by a change of the role of both the Soviet Union and the United States in the international society. The world was changing from a bi-polar world to a unipolar world (Nye 2011: 10). The changed role of Russia and changed structure of the international society had an effect on Russia's identity. Furthermore, Yeltsin's presidency was marked by identity confusion, which led to a change of Russia's interests in the world. The power relations between Russia and the United States changed, which also had an effect on its role in the world and in the Middle East. Russia's role in the world and in the Middle East can therefore be seen as a socially constructed role, which leads to a socially constructed identity. Furthermore, the Cold War paradigm and the (neo-)realist perspective on Putin's foreign policy denies the cooperation in several areas between Russia and the United States. From a constructivist perspective, the Cold War discourse can also be seen as a socially constructed discourse, that keeps the old idea of a bi-polar world structure alive.

SYRIA: THE ULTIMATE BALANCE OF POWER?

Introduction

This chapter will discuss Russia's presence and influence in Syria. Syria has been an ally of Russia since the Cold War. Putin has tried to restore Russia's bilateral relationship with Syria, on an economic and political level. Since the beginning of the Syria Crisis in 2011, Russia has supported Bashar al-Assad, even though the United States among other Security Council members wanted Assad to leave. Russia, with only the support of China vetoed four United Nations Security Council resolutions in favour of Assad. In order to get a better understanding of how Putin positions Russia in the world and how both realism and constructivism can be used to understand the Russian position, Syria offers an interesting case study. Syria seems the ultimate place where power relations between states in international politics become visible. Furthermore, viewed from a realist perspective, the confrontation between the West and Russia in the Syria Crisis can be understood from the framework of 'balance of power'. Within this framework Putin's effort to restore Russia's bilateral relations with Syria can be seen as a way to counterweigh the hegemony of the United States in the region and in the world. However, the constructivist approach gives another perspective on Russia's role in Syria. In this chapter, both theories will be used to get a better understanding of Russia's role, goals and presence in Syria and in the Syria Crisis.

Soviet and Russian relations with Syria

Russia has a long history of presence and influence in Syria. Even before Syria was formally recognized as an independent sovereign state in 1946, the Soviet Union had already established diplomatic links with Syria. The Soviet Union built strong economic and military ties with Syria. Between 1956 and 1970, the relationship between the Soviet Union and Syria became even closer. The Soviet Union supported Syria both on an economic and political level (Kreutz 2007: 12-18). In 1980 "Syria and the USSR signed the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation" (Kreutz 2007: 16). This treaty contained "a rather vague clause that stipulated military cooperation and consultation in the case of threat to the peace and security of one of the parties [...] the USSR promised that it would "respect the policy of non-alignment pursued by Syria" (ibid). Although the Soviet Union tried to maintain the strong bilateral relationship with Syria, the relationship was complex and both parties had divergent interests concerning several issues. According to Kreutz (2007: 17) two major issues of disagreement between the Soviet Union and Syria were "the Syrian quest for military parity with Israel and the heated debate with Moscow over the quality and quantity of its arms supply, and the

second was, the noticeable improvement in Soviet-Israeli relations and mass scale Soviet-Jewish immigration to Israel.” Although Gorbachev tried to remain close to Syria, and invited al-Assad to Moscow, these issues challenged the relationship between the Soviet Union and Syria.

During Yeltsin’s presidency, Russian-Syrian relations were challenged even more. One of the major issues that caused tensions between the two countries was that Syria refused to pay its Soviets debts of an estimated \$7-11 billion dollar to Russia (ibid, 18-19). This had an effect on Russia’s willingness to sell more arms to Syria. Furthermore, this issue had an effect on the relationship between Russia and Syria, and “changed [Syria’s status] from a privileged friend to become a “thorny issue in Russian foreign policy” (Kreutz 2007: 18). Although the ties between Russia and Syria remained to exist under Yeltsin, their relationship could not be compared to the Soviet-Syrian relationship. The declining presence and influence of Russia in Syria during Yeltsin’s presidency was mainly due to the internal weakness, and the international pressure on Russia to follow an agenda in world politics set by the West.

Putin’s involvement in Syria

At first, when Putin came to power, the relationship between Syria and Russia stayed relatively weak compared to the Soviet period (Katz 2006: 1). However, Putin’s main foreign policy goal was to become a great power again in international politics (Stent 2008: 1096). Putin’s presence in Syria should therefore be seen in the light of this broader goal of Putin: to make Russia a great power. Putin’s willingness to change the Russian identity is reflected by a change in interests. Furthermore, in order to become a great power, Putin redefined the Russian interests in the Middle East. He wanted to restore Russia’s strong bilateral relationship with several countries in the Middle East, such as Syria. Putin wanted to counterweigh the United States, so that Russia could follow its own interests in international politics, and the international community would consider Russia a great power. In order to do so, Russia tried to restore its economic prestige, and intensify its economic ties in the Middle East.

Although Putin wanted to restore its relationship with Syria, there were important differences between Syria and Russia that made it difficult to cooperate. First, Russia and Syria had different ideas on how to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Whereas Russia supported the two-state solution in the United Nations Security Council, Syria abstained from voting (Katz 2006: 1-4). Furthermore, the ties between Russia and Israel grew closer under

Putin. The two countries started to cooperate on a security level, and trade between Russia and Israel increased massively under Putin. The security cooperation between the two countries, concerned the Syrian government. Second, the economic relations between Russia and Syria became less tight. Syria still had to pay its debt to Russia, and Russia refused to sell Syria the weapons that it asked for (Katz 2006: 3). Russia and Syria were unable to resolve the debt issue.

However, this changed in 2005, when Bashar Al-Assad visited Moscow and they came to a solution to the debt issue. This solution was that “Moscow [...] agreed to write off 73 per cent of Syria’s now 13,4 billion debt to Russia [...] [and] Moscow allowed Damascus to repay the rest of the loan on terms extremely favorable to Syria: “The remaining \$3,618 billion will be paid off in installments, with Syria paying \$170 million on the debt in 2005” (ibid, 4). This deal was also in favour of Russia, because Syria was not likely to repay the full debt in the future. Furthermore, the deal was highly beneficial for the Russian business sector, especially for the Russian arms, gas and oil industries. The deal increased trade between Russia and Syria, and made Syria more accessible for Russian businesses. However, its was not only economic beneficial, but also in line with Putin’s higher goal for Russia to become a great power.

Apart from this deal, Syria saw Russia as a strategic partner against the United States (Katz 2006: 5). Katz (ibid, 7) explains Syria’s anxiety of the United States by arguing that “the American-led intervention in Iraq and combined European and American pressure on Syria both to withdraw its forces from Lebanon and over the Hariri assassination have heightened Damascus’s sense of insecurity, thus increasing its incentive to turn to Moscow.” This dependency on Russia, gives Putin a comfortable position in Syria. Consequently, he is able to pursue its economic and political interests in Syria. Once again, this strategic partnership of Russia and Syria seems to confirm the realist theory. However, Putin’s effort to counterweigh the United States and his confrontational way of acting towards the United States can also be understood from a constructivist perspective, which sees identities and structures as socially constructed. This can be best explained by looking at Russia’s role in the Syria crisis.

The Syria Crisis and Putin’s Endless Support Of Assad’s Regime

The relationship between Syria and Russia became an important factor in the course of the Syria Crisis. Putin has supported Bashar al-Assad since the beginning of the Syria Crisis. With only the support of China in the United Nations Security Council, Putin vetoed four

UNSC Resolutions (UN, un.org). These resolutions were drawn to impose economic and military sanctions on the Syrian government, to stop the supply of weapons to Syria, to refer the Syrian conflict to the International Criminal Court and it would have even forced the Syrian government to step down (ibid).

Apart from supporting Assad's regime by vetoing these UNSC resolutions, Russia did not stop the supply of arms to Syria (Allison 2013: 35). Although there is an increasingly international pressure on Russia to stop its arms supply to Syria and to punish Assad, Russia keeps supporting its ally (Weir 2012). In order to show its support to Assad, Putin has visited Syria, and invited Assad to Moscow. Furthermore, Russia is not afraid to openly show its support to the Syrian government in the international community. Whereas the United States among other countries believed that the Syrian government used chemical weapons in Aleppo, Russian Foreign minister Sergei Lavrov stated in an interview with *the Washington Times* that he believed it were the rebels who had done it (Lavrov, youtube). Furthermore, he argues that the international community should not punish the Syrian government, or demand it to step down, but instead "it's only the Syrians themselves who can resolve and solve the problems of their country" (Lavrov, youtube). In 2013, Putin wrote "A Plea for Caution From Russia" to *the New York Times* in which he warns the United States to not take unilateral action in the form of military intervention in Syria (Putin).

At first, the answer to question of why Russia supports the Syrian government and Assad in particular so purposeful seems simple. Several scholars and newspapers see the following reasons as the most plausible reasons for Putin to support Assad. First, Russia and Syria are allies since the Cold War. As noted before, the Soviet Union and Syria had strong commercial, military and economic ties. Both Putin and Assad try to emphasize the fact that the relationship between the two countries knows a long history. During a visit to the Kremlin for example, Assad stated "We in Syria have never forgotten and never will forget the support that first the Soviet Union and then Russia gave us over all the years since we established diPalestinian Authoritymatic relations" (Assad, Kremlin Transcripts). Second, Russia has strong economic and political interests in the region. Russia has weapons contracts with Syria, which are worth more than 5 billion dollars (Weir). Russia is afraid to lose these contracts as a consequence of an overthrow of the Assad. Especially after Russia lost \$4 billion dollar in Libya after Muammar Qaddafi was overthrown and murdered (ibid).

Another, more strategic interest of Russia in Syria is the fact that Tartous is an important marine basis for Russia, and "the only port outside of the former where Russian ships enjoy unique anchoring privileges" (ibid). Another significant reason for Russia to

support Assad is that Russia is afraid that his regime will be replaced by an Islamist regime. Russia is anxious for Islamist threats that could spill over to the North Caucasus, or lead to instability in the Russian nation (Allison 2013: 809). Third, Russia does not want a western-led intervention in Syria. Russia does not trust the intentions of the West. Furthermore, Lavrov (WP) states that the United States is not consistent in its statements and actions against states and individuals that violate the principles of the international law. He (Lavrov WP) argues that an individual can violate these principles as much he wants, as long as he is a partner of the United States.

These reasons to support Assad's regime seem legitimate, it is however important to understand on which interests these reasons are based. Although the strong bilateral relationship between Syria and Russia is seen as one of the main reasons for Putin to support Assad's regime, this relationship has not been effortless throughout history. Divergent interests between Russia and Syria have challenged their relationship several times. Therefore, Putin's strong support for Assad's government must be seen in his broader interest for Russia, which is to become a great power in international politics. The fact that Russia does not support a western-led intervention in Syria does not only show that Russia is anxious to lose power in the Middle East in favour of the Soviet Union, but it can also be seen as a way to legitimize its great power status in international relations. Furthermore, Russia wants to be considered a great power that follows the principles of the international law. By creating an image of the United States ('the other'), that has violated the principles of the international law, by taking unilateral actions without the support of the Security Council and acts interest driven, Russia creates an image of 'the self', as a responsible great power, that does not want chaos in the Middle East. This idea of creating an image of 'the self' by creating an image of 'the other' confirms the constructivist idea that identities are socially constructed. Putin's open letter to *the New York Times* can be understood by this idea of socially constructed identities (Putin, NYT).

Identity Formation Through an Open Letter

On September 11, 2013, Putin wrote an open letter to *the New York Times* in which he confronted the United States with their position in the Syria Crisis. This letter seems to confirm several features of the realist theory. First, it seems to confirm that the international society is based on power relations between states. Putin confronts the United States for its actions, and demands the United States to follow the principles of the international law. Apart from the power relations between states, the letter can be seen, as a conformation of the idea

that we live in a world in which anarchy exists. In this anarchic structure, states are considered to be the highest authority. Furthermore, it seems to confirm the idea that the world is a self-help system, in which states are responsible for their own security and well-being. This letter can be seen as an attempt of Putin to guarantee Russia's security and status in global politics.

However, upon closer examination, the realist conclusions that can be taken from this letter seem too shallow. Putin (ibid) makes a few statements in this letter that need further explanation. The constructivist perspective can give a better understanding of the origins of these statements. First, by writing this letter to the United States, Russia places itself next to the United States. Putin seems to show the world that the United States and Russia are equal powers in international politics. By mentioning the Cold War several times in his letter, Putin (ibid) even seems to create the idea of a bi-polar world. This is an example of how structures can be socially constructed. Second, by confronting the United States, Putin (ibid) creates an image of Russia. Moreover, Putin warns the United States for taking unilateral action against Syria. He (Putin, NYT) argues even that "millions around the world increasingly see America not as a model of democracy but as relying solely on brute force". Herewith, Putin creates an image of the United States as an aggressive hegemon that is not willing to follow the principles of the international law. Overleaf, he creates an image of Russia as a responsible great power. This can be seen as an example of how identities are socially constructed. Third, Putin ask the United States to cooperate with Russia on critical issues in international affairs. From a realist perspective, the cooperation between Russia and the Soviet Union on several issues is difficult to explain. However, from a constructivist perspective, the cooperation could be explained from the idea that Russia wants to create an identity of a responsible great power, which includes cooperation with other 'great powers'.

CONCLUSION

Relations between states are often described through a realist perspective. Realism is based on several assumptions about how states act and interact with each other. The realist theory assumes that structures, interests and identities are fixed. Furthermore, it assumes that we live in a world in which anarchy exists, and that states can only rely on themselves for their own security. Wendt (1992: 423) argues that “the meaning of structure for state action changes so slowly that it becomes a de facto parameter within which process takes place, then it may again be substantively appropriate to adopt the rationalist assumption that identities and interests are given”. However, by looking at Russia’s foreign policy towards the Middle East, and what this tells us about how Russia tries to position itself in the world, the realist theory does not give us a thorough overview and understanding. The goal of this paper was therefore to give a more nuanced and enhanced understanding of Russia’s position in the Middle East. It tried to do so by adapting the constructivist theory to this position.

First of all, in order to understand what the constructivist theory can offer in understanding the Russian position in the Middle East it is useful to understand the weaknesses of the realist theory in understanding this position. The main weakness of the realist theory is that it can only explain individual events. By looking at the position of Russia in the Middle East, the realist theory can give a good understanding of why Russia acted as it did. The effort of the Soviet Union and Russia under Putin to create strong ties with several Middle Eastern countries for example can be explained through the framework of ‘balance of power’. Furthermore, the confrontational way of acting towards the United States seems to confirm this realist idea and even confirms the idea of an anarchic structure of the world-system. The reason for these strong ties can be explained through the realist idea of ‘self-help’, in which states are responsible for their own safety.

However, if we look at these events in a broader perspective, the realist theory gives a too limited view. For example, the realist theory does not give a clear understanding of why the changed structure of the world-system after the Cold War. It does not explain how the changed role of Russia domestically and in the world changed its identity and interests. Furthermore, the realist theory cannot explain the cooperation of the United States on different issues in the Middle East.

The constructivist theory can give a better understanding of how the Russian position in international politics and under Putin positions itself in the world. Whereas realism cannot explain the changing interests of Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union, constructivism explains this with the changing role of Russia that caused identity confusion. Furthermore, the

structure of the world system changed, which had an effect on the identity and interests of Russia.

The constructivist theory can also help us to get a better understanding of Putin's foreign policy. The main goal of Putin is to become a key player in the world again. The Russian foreign policy towards the Middle East shows that Putin tries to become a key player through a process social interaction and identity formation. He tries to create an image of 'a great power Russia' by constantly referring to the Soviet period. Furthermore, he creates an image of 'the other' (United States) as an irresponsible, aggressive hegemon compared to the responsible 'self' (Russia). By acting confrontational towards the United States, Putin creates the idea of a bi-polar world, in which the United States and Russia are equal powers. It is however questionable whether Russia can still be seen as a great power. Rumer & Wallander (2010, 57:60) for example argue that Russia is a power in weakness. They (ibid, 61) argue that "a large gap exists between Russian aspirations and images, on one hand, and the Russian ability to be one of the major pillar of the international system, on the other". Furthermore, they argue that Russia's military and economic force is declining. However, as the constructivist theory states (Barnett 2011: 163), power cannot be measured only in material factors. Putin's social constructed identity of Russia as a 'great power' seems to impress the world, and therefore legitimizes Russia's prominent role in international politics. Putin's foreign policy towards the Middle East can therefore be seen as part of a bigger plan of Putin to position Russia as one of the key players in world politics.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allison, R. (2013), 'Russia and Syria: explaining alignment with a regime in crisis', *International Affairs*, pp. 795-823.
- Baylis, J. & Smith, S., Owens, P. (2011), *the Globalization of World Politics; an Introduction to International Relations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, fifth edition.
- Barnett, M. (2011), 'Social Constructivism', in *the Globalization of World Politics*, chapter 7, pp. 150-164.
- BBC Documentary (2011), *Russia, Putin and the West*, episode 1: Taking Control.
- BBC Documentary (2011), *Russia, Putin and the West*, episode 2: Democracy Threatens.
- BBC Documentary (2011), *Russia Putin and the West*, episode 3: New Start.
- Campbell, J.C. (1978), 'The Soviet Union in the Middle East, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 1-12.
- Cohen, A. (2007), 'Putin's Middle East Visit: Russia is Back', *The Heritage Foundation*.
- Dannreuther, R. (2012), 'Russia and the Middle East: A Cold War Paradigm?', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 64, no. 3, pp. 543-560.
- Dunne, T. & Schmidt, B.C. (2011), 'Realism', in *the Globalization of World Politics*, chapter 7, pp. 86-96.
- Evans (2008), 'Putin's Legacy and Russia's Identity', vol. 60, no. 6.
- Foucault, M. (1994), 'So Is It Important to Think?', in *POWER 456*, Faubion, J.D. ed., Hurley, R. trans., New Press: 2000.
- Freedman, R. (2002), 'Russia and the Middle East', *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 6, no. 2.
- Freedman, R. (2010), 'Russia and the Middle East Under Putin', *Ortadogu Etütleri*, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 9-55.
- Katz, M. (2006), 'Putin's Foreign Policy Toward Syria', *George Mason University*.
- Kenner, D. (2013), 'How Putin Turned Moscow Back Into a Middle East Powerhouse', *Foreign Policy*, [online], http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/09/13/how_putin_turned_moscow_back_into_a_middle_east_powerhouse, last verified 12 July 2014, statement by Lavrov.
- Kreutz, A. (2007), *Russia in the Middle East: Friend or Foe?*, London: Preager Security International.
- Lamy, S. (2011), 'Contemporary mainstream approaches: neo-realism and neo-liberalism', in *the Globalization of World Politics*, chapter 7, pp. 116-127.

Lavrov, S. (2013) 'Interview by the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to The Washington Post, Syria', [online], [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKKFkGby270&spfreload=10%20Message%3A%20JSO N%20Parse%20error%3A%20Unexpected%20EOF%20\(url%3A%20http%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DfKKFkGby270](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKKFkGby270&spfreload=10%20Message%3A%20JSO N%20Parse%20error%3A%20Unexpected%20EOF%20(url%3A%20http%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DfKKFkGby270), last verified 14 September 2014.

Lavrov, S (2012). 'Statement by Sergey Lavrov at 67th UN General Assembly', [online], <http://www.voltairenet.org/article176053.html>, last verified 19 August 2014.

Nye, J. S.(1990), 'The Changing Nature of World Power', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 105, no. 2, pp. 177-192.

Nye, J. S., (2011). *The Future of Power*, New York: PublicAffairs.

Putin, V. (2013), 'A Plea for Caution from Russia', *the New York Times*.

Putin, V. (2007), Munich Conference Speech.

Putin, V. (2005), 'Press Statement after the Conclusion of Russian-Syrian Talks', Kremlin Transcripts, [online], <http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/7779>, last verified 5 October 2014.

Putin, V. (2007), 'Answers to Questions from the Russian Media following a Visit to the Middle East', Kremlin Transcripts, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/8503>, last verified 29 August 2014.

Rumer, E. & Wallander, C. (2010), 'Russia: Power in Weakness?', *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 27, no., pp. 57-73.

Rumer, E. (2007), Introduction: A Cool Breeze', *The Adelphi Papers*.

Rumer, E. (2007), 'Chapter One: A Foreign Policy in Transition', *The Adelphi Papers*.

Rumer, E. (2007), 'Chapter Two: Putin's Foreign Policy – A Matter of Interest', *The Adelphi Papers*.

Sakwa, R. (2008), 'New Cold War' or twenty years' crisis? Russia and International Politics', *International Affairs*, pp. 241-267.

Sanger, D. (2014), 'Iran Outlines Nuclear Deal; Accepts Limit', *The New York Times*, [online], http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/15/world/middleeast/iran-outlines-nuclear-deal-accepts-limit.html?_r=0, last verified 12 July 2014.

Schmidt (2011), 'Realism', in *the Globalization of World Politics*, chapter 5, pp. 86-99.

Stent, A. (2008), 'Restoration and Revolution in Putin's Foreign Policy', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 60, no. 6, pp. 1089-1106.

United Nations, 'Security Council, Veto List 1946-2014', [online], http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/resguide/scact_veto_en.shtml, last verified 3 September 2014.

Waltz, K. (1959), *Man, the State and War*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Waltz, K. (1979), *Theory of International Politics*, New York: McGraw Hill.

Weir, F. (2012), 'Why Russia is willing to sell arms to Syria', *The Christian Science Monitor*, [online], <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2012/0119/Why-Russia-is-willing-to-sell-arms-to-Syria>, last verified 14 July 2014.

Wendt, A. (1992), 'Anarchy is What States Make of it: the Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization*, vol. 46, pp. 391-425.

Wendt, A. (1995), 'Constructing International Politics', *International Security*, vol. 20, no.1, pp. 77-81.

Wendt, A. (1994), 'Collective Identity Formation and the International State', *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 88, no. 2, pp. 384-396.