

## **Proxy War and US's Smart-Power Strategy (the Case of Syria, 2011-2016)**

**Seyed Abbas Hashemi\***

PhD. Federal Studies, Assistant Professor, Imam Khomeini International University

**Mostafa Sahrapeyma**

M.A. Student in Political Sciences, Imam Khomeini International University

### **Abstract**

Frequent application of the term “proxy war” indicates its prominent place in academic researches on international relations. Separate implementation of soft power and hard power proved to be unsuccessful in recent years. Accordingly, great failures in classic wars increased tendencies towards proxy wars. By the outbreak of Arab Springs in the early 2011, Syria was devastated by different opposition groups and driven into terrible violence. Obama administration, refraining from the bitter experience of Bush in Iraq and Afghanistan, avoided direct intervention and managed to afford for the largest logistic support for rebel groups in Syria. The United States this time, tried to realize its policies in Syria by means of proxy war. The research, aims at analyzing the reasons for applying proxy war in the US policy in Syria in a general framework of Offensive realism. As a hypothesis, it seems that the new approaches towards proxy war can generally be interpreted according to the brother concept and the logics of smart power.

**Keywords:** Proxy War, Smart Power, Syrian Crisis, Offensive Realism

---

\* Received on 12 December 2017  
Email: teachpol@yahoo.com

Accepted on 10 February 2018

## **1. Introduction**

Man, Power and war are rarely separated during all history. In fact war came as the successor of the verb “want” in human being terminology. The ever limiting sources of power made the wars somehow inevitable in human social and political life. Over time power Experienced new varieties in sources and aspects simultaneous with developments in other human life aspects such as economics, philosophy, technology and international relations. Heavy costs of vast wars drove people to search for different ways to achieve, save and increase power with less Undesirable consequences. Complicated and in other words, hybrid forms of wars were introduced in this way. New elements were borrowed from other aspects to Diversify human power sources. Culture, literature, media were used to increase and strengthen power. Yet, Smart power was the most modern effort in this regard. Proxy war too, although has its roots in ancient or at least colonization era was modernized and implemented in recent years as a tendency within new smart power approach.

The United States introduced the new world order and persuaded its hegemonic desires immediately in the aftermath of the cold war. Direct interventions in different parts of the world before and after the cold war, From Korea and Vietnam to Afghanistan and Iraq proved to be bitter experiences. These wars were all distractive for the US from two perspectives. They imposed huge material and human losses to the US and more importantly, damaged its image in the world due to the vast influence of mass media. The fact that US can no longer exercise its leadership in the world through direct military intervention forced it to manage for decisive changes in the ways of its involvements in international affairs.

The new approach was developed during Obama administration from 2009. Before him, in Clinton administration, soft power was applied in American political terminology providing new sources of power and hegemony. Digital technology drastically deepened and spread the influence of mass media and proved its abilities in introducing American culture and lifestyle in all over the world. As a negative reaction to the Bush’s direct military involvements in international affairs, Clinton tried to make the US desired changes in the world via soft power elements like supporting democratic and cultural activities. Famous authors like S. Huntington and F. Fukuyama developed theoretical frameworks for the approach and almost guaranteed the final triumph of American liberal democracy.

Yet, the developments especially in the Middle East, didn’t realize the US goals as fast as it expected. In such an atmosphere, Obama announced the hybrid approach of smart power.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Offensive Realism Theoretical framework is preferred in this article for its potential abilities to explain the case. It is a structural theory belonging to the neorealist school of thought first postulated by John Mearsheimer (Feng&

Ruizhuan, 2006: 111) John Mearsheimer (1990; 1995; 2001) has been the main proponent of the emerging offensive realist theory. Mearsheimer asserts that states have a will to power in that they do not merely seek to survive, but to thrive in the international system constrained by anarchy; namely the goal is to maximize their share of world power due to structural motivations (Valeriano, 2009: 180). Offensive realism is based on some three basic principles;

1. The goal is to maximize share of world power.
2. The ultimate aim is to become the hegemon.
3. Since global hegemony is impossible, the world is condemned to perpetual great power competition.

Offensive realism suggests that major powers are continuously seeking power. The causal mechanism for this action is the lack of a central authority. The ultimate goal of a state is to prevent state failure, and the only way to do this is through power maximization (Valeriano, 2009: 181).

## **2-1. Proxy War**

War, in the popular sense, is a conflict among political groups involving hostilities of considerable duration and magnitude (Frankel, 2017). The Oxford Dictionary defines war as: A state of armed conflict between different countries or different groups within a country (McGrath, 2014). This is not a specialized definition. But the definition seems relatively comprehensive.

Various types of wars have been witnessed during human history, for instance; guerrilla wars, civil wars, terrorist wars, revolutionary wars etc., all of which called classic wars. New “modern Types of War” are also engaged in recent decades; cyber, biological and nuclear wars. In this article the main concentration will be on proxy war as a new approach illustrating the joining point of classic and modern warfare styles.

Proxy wars are the indirect engagement in a conflict by third parties wishing to influence its strategic outcome. They are constitutive of a relationship between a benefactor, who is a state or non-state actor external to the dynamic of an existing conflict, and their chosen proxies who are the conduit for weapons, training and funding from the benefactor. Such arm's-length interventions are undertaken ostensibly for reasons of maximizing interest, while at the same time minimizing risk. In short, proxy wars are the logical replacement for states seeking to further their own strategic goals yet at the same time avoid engaging in direct, costly and bloody warfare. (Mumford, 2013: 1)

Proxy wars have been especially common since the close of World War II and the rise of the Cold War, and were a defining aspect of global conflict during the latter half of the 20th century. Much of this was motivated by fears that direct conflict between the United States and Soviet Union would result in nuclear holocaust, rendering proxy wars a safer way of exercising hostilities (Wilde, 2017). During the Cold War, war by proxy was a key strategy of indirect conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. The purpose of these

proxy wars was to either maintain or change the balance of power between the superpowers/great powers<sup>1</sup> in conflict areas outside the central front in Europe (D. stone, 2010: 1). But this does not mean that the proxy war has not existed before. Because you can also see signs of the proxy war in 1529 (The Vietnam war, 2014).

Proxy wars can also emerge as a result of the escalation of internal conflicts and the intervention of foreign powers. In Spanish Civil War, (1936–39), military revolt against the Republican government of Spain, was supported by conservative elements within the country. When an initial military coup failed to win control of the entire country, a bloody civil war ensued, fought with great ferocity on both sides. The Nationalists, as the rebels were called, received aid from Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. The Republicans received aid from the Soviet Union, as well as from International Brigades, composed of volunteers from Europe and the United States (Britannica, 2015). However, the emergence of proxy war as a widespread approach in recent times owes to the development of term soft power and then smart power in international relations.

## **2-2. Smart Power: A Hybrid of Soft Power and Hard Power**

What is "power"? Most people have an intuitive notion of what it means. But scientists have not yet formulated a statement of the concept of power that is rigorous enough to be use in the systematic study of the important social phenomenon. Power is here defined in terms of a relation between people, and is developed a statement of power comparability, or the relative degree of power held by two or more persons (Dahl, 1957: 201). Power is like the weather. Everyone depends on it and talks about it, but few understand it. Just as farmers and meteorologists try to forecast the weather, political leaders and analysts try to describe and predict changes in power relationships (Nye, 2004:1).

Power is a cultural product embedded in cultural convictions, sociopolitical relationships, and interpersonal actions propelling societies whether at war or at peace. These relations of power are in large part subjectively enacted and are at best only partially recognized. Power relations become part and parcel of the taken-for-granted world (Nordstrom, 2004: 73). A power of an actor, A, would seem to be adequately defined by the measure M which is the difference in the probability of an event, given certain action by A, and the probability of the event given no such action by A. Because the power of any actor may be estimated in this way, at least in principle, them different actors can be ranked according to power, provided only that there exists a set of comparable subjects for the actors who are to be ranked (Dahl, 1957: 214). Two major aspects of power have been distinguished in international schools in new studies; soft Power and Hard Power

In the Oxford Dictionary, soft power is defined as "a persuasive approach to international relations, typically involving the use of economic or cultural influence, (Oxford dictionaries<sup>1</sup>, 2017) and hard power as " a coercive approach



to international political relations, especially one that involves the use of military power (Oxford dictionaries<sup>2</sup>, 2017). Of course, these are not specialized definitions, but these are enough to understand the subject matter. There is a very obvious difference between soft power and hard power, no military force is used in soft power, whereas, the most striking feature of hard power is military capability.

Everyone is familiar with hard power. We know that military and economic might often get others to change their position. Hard power can rest on inducements ("carrots") or threats ("sticks"). But sometimes you can get the outcomes you want without tangible threats or payoffs. The indirect way to get what you want has sometimes been called "the second face of power." A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries-admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness-want to follow it. In this sense, it is also important to set the agenda and attract others in world politics, and not only to force them to change by threatening military force or economic sanctions. This soft power-getting other to want the outcomes that you want-co-opts people rather than coerces them (Nye, 2004: 5). Nowadays, the soft power and hard power are very dependent on each other. To understand the importance of soft power, one has to know the limitations of hard power, as scholars see it. While hard power has been one of the most prevalent forces in the history of international relations, those who believe that hard power is in decline, in turn advocate the emphasis on soft power. There are many reasons that some have suggested hard power (or military power) is not as important, and not as used, as it may have been in the past. For example, while there is a history of military power (which still exists today), some, such as Joseph Nye (1990) say that "today...the direct use of force for economic gain is generally too costly and dangerous for modern great powers. Even short of aggression, the translation of economic into military power resources may be very costly (Nye, 1990: 159).

Joseph Nye and Armitage have also identified soft and hard power sources, which are largely inclusive. Historically, hard power has been measured by such criteria as population size, territory, natural resources, military force, and social stability (Nye and Armitage, 2007: 6).

In contrast, soft power resources are more complex, both in categorization and in nature. In behavioral terms, soft power is attractive power. In terms of resources, soft power resources are the assets that produce such attraction (Nye, 2008: 107).

Hard Power represents a coercive approach to international relations and employs the use of military or economic power to achieve certain outcomes. The underlying theme of Hard Power is coercion and states use such power to influence weaker states to comply with their will. Soft Power, in contrast, represents a subtle, persuasive approach to international relations between states. States utilize Soft Power to "attract and co-opt" other states to desire what they desire. It has the ability to influence the preferences and interests of

other states. This persuasive approach is applied through cultural, historical and/or diplomatic means (Differencebetween,2015).

Soft power and hard power are different. Hard power is coercive power executed through military threats and economic inducements and based on tangible resources such as the army or economic strength. In contrast, soft power is persuasive power deriving from attraction and emulation and grounded on intangible resources such as culture. Although they are oppositional approaches to power, their combination, smart power, has its place in academic debate and policy making. Overall, it appears that soft power strategies are more effective in the contemporary international system than hard power strategies. The demise of hard power is caused by changes in the world order, whereas the strength of soft power is based on its endurance and sustainability. As soft power has weaknesses, too, it is worth considering the strength of smart power strategies (Philipp &Wagner, 2014). As Nye holds; Hard and soft power are related because they are both aspects of the ability to achieve one's purpose by affecting the behavior of others (Nye, 2004:7). The major goal in smart power is to reduce costs and increase efficiency.

The primary Smart Power Initiative is related to Susan Nossel Studies. In an article published in Foreign Affairs in 2004, Suzanne Nossel, a famous US diplomat, currently working as a Chief Operating Officer for the NGO Human Rights Watch, tried to renew the doctrine of liberal internationalism allegedly adopted, according to her, by the Bush Administration after 9/11, but only in its rhetoric of human rights and democracy, whereas in reality practiced through a strategy of aggressive unilateralism. Denouncing Bush's "hard power" focused foreign policy, Nossel called for the necessity for the US Administration to take into account all instruments of power: "unlike conservatives, who rely on military power as the main tool of statecraft, liberal internationalists see trade, diplomacy, foreign aid and the spread of American values as equally important" (Nossel, 2004). The relationship between the two components of smart power, hard and soft power, is complicated, complex and interactive: the two are neither perfect substitutes nor are they perfect complements, although they do often reinforce one another. Certainly, a strong positive image can garner many more security commitments, which in turn can bolster a nation's hard defenses. And of course, force in the form of wars of liberation (humanitarian intervention) will certainly garner a better image for the protector state (Gallarotti, 2014: 13). This article defines smart power as the capacity of an actor to combine elements of hard power and soft power in a way that are mutually reinforcing such that the actor's purposes are advanced effectively and efficiently. A conceptually robust and policy-relevant framework for smart power should be built on a few additional core considerations:

- The target over which one seek to exercise power its internal nature and its broader global context. Power cannot be smart if those who wield it are ignorant of these attributes of the target populations and regions.

- Self-knowledge and understanding of one's own goal capacities. Smart power requires the wielder to know what his or her country or community seek, as well as its will and capacity to achieve its goals.
- The broader regional and global context within which the action will be conducted.
- The tools to be employed, as well as how and when to deploy them individually and in combination (Wilson, 2008: 115).

### 2-3. Smart Power Logics and Proxy War

In so far, we discussed two concepts; proxy war and smart power. It is now necessary to study the possible links between them. It is generally admitted that engaging in a war requires a reasonable amount of power. Wars impose relative losses in both material and non-material/ psychological notions. As a result, countries, especially great powers tend to diminish great losses. Under these circumstances, the best choice is the proxy war. A engagement without direct involvement.

Arguably, there are four identify able types of relations between these actors that have shaped the dynamics of proxy wars in the past and present. These are when:

- a state uses another state (as a surrogate force);
- a state uses a non- state actor (such as a terrorist organization, militia group or private military company);
- a non- state actor uses a state;
- a non- state actor uses another non- state actor -as a surrogate Force - (Mumford, 2013: 45).

Proxy war typifies this assertion. The risks associated with direct intervention in inter- or intra- state wars are self- evident: international condemnation; loss of life to military personnel; high financial costs of lengthy and substantial deployments; and the potential embarrassment of open strategic failure (Mumford, 2013: 41). In this way, Proxy war is a measure with the aim of maximizing gains and decreasing losses. /the same is aimed at in smart power. Although the roots of proxy war back to the fourteenth century, but proxy war in the 21st century has a high sense Similarity to and interrelation with Smart Power. Essentially both are the consequences of an intelligent approach towards power and war.

The story of war is the story of power. Power, in its most basic terms, is the ability to exercise one's will over others. Of course, exercising one's will involves controlling the very definitions of power (Nordstrom, 2004: 72) Smart power as hybrid approach depends completely on proxy war in its hard power/military notions. According to Chester A. Crocker, smart power "involves the strategic use of diplomacy, persuasion, capacity building, and the projection of power and influence in ways that are cost-effective and have political and social legitimacy" – essentially the engagement of both military force and all forms of diplomacy (Crocker, 2007: 13).

### **3. Smart Power, Proxy Wars and the US**

The Strive to maintain, strengthen and continue of global leadership, has been a permanent component of US foreign policy evermore. This principle does not change when the presidents enter to the White house. They are merely doing different efforts in the direction of this principle. The US has always measured its power in a real scene. This power can be hard or soft, it can be according to the political, military, economic or media capacity, and in the present situation, we can focus on smart power as the most innovative area of power. US, is the theoretician of this power.

Joseph Nye, former Assistant Secretary of Defense under the Clinton administration and author of several books on smart power strategy, suggests that the most effective strategies in foreign policy today require a mix of hard and soft power resources. Employing only hard power or only soft power in a given situation will usually prove inadequate (Gavel, 2012). He believes that: "Power resources are not as fungible as money. What wins in one game may not help at all in another. Holding a winning poker hand does not help if the game is bridge) Even if the game is poker, if you play your high hand poorly, you can still lose. Having power resources does not guarantee that you will always get the outcome you want. For example, in terms of resources the United States was far more powerful than Vietnam, yet we lost the Vietnam War. And America was the world's only superpower in 2001, but we failed to prevent September 11" (Nye, 2004: 3).

Nye takes a brief look at the past, to explain the matter. The end of the Cold War was marked by the collapse of the Berlin Wall, which fell as a result of a combination of hard and soft power. Throughout the Cold War, hard power was used to deter Soviet aggression and soft power was used to erode faith in Communism. Joseph Nye said: "When the Berlin Wall finally collapsed, it was destroyed not by artillery barrage but by hammers and bulldozers wielded by those who had lost faith in communism" (Nye, 2009: 160). Nye introduces the term "smart power" in his book, "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics". "Smart power is neither hard nor soft. It is both," he writes (Nye, 2004: 23). In an article in "Foreign Affairs", analyst Suzanne Nossel uses the term "smart power". For Nossel, "Smart power means knowing that the United States' own hand is not always its best tool: U.S. interests are furthered by enlisting others on behalf of U.S. goals" (Nossel, 2004).

In light of 9/11 and the war in Iraq, the Bush administration was criticized for placing too much emphasis on a hard power strategy. To counter this hard power strategy, the Center for Strategic and International Studies released the "Commission on Smart Power" to introduce the concept of smart power into discussion on which principles should guide the future of U.S. foreign policy in light of 9/11 and the war in Iraq. The report identifies five critical areas of focus for the U.S.: Alliances, Global Development, Public Diplomacy, Economic Integration, and Technology and Innovation. According to the report, these five goals constitute smart foreign policy and will help the United States achieve the

goal of "American preeminence as an agent of good"(Nye & Armitage, 2012). The Center for Strategic and International Studies, released a second report, "Investing in a New Multilateralism", to address the concept of smart power in international releases. This report addressed the United Nations as an instrument of U.S. smart power. By collaborating with the UN, the U.S. can lead the way in reinvigorating multilateralism within in the international community in the 21st century (Forman, 2009).

Paying attention to Hillary Clinton's remarks, will makes the process more obvious. She outlined the widespread dimension of the smart power. The dimensions are very comprehensive and complete, which also includes the military option. Here we can see a relatively clear relationship between smart power and proxy war.

Under the Obama administration, smart power became a core principle of his foreign policy strategy. It was popularized by Hillary Clinton during her Senate confirmation hearing on January 13, 2009 for the position of Secretary of State: "We must use what has been called smart power---the full range of tools at our disposal---diplomatic, economic, military, political, legal, and cultural---picking the right tool, or combination of tools, for each situation. With smart power, diplomacy will be the vanguard of foreign policy" (Clinton, 2013).

Political analysts tend to analyze Obama's foreign policy in comparison with the one practiced by the Bush Administration, and more precisely with what is commonly known as the "Bush doctrine". Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the "Bush doctrine" is generally defined as a turn in the US foreign policy marked by a full-scale militarization and unilateralism meant to defend the US national security and vital interests by imposing the US hegemony in the world. As put by the former President of the National Intelligence Council (NIC) and former assistant Secretary of Defense, Joseph Nye, Bush made three main changes to US grand strategy: "reducing Washington's reliance on permanent alliances and international institutions, expanding the traditional right of preemption into a new doctrine of preventive war, and advocating coercive democratization as a solution to Middle East terrorism" (Dimitrova, 2009: 2).

Smart power was chosen as the major policy in Barack Obama's administration. It became more important after 2011. Obama's "2011 May Speech on the Middle East and North Africa" called for a smart power strategy, incorporating development, in addition to defense and diplomacy, as the third pillar of his foreign policy doctrine (Obama, 2011). The smart power requires a scene to emerge.

Historically, the US had a proxy war experience in Afghanistan. US tried to avoid direct confrontation with the former Soviet Union after the latter's intervention in Afghanistan. Afghan groups were enlisted to improve US policy in the war against Soviet Union.

In the 1980 s and early 1990 s, Afghanistan was a proxy battleground for the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. One could argue that

America was the winner in that battle (the Soviet Union and Afghanistan certainly weren't), except that US actions then created the threat from the Taliban today. There were no winners. (Dormandy, 2007) America's proxy war strategy in Afghanistan was summed up by Charles Cogan, one of the CIA's chief operatives in the region, in simple terms: 'we took the means to wage war, put them in the hands of people who could do so, for the purposes for which we agreed'. The first American arms delivery – a shipment of rifles – arrived just fourteen days after the Soviets had invaded Afghanistan on 24 December 1979 in an effort to prop up a crumbling communist regime in Kabul. This swift response by President Jimmy Carter demonstrated the degree of readiness with which he was willing to adopt a proxy war strategy (Mumford, 2013: 72).

The end of the Cold War was not the end of the proxy wars. Proxy wars continued and became more complex over time. While there were two major Super powers during the Cold War, new ever increasing powers emerged in there after decades despite the US desire illustrated and declared in "New world Order". The US was involved with economic and financial problems, and Bush's foreign policy worsened the situation for this country. Therefore, the United States had to make adjustments in its measurements. The US has been trying to make a big part of its goals, by the hands of its allies. The Arab world uprisings were a good opportunity for the United States.

After 9/11, through programs like the Pan-Sahel Initiative and the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership, the United States has pumped hundreds of millions of dollars into training and arming the militaries of Mali, Niger, Chad, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia in order to promote "stability." In 2013, Captain J. Dane Thorleifson, the outgoing commander of an elite, quick-response force known as Naval Special Warfare Unit 10, described such efforts as training "proxy" forces in order to build "critical host nation security capacity; enabling, advising, and assisting our African CT [counterterror] partner forces so they can swiftly counter and destroy al-Shabab, AQIM [Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb], and Boko Haram." In other words, the US military is in the business of training African armies as the primary tactical forces combatting local Islamic militant groups (Turse, 2014).

Barack Obama paid more attention to regional actors in his policies. On January 5, 2012, Obama announced a new defense strategy entitled Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership. He did not directly refer to the war in this document, but he referred to a metaphorical form. Obama announced: "U.S. policy will emphasize Gulf security, in collaboration with Gulf Cooperation Council countries when appropriate, to prevent Iran's development of a nuclear weapon capability and counter its destabilizing policies. The United States will do this while standing up for Israel's security and a comprehensive Middle East peace. To support these objectives, the United States will continue to place a premium on U.S. and allied military presence in– and support of– partner nations in and around this region."(Obama, 2012). These words were a smart redefinition of



the proxy war concept. That is, he preserved all pressure means. Syria in Arab Spring developments was an appropriate option to realize this strategy.

#### **4. US and Proxy War in Syria**

On December 17, 2010, a street vendor in Tunis, named Mohammed Bouazizi, immolated himself in protest of the arbitrary seizing of his vegetable stand by a local government official. That act triggered the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia and a wave of public unrest throughout the Middle East that came to be called the “Arab Spring” (Micallef, 2017).

The initial protests in Syria in mid-March 2011 were triggered in Deraa when a group of local teenagers were arrested by the police and allegedly tortured for “defacing” walls with the motto of the Arab Spring: “Al-sha’b yurid isqat al-nizam” graffiti – “the people want the downfall of the regime. The first anti-government demonstrations broke out in Latakia when protestors hurled projectiles at the bronze statue of Hafiz al-Assad, the former President of Syria. The sectarian character and the geopolitical networking are quite complex. For example, the influence of Iran, the domestic security of Israel, the interest of Russia and China, and the various positions of USA and Europe led from a civil war to a proxy war where the struggle between East and West is about the dominance in the Near East (Ulmer; 2013: 86). The citizens of these states raised their voices against their autocratic rules through widespread public protests which led to the removal of Tunisian President Zein El Abidine Bin Ali, Libyan President Mu’ammarr al Qadhafi and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. After the removal, Libyan President was attacked by the NATO forces along with the civilians and resultantly he demised. This paper also highlights the consequences of these civil clashes and civil uprisings. Tunis was one of the victim states of Arab Uprisings which succeeded to implement its new Constitution with common and mutual census.

But the situation in Syria as in Libya, was different. The demonstration entered in a violent phase. There was violence in all countries that were involved with the Arab uprisings, but violence in Syria was obviously organized. Many armed groups were formed in a short term process against central government. It rapidly changed to a world war.

Any analysis of proxy warfare is hampered by two factors. The fact that sponsors usually provide assistance covertly – on the basis of plausible denial means that it is often difficult to gain verifiable evidence that a faction within a given conflict has a proxy relationship with external supporters. It is also very much in the interests of any government embroiled in a domestic conflict to claim that it has been artificially generated by malevolent foreign powers. By proclaiming that it is fighting ‘terrorists’ backed by hostile states, the Baath regime in Syria is seeking both to discredit its internal foes and to absolve itself of any responsibility for provoking an insurrection through its own misrule. Nonetheless, it is likely that the Syrian civil war is will become a proxy conflict, due to its intersection with regional rivalries and power-political disputes

(Hughesa, 2014: 524). As'ad Abu Khalil, Professor of Political Science at the University of California, distinguishes eight proxy wars in Syria; the internal Wahhabi war, the Iranian-Saudi war, the Sunni-Shia war, the Russian-American war, Qatari and Saudi conflict, Hezbollah versus the Future Movement, Clash of Islamic identities and the regional conflict between the global organization of the Muslim Brotherhood on one hand and the regional Salafism on the other (Abu Khalil, 2014).

In 2013, the US Special Operations Command (SOCOM) — one of the nine organizational units that make up the Unified Combatant Command — had special operations forces (SOFs) in 134 countries, where they were either involved in combat, special missions, or advising and training foreign forces (McGrath, 2014).

It should be noted that even now, the United States has the largest number of military bases in other countries. Thousands of American soldiers are involved in various operations, thousands of kilometers beyond of the US borders. It means that the US did not fully leave aside Bush's military strategy but developed it into a smart level.

The Syrian crisis coincided with Barack Obama's presidency. Obama Administration pursued the following policies towards Syrian uprising against the Assad regime began in March 2011: demanding a political transition, international diplomacy, U.S. sanctions, humanitarian aid, non-lethal aid, intelligence coordination, disruption of arms shipments to Syria, contingency planning, and preparing for a transition (Sharp & Blanchard, 2012: 13). The social, economic, and cultural structure of Syria too provided potentials of proxy war for the foreign powers among them and the foremost the US. It should be noted that Syria is a country of ethnic and religious diversity. Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen are the ethnic divisions, and Sunnis, the Alevis, Shi'ites, Drosites, and various Christian sects are religious divisions of the country.

Proxy warfare may appear to be an attractive policy option for sponsors, but it has several pitfalls. For the proxy forces involved, the risk is that they can be treated as expendable by their external patrons, and can be manipulated by them. Any conclusions about a proxy conflict in Syria are tentative in nature, but it is possible that the rebels will face the risks associated with abandonment, critical weaknesses in combat against Assad's military and security forces, and also exacerbated factionalism, potentially leading to internecine violence between rival insurgent movements. For sponsor states, the risks involve the potential for escalated involvement (drawing in their own armed forces), retaliation, and also the unintended consequences of backing rebel forces, foremost among them a revival of radical Sunni Islamism, and the empowerment of an al Qaeda movement weakened by the 'war on terror'.

The US needed an Excuse to take action against the Syrian state. The procedure was previously experienced by the US in Afghanistan and Iraq. The US during Bush Administration, used September 11 terrorist attacks as a legal excuse to invade Afghanistan. The case against Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq was



possession and possible usage of mass destruction weapons. Barack Obama too, applied a similar approach against Assad regime in Syria accusing him for using chemical weapons against his people. This happened while the Syrian government attributed the usage of chemical weapons to terrorist groups and requested a neutral international investigation for the case. The request was rejected by the US and its allies in the UN. However, the United States used it to the best of all. After the first use of chemical weapons in Syria, we saw Obama's remarkable statements.

Obama asserted in a news conference in Stockholm in Sept. 4, 2013: "We have been very clear to the Assad regime, but also to other players on the ground, that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus. That would change my equation" (Kessler, 2013)

Obama tried to warn about Syria's great danger to the whole World. Yet, unlike Bush, Obama was more careful about using the military option. He added: "I have, at this point, not ordered military engagement in the situation. But the point that you made about chemical and biological weapons is critical. That's an issue that doesn't just concern Syria; it concerns our close allies in the region, including Israel. It concerns us. We cannot have a situation where chemical or biological weapons are falling into the hands of the wrong people" (Kessler, 2013). The United States, after transmitting this code to the world, gradually expanded its indirect military policies against Syria. Obama continued the process, to gain a positive congressional opinion of limited action in Syria in the end.

Secretary of State John Kerry argued before the House Foreign Affairs Committee that "extremist groups fighting against the Syrian government would become stronger if the United States did not carry out a military strike." In Kerry's scenario, if the United States does not punish the Assad government for using chemical weapons, other nations in the area will begin arming the more extremist rebel groups that the United States has been pressuring them not to (Landler, 2013).

At the direction of U.S. President Barack Obama, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was put in charge of the operations, worth about \$1 billion annually, to arm anti-government forces in Syria (Black, 2015). Obama first authorized the CIA-run covert program, known as "Timber Sycamore," in early-2013. Since then, it has trained and armed thousands of insurgents who have fought regime forces and extremist groups alike. This support entailed ammunition and small arms, including rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and valuable anti-tank guided missiles. Critically, it also entailed money for salaries, without which commanders could not recruit or retain fighters who would desert or defect to better-resourced extremist groups. Recipients of U.S. aid had already struggled against the Assad regime and jihadist groups. Ending the program, then, means choking off mainstream, non-extremist opposition to Assad in northern Syria where he is already very weak, and potentially in its

stronger form in the south (Itani, 2017). The United States first supplied the rebels of the Free Syrian Army with non-lethal aid (including food rations and pickup trucks), but quickly began providing training, cash, and intelligence to selected Syrian rebel commanders. During the Syrian Civil War, which began in 2011, two US programs attempted to assist the Syrian rebels. One was a military program that planned to train and equip 15,000 Syrian rebels, but was canceled in 2015 after spending \$500 million and producing only a few dozen fighters (Goldman& Schmidt, 2017).

The CIA program began officially in June 2013, although the United States had been secretly providing support to Syrian rebels since 2012. The goal of the program was to empower the FSA against Islamist factions, particularly Jabhat al-Nusra, the Syrian branch of al Qaeda that is now known as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). Both U.S. President Barack Obama and congressional leaders were convinced to fund the CIA program after the publication of several reports demonstrating the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons. Under its terms, the United States provided approved rebel groups with light weapons, military training, salaries, and sometimes TOW anti-tank missiles. Washington, however, always refused to provide them with heavier weapons such as surface-to-air missiles, lest they fall into the hands of groups such as HTS (Balanche, 2017)

The Free Syrian Army was also the primary recipient of CIA funding to overthrow Assad, but this support diminished as ISIS and Al-Qaeda became increasingly influential among rebels (O'Connor, 2017).

During the beginning of the coalition interventions, leaders including U.S. President Obama, said coalition ground forces would not be used in the fight against ISIL either in Iraq or Syria unless they were local coalition forces. (Broke, 2014) It is obvious that the US tends to keep the war in Syria alive. Syria geographically and strategically is a hot spot for the US especially when considering Israel as the close neighbor of this country. Hence, the United States manages to support Syrian opposition despite their constant failures on the battle ground.

## **5. Conclusion**

Offensive Realism implies motives and ambitions of great powers to maintain and strengthen hegemony. So power remains the mere nature of international relations in this notion of realism. Power has been among the most ancient subjects in human searches and measures. Yet, the concept of power has been developed during different periods of history. Developments in various aspects of human life including economic, technologic, social and even psychological aspects constituted new notions and approaches regarding power and related terms like war.

From the other side, destructive Weapons and ammunitions increased the possible physical and humanitarian losses to a Terrible and intolerable level. The invention and development of mass destruction weapons especially Nuclear

weapons in recent decades made new definitions and attitudes of power quite inevitable.

Other forms of power were introduced theoretically and practically. Soft power was added to the literature of political sciences and international relations as a new query. The combination of the classic hard power and the new soft power created the term and approach of smart power. Proxy war, though rooted back to the history, was re-considered and redefined by strategists according to the perspective of the hybrid smart power.

The above mentioned developments were initially and warmly embraced and welcomed in US academic and military institutions, due to the unpleasant experiences of wars in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and eventually Iraq during Bush's administration. Massive losses and less gain were the final evaluation of Bush's policies in Iraq and Afghanistan by analysts. Clinton Administration (from January 20, 1993 to January 20, 2001) announced and applied the preference of soft power as a vital reaction to Bush's direct and military interventions in International affairs. George W. Bush's presidency was a flash back to his father George H. W. Bush (1981 to 1989) policies based on military dimensions of hard power. Yet, Obama Administration (January 20, 2009 to January 20, 2017) recognizing the deficiencies of US measures tried to make necessary adjustments in the Country's strategies.

Almost immediately after the 9/11 terrorist attack and start of George W. Bush's militaristic policies, theorists and observers like Susan Nossel and Joseph Nye warned about the unilateral use of soft power or hard power. Yet, it was during Obama's administration that the warnings were seriously considered and Smart power was introduced as an appropriate solution. Proxy war was an approach within the general framework of smart power theory taking its essential principles from logics of smart power. It means that the same motives that drove US to the implication of soft and then smart power, paved the way for focusing on proxy war. Inevitability of hard power despite positive aspects of soft power was led to smart power but terrible experiences of direct involvement in military actions in international scene made proxy war a preferable choice in the US policy, especially in the Middle East. The Arab Spring was an opportunity for the United States, an opportunity for a practical test of proxy war. Evidences prove that the US government along with and by means of some rich Arab States namely Saudi Arabia, Emirates and Qatar have been major sponsors for many of armed groups in Syria. Conditions and actors have been changed in the region and in the world too. The United States' hegemony is threatened by the emergence of new powers despite declaration of the New World Order. The US could no longer operate in Syria, as it did in Iraq and Afghanistan. Syrian Assad enjoyed an almost popular support in the country despite historical religious and ethnic oppositions. On the other hand, unlike Iraq and Afghanistan during the Bush era, it also has strong supporters like Iran and Russia. Proxy war was selected to avoid possible negative consequences of direct military intervention in Syria.

## References

1. Abu Khalil, As 'ad (2014). The 8 Proxy Wars Going on in Syria Right Now. Huffington post. Retrieved from [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/asad-abukhalil/syria-proxy-wars\\_b\\_5874488.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/asad-abukhalil/syria-proxy-wars_b_5874488.html).
2. Balanche, Fabrice. The End of the CIA Program in Syria. Retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2017-08-02/end-cia-program-syria>
3. Black, Ian (2015). US axes \$500m scheme to train Syrian rebels, says NYT. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/09/us-to-axe-5-scheme-train-syrian-rebels-nyt>
4. Blanchard, Christopher M. Sharp, Jeremy M. (2012). Armed Conflict in Syria: U.S. and International Response. CRS Report for Congress Prepared for Members and Committees of Congress August 20, 2012.
5. Britannica (2015). Spanish Civil War. The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/event/Spanish-Civil-War>
6. Brooks, Rosa (2014). Why Obama's assurance of 'no boots on the ground' isn't so reassuring. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-obamas-assurance-of-no-boots-on-the-ground-isnt-so-reassuring/2014/09/26/c56d859e-44bf-11e4-9a15-137aa0153527\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-obamas-assurance-of-no-boots-on-the-ground-isnt-so-reassuring/2014/09/26/c56d859e-44bf-11e4-9a15-137aa0153527_story.html)
7. Clinton, Hillary (2017). Clinton: Use "Smart Power" in Diplomacy. Retrieved from <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/clinton-use-smart-power-in-diplomacy>.
8. Crocker, Chester A, Hampson, Fen Osler; Aall, Pamela R. (2007). Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World. US Institute of Peace Press. ISBN 978-1-929223-97-8.
9. D. Stone, Gregory (2010). Proxy War: A Critical Examination of Superpower Indirect Conflict in Africa. Department of Political Studies, Faculty of Arts University of Manitoba. 2010. Available at: <https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/bitstream/handle/1993/4170>
10. Dahl. Robert A. (1957). The Concept of Power. Department of political science, Yale university. Volume 2, Issue 3 Pages 201–215. 1957 DOI: 10.1002/bs.3830020303.
11. Difference between (2015). Difference Between Hard Power and Soft Power. Retrieved from <http://www.differencebetween.com/difference-between-hard-power-and-vs-soft-power/>
12. Dormandy, Xenia (2007). Afghanistan's Proxy War. Harvard Kennedy School: Belfer Center for Science and international Affairs. Feb. Retrieved from <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/afghanistans-proxy-war>
13. Feng, Liu; Ruizhuan, Zhang (Summer 2006). The typologies of realism. The Chinese Journal of International Politics. Oxford Journals. Vol 1: 109–134.
14. Forman, Johanna Mendelson (2009). Investing in a New Multilateralism. Center for Strategic and International Studies. January. 2009.
15. Frankel, Joseph (2017). War. ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/war>

16. Gallarotti, Giulio M. (2014). Smart Power: Definitions, Importance, and Effectiveness. Division II Faculty Publications. Paper 163. Available at: <http://wescholar.wesleyan.edu/div2facpubs/163>
17. Gavel, Doug (2012). Joseph Nye on Smart Power. Harvard University Kennedy School. Retrieved 26 April 2012.
18. Goldman, Mark Mazzetti, Adam; Schmidt, Michael S. (2017). Behind the Sudden Death of a \$1 Billion Secret C.I.A. War in Syria. The New York Times. ISSN 0362-4331.
19. H. Keely, Lawrence (1997). War Before Civilization: The Myth of The Peaceful Savage. Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford. 1997.
20. Hughesa, Geraint Alun (2014). Syria and the perils of proxy warfare. A Defense Studies Department, King's College London, UK. 01 Jul 2014. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2014.913542>
21. Itani, Faysal. The End of American Support for Syrian Rebels Was Inevitable. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/07/trump-syria-assad-rebels-putin-cia/534540/>
22. Kessler, Glenn. President Obama and the 'red line' on Syria's chemical weapons. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2013/09/06/242c1afe7858>
23. Landler, Mark, Weisman, Jonathan, Gordon, Michael R. Split Senate Panel Approves Giving Obama Limited Authority on Syria. Retrieved from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/05/world/middleeast/divided-senate-panel-approves-resolution-on-syria-strike.html?pagewanted=all>
24. McGrath, Timothy. The US is now involved in 134 wars or none, depending on your definition of war. Retrieved from <https://www.pri.org/stories/2014-09-16/us-now-involved-134-wars-or-none-depending-your-definition-war>
25. Micallef, Joseph V. (201). The Arab Spring: Six Years Later. Retrieved from [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-v-micallef/the-arab-spring-six-years\\_b\\_14461896.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-v-micallef/the-arab-spring-six-years_b_14461896.html)
26. Moseley, Alexander (2017). The Philosophy of War. University of Tennessee at Martin. Retrieved from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/war/>
27. Mumford, Andrew (2013). Proxy Warfare; War and Conflict in The Modern World. Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc, 2013
28. Mushtaq, Abdul Qadir & Afzal Muhammad (2017). Arab Spring: Its Causes and Consequences. JPUHS, Vol.30, No.1, January - June, 2017.
29. Nordstrom Carolyn (2004). Shadows of War: Violence, Power, and International Profiteering in the Twenty-First Century. University of California Press, Year: 2004.
30. Nossel, Suzanne (2004). Smart Power. Foreign Affairs, vol. 83, March/April, 2004.
31. Nye Jr. Joseph S. (2004). Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics. United states. 2004

32. Nye Jr. Joseph S. (2009). Get Smart Combining Hard and Soft Power. *Foreign Affairs*. Vol. 88, No. 4 (July/August 2009), pp. 160-163. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20699631>
33. Nye, J. S. Jr. (2008). Public Diplomacy and Soft Power. *The ANNALS of the America Academy of Political and Social Science*. 616(94) [pdf]. Available at: <http://ann.sagepub.com/content/616/1/94>
34. Nye, J.S. (1990). Soft Power. *Foreign Policy*, No. 80, Twentieth Anniversary, (Autumn 1990), pages 153-171.
35. Nye, Joseph (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs.
36. Nye, Joseph. Armitage, Richard L. (2012). *CSIS Commission on Smart Power: A Smarter, More Secure America*. Center for Strategic and International Studies. 2012.
37. Obama, Barack (2012). *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities For 21ST Century Defense*. January 2012.
38. Obama, Barack. *Obama's Speech on the Middle East and North Africa*. Council on Foreign Relations. Retrieved 12 December 2017.
39. O'Connor, Tom. (201). U.S. Military Battles Syrian Rebels Once Supported by CIA, Now Backed by Turkey. 8/29/17. <http://www.newsweek.com/us-military-battles-syria-rebels-supported-cia-backed-turkey-656617>
40. Oxford dictionary1 (2017). Soft Power. Retrieved from [https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/soft\\_power](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/soft_power)
42. Oxford dictionary2(2017). Hard Power. Retrieved from [https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/hard\\_power](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/hard_power)
43. Oxford dictionary3 (2017). War. Retrieved from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/war>
44. Philipp, Jann & Wagner, E. (2014). The Effectiveness of Soft & Hard Power in Contemporary International Relations. Retrieved from <http://www.e-ir.info/2014/05/14/the-effectiveness-of-soft-hard-power-in-contemporary-international-relations>
45. The Vietnam War." What is a Proxy War?". May 5, 2016. <https://thevietnamwar.info/proxy-war/>
- Turse, Nick (2014). *America's Proxy Wars in Africa*. Available at: <https://www.thenation.com/article/americas-proxy-wars-africa/>
46. Ulmer, Beate (2013). *Arabellion: Geopolitical Proxy Wars and New Constellations of East and West in Syria. The Political Geography of Religious Radicalism. A compendium of selected case studies around the globe*. University of Tübingen. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259027220>
47. Valeriano, Brandon (2009). Department of Political Science, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, USA. 179–206, 2009.
48. Wilde, Robert (2017). *Mutually Assured Destruction*. Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/mutually-assured-destruction-1221190>

49. Wilson, Ernest J. (2008). Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power. Retrieved from <http://ann.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/616/1/110>





### برگ درخواست اشتراک فصلنامه مطالعات سیاسی جهان اسلام

نام و نام خانوادگی:.....شغل.....  
نشانی گیرنده:.....  
کد پستی:.....تلفن:.....  
مبلغ پرداخت شده:.....شماره رسید بانکی:.....  
  
تاریخ و امضاء:.....

### بهای اشتراک سالانه

اشخاص حقیقی (افراد)	۲۴۰۰۰۰ ریال
اشخاص حقوقی (موسسه‌ها)	۲۴۰۰۰۰ ریال
دانشجویان، اساتید و فرهنگیان	۲۰۰۰۰ ریال
بهای تک شماره نشریه در داخل کشور	۶۰۰۰۰ ریال

مشترکان محترم می‌توانند بهای اشتراک خود را به حساب ۲۱۷۳۳۴۰۲۲ جام بانک ملت به نام دانشکده علوم اجتماعی- شعبه دانشگاه بین المللی امام خمینی (ره) قزوین واریز نموده و روگرفت قبض پرداخت شده را به نشانی فصلنامه ارسال فرمایند. ضمناً دانشجویان، فرهنگیان و اعضای هیات علمی دانشگاه‌ها، جهت برخورداری از تخفیف، روگرفت کارت شناسایی خود را به همراه برگ درخواست ارسال نمایند.