

IDENTITY THROUGH FOREIGN POLICY: RUSSIA AND CHINA IN THE  
MIDDLE EAST

BY

ALEXANDER JAMES SLOCOMBE

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## **Abstract:**

Understanding national identity through foreign policy provides a strong means of ascertaining the prevailing social constructions within a great power nation state. There is a growing need to understand the national identities of Russia and China without pre-theorising or depending on asymmetric comparative studies with regional states. China and Russia are frequently compared to their regional neighbours which undermines understanding their unique identities. There are also frequent misunderstandings of contemporary Chinese and Russian national motives, often likening the modern Russian state to the Soviet Union, or attempting to understand China as a challenger to US unipolarity. Both great powers exhibit common characteristics of authoritarianism, both have recently endured massive social and national changes, and both have global interests that manifest in the Middle East such as securing vital geostrategic resources, both states are conscious of their native Muslim populations and to be recognised as a great power identity both must demonstrate influence in the Middle East. Yet, there have been significant differences in agendas and outcomes of their foreign policy decisions. This thesis seeks to use a constructivist framework to discern Russian and Chinese identity through comparison of their respective foreign policy. Contrary to “neo-realist” and “neo-liberal” arguments that accept state interests as rational, determined by the international system, and not determined by identity, this thesis seeks not to pre-theorise but to identify how their respective actions towards three key case studies in the Middle East; the Syrian Civil Conflict, the Iranian Nuclear Framework, and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, indicate their prevailing social constructions. This thesis compares Russian and Chinese attitudes and actions towards these cases. Despite their similar disposition and principles towards international relations these two nations had significant points of difference. Drawing upon foreign policy analysis and a comparative model this thesis finds that despite the commonalities between the Russian and Chinese nations, Russian identity as great power, unique Eurasian power, and an alternative to the West, ensures a defiance of its relatively weak economic position to engage in positions of leadership in the Middle East, whilst China’s identity constructions that are common with Russia, its great power, civilisational, and alternative to the West constructions manifest despite an increasingly influential and material position in the world order, has provided little incentive to engage in meaningful ways throughout the Middle East’s recent conflicts.

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## 1. Introduction

For both Russia and China, the 20<sup>th</sup> century proved a turbulent time for national identity. National identity is an important aspect of society. Nations are full of individuals whom share common language, practises, and interests which are not deliberately or consciously chosen. Disputes remain regarding whether the shared Russian identity experience is European or a unique Eurasian nation. Likewise, the rising economic and political status of China has provoked much debate over how China experiences its identity. Understanding how the relationship between a country's identity and its foreign policy leads to greater ability to engage in successful relations. In order to understand the respective identities of Russia and China this is comparative in nature, but where typical comparative work seeks to understand national identity through critical comparison with neighbouring nations (or unions), for example Russia with Europe, or China with Japan, this thesis seeks to compare Russia and China with a comparable non-regional state, in this case, one another. Regional comparisons risk misunderstanding nations as having identities fundamentally comparable to their regional neighbours, and tacitly assume a degree of sameness between these states and the surrounding nations. The purpose of this thesis is to ascertain the identity constructions of these nation-states through their respective foreign policies towards the Syrian Civil Conflict, the Iranian nuclear framework, and the Israeli-Palestinian Crisis. This approach does not deny value to comparison with regional neighbours but assumes that identities are multi-layered. Different relationships with different groups of actors may produce different behaviours not yet considered.

Therefore, this thesis aims to understand what national identity constructions are held by Russia and China as demonstrated through their respective foreign policies in the Middle East. This thesis seeks to compare these two regional great powers for their similar historical experiences, that they have both experienced great social and political change in their recent histories, that they both share a centralised authoritarian administration, and that they both have vital global interests that begets action in the Middle East, for instance China and Russia both have vulnerable alliances in the region, diaspora, and material interests. These nations are indisputably great powers with global responsibilities. In this way, it aims to discern how comparing these powers to one

another rather than their democratic neighbours may provide a more nuanced understanding and enhanced predictability of these global superpowers. Foreign policy literature has largely failed to consider in these cases how identity has shaped interest over traditional material rationales.

Western analysts often assume that the governing rules and beliefs in international relations provide an appropriate framework for the study of non-Western nation states. These features of Western international relations analysis depend on notions of state, power, order, identity, borders, and respect for sovereign independence, which may in fact not be universally held beliefs. The benefit therefore of comparing two non-Western, non-democratic states is that these preconceived notions of fundamental international relations analysis may be challenged. Donald Puchalan explains non-Western world-views, saying: “‘States’ are not very important ... but ‘forces’, ‘movements’, ‘parties’, ‘peoples’, ‘cultures’, and ‘civilisations’ are important.”<sup>1</sup> Puchalan goes on to state that ideas and ideologies are far more important in non-Western politics because “they dialectically drive world affairs.”<sup>2</sup> Non-Western political identity, in relation to the West attempts to reject the West almost entirely; from Western emphasis on individualism rather than communal values, to its emphasis on materialism.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, a comparison between Western and non-Western states risks being troubled by the fundamental differences between the two ideologies. In order to understand non-Western international relations theory one must look at non-Western states in relation to themselves.

For Russia, the Self has gone through many competing notions ideological frameworks; ‘Statists’, ‘Westernisers’, ‘Civilisationists’, etc. – all varieties have Europe, or European civilisation as the constitutive other. As well as recent relations to Japan, for China, it had been the barbarian other.<sup>4</sup> In response to these threats, both states have displayed Russocentric or Sinocentric, themes in identity discourse. For both Beijing and Moscow, Europe/Japan is a definite constitutive Other, but the nature of

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<sup>1</sup> Donald J. Puchala, "Some non-Western perspectives on international relations." *Journal of Peace Research* 34, no. 2 (1997): 130.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 130.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Jeanne L. Wilson, "Russia and China Respond to Soft Power: Interpretation and Readaptation of a Western Construct." *Politics* 35, no. 3-4 (2015): 287-300.

identity is that it is multifaceted and may produce evidence of different constitutive features in different environments.

Both Russia and China have found themselves ontologically threatened by the Western universal values they allegedly seek to displace. The Kremlin developed an assessment “that identified the West, and the United States in particular, as engaged in a process of regime subversion and penetration that sought nothing less than regime change in targeted states (including implicitly Russia itself).”<sup>5</sup> Likewise, the CCP has drawn similar conclusions, expressed in articles, as well as, “[published] in CCP journals or disseminated for internal viewing” that “portrays the West as an existential threat that seeks to destabilize, if not overthrow, Communist party rule.”<sup>6</sup> This presents a uniquely shared commonality between Russia and China. Following a century dominated by the Western neoliberal world view powered by globalisation, Russia and China are presented as the antithesis of progressive universal values. Yet, both Beijing and Moscow perceive that they are the victims of a hostile world.<sup>7</sup> The challenge therein is to identify and recognise Russia and China’s prevailing social constructions which could consequently mean bridge-building relationships by preventing inertia from dictating the West’s understanding of these great powers.

The Russian identity experience following the collapse of the Soviet Union and failed integration into the West through Gorbachev’s *Perestroika* initiatives has been misinterpreted by international actors and studies. The Russian people felt that they were the victims of the collapse much more than other post-Soviet states cite. Post-Soviet collapse, Russia tried and largely failed to Westernise. However, since the turn of the century, through the leadership of Vladimir Putin, there has been a resurgence of Statist, or civilisational discourse regarding Russian national identity. There is a rich history in this debate, whether Russia is European, pan-Slavic, or Eurasian, there is also debate regarding the extent to which Russia rejects or embraces its Soviet past as a basis for ontological security. Subsequently, no dominant ontological thread has emerged from Russian foreign policy, and so there is a popular misconception that Russia operates as an amalgamation of identities often mistaken for identity flexibility.

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<sup>5</sup> Jeanne L. Wilson, "Cultural Statecraft in the Russian and Chinese Contexts: Domestic and International Implications." *Problems of Post-Communism* (2016): p.138.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Uncertainty leads to misinterpretation of Russian foreign policy motives and reduces predictability for other agents in world politics. This study seeks to answer the questions; What is the popular construction of Russian identity as can be seen through foreign policy in the Middle East? When comparing China and Russia, how do their similar constituent features of identity compare?

During the Cold War, Soviet foreign policy was analogous to that of their rival the United States, building nuclear arms, controlling regional allies, and spending vast sums of money worldwide to secure distant allies.<sup>8</sup> These Cold War examples of foreign policy demonstrate that Russia can be reactive to the international environment, but the Soviet Union of the Cold War and the Russia of today are significantly different in their understanding of the Self. Where Soviet foreign policy was guided by an ideological conflict, this should not be assumed to be the case with Russia. Under Vladimir Putin Russian foreign policy had transitioned from emaciated economy to great energy power, furthermore, its foreign policy has shown use of both hard (coercion) and soft (appeal) power means of achieving goals. Whilst China is patently a non-Western nation, Russia has always been on the periphery of Europe, sometimes identifying as a Western society, other times identifying as uniquely Russian. Economically, Russia is all but incomparable to China. Despite vast oil and gas reserves, Russia has been under economic sanctions from the West due to its annexation of Crimea. The theory behind sanctions is to disrupt not necessarily the ruling elites, but the public, and therein incense the public to pressure its leadership to change. Despite this, due to the leadership of Putin, the Russian public has, in spite of worsening economic conditions, ostensibly gained approval for their leadership.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, we cannot rely on material or economic orientated methodologies to understand the identity of Russia. We must look towards the history of Russia, and its social identity to as demonstrated through foreign policy in the Middle East in order to understand the multi-layered Russian identity.

To understand how identity is shown through the Middle East it is necessary to understand how foreign policy compares between nations, even nations of different

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<sup>8</sup> Beasley, Ryan K. *Foreign Policy in Comparative Perspective: Domestic and International Influences on State Behavior*/ Edited by Ryan K. Beasley ... [et Al.]. (Washington DC: 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Michael Birnbaum, "How to understand Putin's jaw-droppingly high approval ratings." *Washington Post*. Published Mar. 6, 2016. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/how-to-understand-putins-jaw-droppingly-high-approval-ratings/2016/03/05/17f5d8f2-d5ba-11e5-a65b-587e721fb231\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/how-to-understand-putins-jaw-droppingly-high-approval-ratings/2016/03/05/17f5d8f2-d5ba-11e5-a65b-587e721fb231_story.html)



capability. Where Russia has seen economic downturn, China demonstrates a viable alternate path (in part) legitimised by its ‘miraculous’ economic growth, recently becoming the most powerful economy in the world by GDP. The recent successes of the Chinese state marks a remarkable shift of the attention towards the so-called civilisation. Particular focus has been given to China’s recent foreign policy agenda, which includes China’s announcement of the Silk Road economic belts was accompanied by Xi Jinping making many visits to foreign nations, during which he spoke of combatting the ‘three evils’ of terrorism, extremism, and separatism.<sup>10</sup> The Silk Road fund has been estimated to be as much as US\$40 billion and includes regional and infrastructural development across Central Asia, Eurasia, and the Middle East.<sup>11</sup> China, in the past was a civilisation state whose ideas and culture permeated throughout Asia, many have called China’s rise a ‘return’ to China’s past status. A tentative reading in to the character and ideas that motivate and to an extent define the *Self* of China depict a civilisation state. As a civilisation state, China sees itself as something greater than the next given state and this belief may be responsible for foreign policy discourse and actions. Finally, China’s history and the “century of humiliation” is a prevailing aspect of China’s modern identity and has had profound implications regarding Chinese nationalism. The century of humiliation provides interesting insight into a sense of Chinese victimhood. According to Qing Cao in *Discourse and Socio-political Transformations in Contemporary China*, China’s loss in the first Sino-Western military clash (the Opium War 1840-42) had serious socio-political consequences; “it gave rise to a deeply entrenched perception of Western powers’ moral corruption in invading other people’s spaces.”<sup>12</sup> Paradoxically, Katzenstein notes that China’s sense of Self often begets a claim of civilisational superiority as a political tool.<sup>13</sup> China’s civilisational Self and its victimhood constructions may seem at odds but the nature of the superiority is based in China’s longevity as a nation.

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel C. Lynch, "Securitizing Culture in Chinese Foreign Policy Debates." *Asian Survey* 53, no. 4 (2013).

<sup>11</sup> Theresa. Fallon, "The New Silk Road: Xi Jinping's Grand Strategy for Eurasia." *American Foreign Policy Interests* 37, no. 3 (2015).

<sup>12</sup> Paul Chilton, Hailong Tian, and Ruth Wodak, eds. *Discourse and socio-political transformations in contemporary China*. Vol. 42. John Benjamins Publishing, 2012. p. 129.

<sup>13</sup> Peter J. Katzenstein, *Sinicization and the Rise of China : Civilizational Processes beyond East and West / Edited by Peter J. Katzenstein*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2012.

China, during its ontological changes of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, culminating in the Tiananmen Square protests, suffered a similar breakaway from past ontological security apparatus and has doubled down on civilisational ontological national unity. If a condition of relations with China is a deference to its civilisation superiority this is a clear indication of the power of ideas/social constructions. Given its astounding achievements in the world economic order many have researched the ontological predicates that constitute China's national identity. Yet, China's rise has not been matched by the same social, democratic, or institutional growth. This is often demonstrated by a dependence on social constructions of victimisations by Western powers and Imperial Japan. But how long can these constructions last when China is vying for global superpower status and the 'aggressor' states are no longer considered threatening? By attempting to discern China's identity themes through foreign policy this thesis tests the extent to which China's ontological construction is reflective of civilisational status. How do the constituent features of China's identity compare to Russia's? And through comparison to Russia, are the social constructions identified in the literature reflective of China's contemporary social construction internationally?

This thesis holds that foreign policy towards the Middle East reflects unique aspects of dominant national identity on the world stage. In part, Middle Eastern affairs warrant a greater degree of deliberation than compared to foreign policy enacted towards neighbouring states because recent history has shown a great deal of involvement in the Middle East by the EU, NATO, US, and Russia. Essentially there are competing philosophical worldviews in the region. And so, Middle Eastern foreign policy constitutes a military, economic, social, and political agenda. Therefore, foreign policy decisions taken towards the Middle East by global powers can and should be taken as a strong indicator of national identity.

### 1.1. Grounds for Comparison

There are various benefits to comparing China and Russia respectively, specifically in relation to comparing two non-Western non-democratic states. A constructivist study of these respective nations produces a great deal of potential towards understanding these great powers through a new lens the depends less on pre-theorisation. In terms of Russia, this thesis seeks to understand prevalent Russian identity as reflected in foreign policies towards the Middle East and therefore challenge notions of Russia's identity experience reflecting the experience of a European-state social construction. This thesis

seeks to verify the identity themes found in the literature against their foreign policy actions in three key Middle Eastern states, then contrast Russian foreign policy with the prevailing literature themes regarding China's identity when verified against foreign policy in the Middle East. Through comparison this thesis aims to identify the extent of Russia's ontological independence from Europe. Through comparison to China we can see the extent to which Russia may identify as a unique Eurasian state. In turn through comparison to Russia, this thesis unearths the extent to which China reflects the social construction of civilisation-state. By examination of foreign policy towards three key Middle Eastern cases; the Syrian Civil Conflict, the Iranian nuclear framework, and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, the distinctiveness of these state's concept of the Self is shown.

Both Russia and China have undergone recent periods of ontological transformation where they have had to adjust to new-found identities. Russia and China had both abandoned Marxism-Leninism leaving them in a comparable state of ideological change in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. How this ideological change has affected these nations, and their respective responses to it has not gone unnoticed in the literature.<sup>14</sup> Yet, most literature on the ontological change and subsequent foreign policy has been in comparison to their regional Others. Comparative studies analysing the polarised political, cultural, and economic, conditions of geographically proximate nations, i.e. Russia: Europe, and China: Japan, critically risk mistaking causality. For example, the meme of China's 'newfound' assertiveness was found to be based upon misperception following critical analysis by Johnston who found that China's contemporary assertiveness was not out of character given context and China's history.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Tsygankov, analysing the Western construct of Russia being an inherently imperial state, per the theory of authoritarian expansionism, found that Russian assertiveness in each of the examples within the theory, could be explained in a way that undermined both the 'authoritarian' and the 'expansionist' claims in the theory.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, each of these themes have affected the way outside observers recognise these states. As demonstrated by these scholars, with the value of understanding nations not by their pre-theorised reputation

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<sup>14</sup> See. Wilson, "Cultural Statecraft in the Russian and Chinese Contexts."

<sup>15</sup> Alastair I. Johnston, "How new and assertive is China's new assertiveness?" *International Security* 37, no. 4 (2013).

<sup>16</sup> Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Assessing Cultural and Regime-Based Explanations of Russia's Foreign Policy. 'Authoritarian at Heart and Expansionist by Habit'?" *Europe-Asia Studies* 64, no. 4 (2012): 695-713

but by comparison to historical contemporaries or their past selves, this study seeks to dispel wayward notions of Russia and China as ideologically misguided. Rather it argues that their respective ideologies reflect a nuanced understanding of the Self as a blend of contemporary interpretation of their histories and their place amongst their international peers. Specifically, this study seeks to analyse and verify the nature of these nation's identity constructs as reflected in their foreign policy towards the Middle East.

Finally, the West's relative decline, has provided a strong need for predictability of Russia and China. Larson & Shevchenko argue that China and Russia are vital to any stable global political order, with the caveat that obtaining cooperation with these nations can prove difficult due to their status as outsiders from the liberal Western community.<sup>17</sup> The lack of ability of the international community to recognise the identity and therefore interests of these states led to claims of "China's premature assertiveness [arousing] fears in East Asia, and Russia's diplomatic balancing [as] anachronistic and ineffective in a globalized, unipolar world."<sup>18</sup> Ascertaining accurately how discourse translates to foreign policy provides a grounding for predictability in international relations.

### 1.2. Theoretical framework and Methodology

This thesis utilises a constructivist framework as a lens with which to interpret and analyse foreign policy to discern dominant national identity features. A constructivist framework claims that identity and interests are central in theorising international relations. Moreover, that identity and interests whilst being objectively grounded in material terms (per neorealism) are equally the result of socially constructed interpretations of ideas. These interpretations originate through social interactions. Constructivism is a movement away from enlightenment theory; moving away from the primacy of the individual's capacities for reason, and the individual as a central component of analysis, instead drawing on relationships and group identity as a foundation for action. Group identity in turn can give the community a sense of relationship with ancestors and a sense of continuity through time. Thus, for Gergen and Gergen, "it is not individuals who come together to create relationships, but

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<sup>17</sup> Deborah W. Larson, , and Alexei Shevchenko. "Status seekers: Chinese and Russian responses to US primacy." *International Security* 34, no. 4 (2010).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 77.

relationships that are responsible for the very conception of the individual.”<sup>19</sup> These relationships provide the basis for the web of understanding that guides society. Per Hopf,

*Every society is bounded by a social cognitive structure within which some discursive frameworks dominate and compete. An individual's identities contribute to the creation and recreation of discourse and social cognitive structure; at the same time, those identities are constrained, shaped, and empowered by the very social products they have a hand in creating.*<sup>20</sup>

Constructivism is therefore aptly suited for seeking to understand what the dominant identity experience of a state is through foreign policy. As state identity is omnipresent, identity is expressed through relationships with other states. Actions towards other states are considered a performance of this identity.

Constructivism is preferable over traditional rational choice frameworks as constructivist frameworks are less presumptuous. A major criticism of neorealism, as stated by Wendt, is that the anarchic structure of the international system which supposedly dictates the way states will interact failed to explain major changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as well as failing to indicate whether states “will be friends or foes, will recognize each other's sovereignty, will have dynastic ties, will be revisionist or status quo powers, and so on.”<sup>21</sup> Wendt also suggests that the accelerated end of the Cold War exposed these international relations orthodoxies through their failure to explain the end of the war, and systemic change more generally.<sup>22</sup> Traditional rational choice theory, which suggests that individuals interact with one another in a manner decided by the perceived potential for material gains weighed against the perceived potential for material costs, risks overlooking the social environment within which interactions are taking place. Actors are not necessarily governed by imperatives in the manner dictated by rational choice theories, instead, this thesis assumes that an actor operates only under

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<sup>19</sup> Kenneth J. Gergen, and Mary Gergen. "Social construction and research methodology." *The SAGE handbook of social science methodology* (2007).

<sup>20</sup> Ted Hopf, *Social construction of international politics: identities & foreign policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*. Cornell University Press, 2002. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics." *International organization* 46, no. 02 (1992): 396.

<sup>22</sup> Alexander. Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics / Alexander Wendt*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

the bounded reality dictated by the identity she experiences. Per Hopf, domestic identities provide a cognitive device, or heuristic, that allows for the Self to interpret the Other.<sup>23</sup> These identities then categorise people per common features, providing scripts and schemas with which to inform behaviour, and therefore to inform foreign policy decisions. Since nobody can operate outside of these constructions, and the state is an amalgamation of human qualities and intentions, we can use the discourse and decisions of state actors and agencies, to aid identification of the social constructions.

The constructivist framework in this thesis relies on Self/Other understanding in identity theory. Identity construction often involves othering peoples of different perceived identity constructions. Others in this sense can be external spatial Others, i.e. peoples of another nation state, or they can be temporal Others, i.e. peoples of the same geography but a previous time. States can have a multitude of Others with varying degrees of ontological importance. This is an important aspect of identity as it demonstrates that identity construction is multi-layered, that is, interactions with different Others (i.e. different states) can be expressive of different constituent features of a state's identity construction. Moreover, per Rumelili, for critical constructivists, state interaction reflects the performative aspect of identity, that is to say how a state acts is indicative of its identity, i.e. democratic states have unique actions that non-democratic states would not do.<sup>24</sup> This is an important aspect of this study as Russian and Chinese foreign policy to the Middle East when viewed through a social constructivist lens may show different constituent features of their respective identity constructions than would be shown through their respective relations with Europe/Japan or the US.

Recognition is a large part of national identity construction. One can infer identity through performance as states seek recognition for the constituent identity features they claim. Gustafsson writes of the difference between types of recognition, namely thin and thick recognition, the former being a basic kind, i.e. within the international community being recognised as a sovereign state.<sup>25</sup> Whereas, *thick* recognition is recognition given regarding the uniqueness of a state, denial of thick recognition is to

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<sup>23</sup> Hopf, *Social construction of international politics*.

<sup>24</sup> Bahar Rumelili, "Constructing identity and relating to difference: understanding the EU's mode of differentiation." *Review of international studies* 30, no. 01 (2004).

<sup>25</sup> Karl Gustafsson, "Recognising Recognition through Thick and Thin: Insights from Sino-Japanese Relations." *Cooperation and Conflict* 51, no. 3 (2016).

recognise a state in question differently from its self-identity.<sup>26</sup> Whilst it is critically important that the Self recognises its dominant characteristics, failure to secure recognition from others in this regard can be ontologically undermining and lead to unpredictable behaviour. Domesticating the Other is a means of reducing agency to a historical other that cannot withhold recognition. Problematically, contemporary nations can, for a myriad of reasons, withhold thick recognition. Neumann argues that only those in a group can recognise others as also being in that group, i.e. Russia cannot attain a super power status, until other great powers acknowledge it as so.<sup>27</sup> Likewise this means that there are mutual gains to be ascertained through mutual recognition as part of the group. For this study, the search for thick recognition may be observed in foreign policy action as through interaction with Others a state reflects the identity with which it seeks recognition for. Recognition of the multi-layered nature of identity is a further reason why social constructivism is apt for this thesis.

### 1.3. Methodology

My aim is to identify the key identity constructs that constitute the social constructions of China and Russia. I seek to do this through interpretation of foreign policy. Through this I will show a particular identity, in regards to the respective foreign policy of China and Russia towards three key Middle Eastern cases. Determining the dominant identity constructs lay in understanding the key debates, norms, behaviours, and heuristics of political and social culture. The data utilised in this study is interpretation of themes found in foreign policy documents, speeches and publications from key foreign policy actors. In the following section I will expand on data analysis and collection and the nature and benefits of the comparative model,

### 1.4. Data collection and analysis

The data collected for this study will depend primarily on translations of official government documents and publications, as translated on their native English language websites, available English language publications native to the respective countries. While they include statements issued by Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping as well as their ministers and premiers, both to domestic and international audiences, also including scholarly reviews of relevant foreign policy. Ascertaining foreign policy initiatives may

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Iver B. Neumann, "Russia as a great power, 1815–2007." *Journal of International Relations and Development* 11, no. 2 (2008).

not always be accessible from official sources, such as in cases where the nature of foreign policy may be covert or deliberately unclear. In those cases, and generally, I include the use of reputable news sources and make clear that such findings are speculative in nature. For instance, as I will cover later, there are reasonably strong allegations with evidence that suggests Russia has attacked civilian targets in Syria. Such a contentious claim is unlikely to be acknowledged by the government but still constitutes foreign policy action thus necessitating third party sources. It is important to consider these military foreign policy decisions as well as they indicate the nature of the engagement, which in turn indicates the perception of the engagement – a definitive part of the constructivist approach.

Hopf states that phenomenology “is to let the subjects speak,” in his case as in mine, through text.<sup>28</sup> This study proposes to recognise and explore the identity construct constituents shared by both Russia and China and identified by the literature and compare the validity and relevance of these features of identity. To achieve this, I have surveyed available literature, foreign policy publications, and reputable news sites to generate a coherent image of the respective foreign policy approaches to the given cases. Once this image is ascertained, I use the themes found in the literature review through which I can impose a thematic order. This provides the basis for comparison between China and Russia’s identity as demonstrated through foreign policy.

### 1.5.The Case for Comparison

This study uses a method of comparison to determine what are the social phenomena unique and shared by Russia and China that are represented in action towards the Middle East. Comparative methodology allows for understanding of the distinctive outcomes given seemingly common approaches in these cases (e.g. shared approach to Syria) and understanding how this aspect reflects their shared characteristic, or highlights their differences. The chosen cases reflect examples of Chinese and Russian foreign policy where these respective states have taken a comparative stance allowing for a comparative analysis to indicate the potential differences in the ways that these decisions were arrived at. For example, both states agree that Iran should be allowed, and indeed have facilitated, the building of nuclear power stations, therein,

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<sup>28</sup> Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics*, 23.



how are their respective relations with Iran constructed? What justifications are used? And what can we infer from these elements?

Utilising foreign policy as a basis for comparison is at its heart an investigation in to decision making. Identity is both multifaceted and omnipresent, therefore foreign policy must indicate constituent identity features. My established constructivist framework is therefore ideal to understanding the decision-making behind foreign policy. In this section I will briefly discuss how I will use foreign policy in regards to the Middle East to shed light upon Chinese and Russian identity. First, by discussing how foreign policy decisions reflect the norms and identities found in China and Russia. Second, by comparing the constituent features of identity found and thematically analysed I will be able to verify the extent to which these features are legitimate constituent features of their respective national identities. The purpose of using a comparative model is that it aids in finding patterns and behavioural traits unique to the states under examination. As well as the plethora of factors external to the state that influence foreign policy (e.g. the multipolar world system, the anarchy amongst states, global trends, etc.) there are very influential internal factors in contemporary foreign policy and it is these endogenous factors that frame the heads of states perceptions of exogenous factors. Academics note that authoritarian and centralised bureaucratic governments (despite their reputation) are influenced by public opinion and culture. For example, Russia must support its 'great power' identity, failure to behaviour as such will reduce positive public opinion,<sup>29</sup> and erode the legitimacy of the ruling elite. Supporting this, Putnam noted that foreign policy making is a "two level game", describing national leaders as participating on two 'game boards', domestic and international.<sup>30</sup> Therein, this work identifies that behaviour towards international events can be informed by a desire to solidify ontological legitimacy at home. As O'Neil explains, a comparative framework allows for the understanding of an existing puzzle, relying on a deductive framework to formulate a hypothesis which can then be tested out on a number of cases.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Beasley, et al. *Foreign Policy in Comparative Perspective*.

<sup>30</sup> Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-level Games." *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988).

<sup>31</sup> Patrick H. O'Neil, *Essentials of Comparative Politics / Patrick H. O'Neil*. 3rd ed. New York: W.W. Norton &, 2010.

## 1.6.Summary

As shown in this chapter I believe that a social constructivist framework as established by Hopf and supplemented by Wendt provides a strong basis for a comparative analysis of China and Russia's foreign policy in the Middle East. The nature of social constructivism provides a means of understanding how non-democratic Eurasian states who have had an identity defined in-part during a century of Western domination perceive themselves and therein what ideas they identify as embodying. This is key to understanding how their foreign policies compare and to finding how their foreign policy stands to have significant difference than that of the Western powers. Finally, the comparative analysis of state discourse provides grounds for ascertaining the identity experience of these states. Study in this regard will determine the consistency in discourse, or lack thereof as an indication of the degree of ontological stability. This chapter gave a basis for the theoretical approach used in this thesis as well as the method of data collection and the basis for comparison. The next chapter is a survey of the literature covering China and Russia's identity as well as their identity through foreign policy, as well as their involvement in the Middle East.

## 2. Literature Review

The following section will provide an overview of common academic themes and perspectives within the available literature whilst introducing the basis for comparison that this thesis will use to thematically analyse the foreign policy found in the three Middle Eastern cases. The structure of each section will identify general themes of Russian or Chinese identity generally, then the identity as seen in foreign policy, and finally an overview of the key features of these nations foreign policy in the Middle East.

### 2.1.Literature on Russian Foreign Policy

Foreign policy informed by national identity is a familiar notion within the literature. Yet surveying literature on Russian identity finds that the consensus is that Russia has no clear identity with which to link to foreign policy. There are competing notions, problematically many of which rely on the West as the Other, which prevents a holistic understanding of Russian identity. Moreover, the literature identifies that the personality of Putin is crucial to any understanding of Russian foreign policy, though constructivist theory contends that Putin cannot act autonomous to the prevailing national identity constructions. Problematically, Putin is simultaneously depicted as a

foreign policy virtuoso playing identities off against one another whilst at other times being constrained by the identity trends of Russia's people and elites. With there being little agreement as to Russian identity – aside from agreement of a Westernist/Statist dichotomy, there are several problems within domestic identity theories. Most identities relate Russia to the Soviet Union, or the West. Study regarding Russian policy compared to China in relation to the Middle East would answer whether Russian foreign policy genesis is informed predominantly from its nationalist Russian character, or an inherent European-ness.

## 2.2. Russian Identity

Literature on Russian identity finds that while there is no cohesive identity with which Russian foreign policy agents can refer to, there are several competing notions of what it means to be Russian and how Russia relates to others. These identities have a strong interplay which provide a flexible degree of discursive options for Putin. This can be construed as Putin being above ideational demands; he can be a European in Europe, or an Asian in China. Yet there are constraints upon Putin's heuristics that have not been appropriately identified in the debates around Russian identity. Most identity debates support an identity discourse that is predicated on a narrow field of potentials, i.e. is Russian identity a fundamentally unique experience, or is it a European variant? Or, are all Russia's Statist discourses in reference to the international construction of Russia as prime challenger to US unipolarity? Or, to paraphrase Lavrov, is there a 'Cold-War by inertia?'<sup>32</sup> This perspective provides problematic grounds with which to build a strong understanding of how Russia will engage in the global environment as it presupposes a great deal about Russian identity and interests.

Looking for agreement on Russian identity that is not predicated on Russia as the sole inheritor of the Soviet Union's identity and interests proves difficult. There is a theme of comparing contemporary Russia to the Soviet Union. This finds contemporary Russian identity lacking consistency following the collapse of the Soviet Union. This is the basis of Hopf's seminal work on the subject. Hopf describes that people look back on the Soviet era as a mixed bag of experiences, identifying with only some Soviet Union notions, for example, the high quality of culture, whilst rejecting others, e.g. the

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<sup>32</sup> Sergey Lavrov. "Russia's Foreign Policy Independence \_ Implicit Imperative." *Knight Ridder/Tribune*, January 23, 2007.

Stalinist terrors, or rejection of religion.<sup>33</sup> Scholars argue that the transition to market economy in the 1990s and the poorly executed nature of this transition heralded the end of the ‘good times.’<sup>34</sup> Lo, describes the state in this period as being in a “profound crisis,” and that Russia was on its way towards being a failed state.<sup>35</sup> The collapse of state institutions, failure of government, lack of sufficient law and order, and the ‘shock therapy’ itself are all considered short term perspective reasons for Russian failure to transition. Shearman writing in 2001 depicts Russian foreign policy orientation as lacking any coherent form due to the lack of any cohesive identity experience. Shearman writes “when the [Russian] empire collapsed along with the communist project, Russia was left in limbo, with an uncertain sense of identity and a fundamental conflict among the political elite of Russia’s future direction.”<sup>36</sup> However, Popov argues that the 300-year trajectory of Russian institutional development explains the ‘deeper’ cause.<sup>37</sup> Popov refers to the Russian communist regime (1917-1991) as a deviation from Russia’s ultimate end goal of Westernisation, a process which had started in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>38</sup> This emphasises the importance of considering more than simply the Soviet Union, a socialist state that lasted 69 years, but having to consider what aspects of Russian character survived the Soviet experience and which were reshaped or introduced by the Soviet experience.

The literature which seeks to identify how the Soviet experience affected the identity experience of contemporary Russians identifies the nuance in the relationship between past and current Self. In contrast to Popov’s earlier related notion that the communist experiment was a deviation from Russia’s path to Westernisation, Sussex writing more recently rejects that Russia is at a loss of direction given a loss of identity. Sussex maintains that Russian interests have “remained largely unchanged since the collapse of the USSR.”<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Hopf argues that any literature arguing in such a

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<sup>33</sup> Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics*.

<sup>34</sup> Vladimir Popov, "The Long Road to Normalcy: Where Russia Now Stands." In *Russia: The Challenges of Transformation*, ed. Dutkiewicz Piotr and Trenin Dmitri, by Calhoun Craig and Yakunin Vladimir I., 41-72. (NYU Press, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> Bobo Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the evolution of Russian foreign policy*. John Wiley & Sons, 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Shearman, "The Sources of Russian Conduct: Understanding Russian Foreign Policy." *Review of International Studies* 27, no. 2 (2001): 254.

<sup>37</sup> Popov, "The Long Road to Normalcy".

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Matthew Sussex, *Conflict in the Former USSR* / Edited by Matthew Sussex. 2012. 204.

dichotomy of old vs. new will never capture the nuance of Russian identity.<sup>40</sup> Hopf exemplifies by detailing the complicated relationship Russians in 1999 had with the Soviet history, arguing that Russians liked the Soviet high quality of culture, its status as great power, the emerging democracy, the agricultural economic performance, yet, did not like the Stalinist terror, arbitrary use of political power, or the modern Soviet rejection of religion.<sup>41</sup> Sussex states that the belief that Russian foreign policy intentions are neo-imperial is over simplistic saying “such thinking makes much of Russia’s myths of great power chauvinism. It envisages a kind of manifest destiny; whereby Russian interests are obsessed with ideas about recapturing its past splendour.”<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, Skak reflects on Russian foreign policy during the 1990s as a potential bridging of identity across the old into the new by fulfilling a social function for Russia. Skak says that the loss of internal empire was an identity crisis much more than the loss of the East European empire and so Russian foreign policy has been used to create societal cohesion – drawing parallels between Russian foreign policy and that of the decolonised states of the third world who needed to ascertain a unique identity and consolidate their newly independent national community.<sup>43</sup> Khasan also suggests that Russian foreign policy is driven by the pursuit of the lost international standing.<sup>44</sup> He says that whilst emaciated economic conditions within Russia have promoted philosophies of international cooperation to drive Russian foreign policy, there will always exist a ‘patriotic consensus’ regarding Russian world power status; a consequence of the size, natural wealth, and location of the Russian federation.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, Lo describes Russian insecurities as being still present, just Putin’s calm public demeanour has replaced complaints surrounding ‘lack of respect’ and the discourse of attacks on Russian ‘dignity.’<sup>46</sup> The literature therefore presents a problem in oversimplifying the nature of identity with sweeping categories that fail to capture the complexities of Russian identity. Importantly, these debates challenge the presumption that the modern Russian identity construction and therefore modern Russian national

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<sup>40</sup> Hopf *Construction of International Politics*.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. See, page 153 for complete list.

<sup>42</sup> Sussex *Conflict in the Former USSR*, 205.

<sup>43</sup> Mette Skak, "Post-Soviet Foreign Policy: The Emerging Relationship Between Russia and Northeast Asia." *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 7, no. 1 (1993).

<sup>44</sup> Hilal Khasan, "Russia's Middle Eastern Policy." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 59, no. 1/4 (1998).

<sup>45</sup> Khasan 1998

<sup>46</sup> Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the evolution of Russian foreign policy*.

interests are unchanged since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Where it may appear that Russian interests mirror the Soviet interests, it is important to identify what construction contemporary Russia holds of the international arena and how that is different.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union Russia has been relatively fast to reengage with the international community as a great power. Where Germany took 15 years to reappear as a major power the Russian recuperation is ongoing. Walter Laqueur attributes this in part to the oil and gas windfall greatly aiding the economy, and partly due to Putin's confidence given that global conditions had precipitated a Russian comeback. He writes that with Europe in decline, the US weakened by the financial crisis and preoccupied with domestic problems Russian leadership perceived the key states of the West are under weak leadership.<sup>47</sup> For Putin, Neumann writes that the 2000s saw the strong leader Vladimir Putin dominate the political scene.<sup>48</sup> Immediately his policy was a friendliness to the West, this is in a time when the September 11 terrorist attacks drove the international community together, but also Putin's entourage included noted liberals such as Andrey Illarionov.<sup>49</sup> This indicated a Westernist influenced policy agenda. Putin's political position seemed to be an amalgamation of previous discourse. Scholars when writing about Putin often refer to 'Putin's Pragmatism,' his centrality within Russia's identity, and his authority over FP direction. The nature of social constructivism suggests that whilst Putin's foreign policy decisions may not be limited in an institutionalised democratic fashion, they are limited in a discursive fashion. Suffice to say, he is bounded by his own rationality and his rationality is informed by his Russian community identity. His values, per Tsygankov are somewhere between Westerniser and Statist.<sup>50</sup> Sakwa describes Putin as having predominantly Statist values.<sup>51</sup> Nikolay Kozhanov described Putin as being "less pro-Western and more pragmatic" than former President Medvedev.<sup>52</sup> The character of foreign policy under Putin has been ambitiously moving from modest regional power to

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<sup>47</sup> Laqueur, Walter. "Moscow's Modernization Dilemma-Is Russia Charting a New Foreign Policy?" *Foreign Aff.* 89 (2010): 153.

<sup>48</sup> Neumann 2016

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Tsygankov 2016.

<sup>51</sup> Sakwa 2008

<sup>52</sup> Kozhanov in Mason 2014, p.105. USE FULL REF THIS IS FIRST TIME CITING.

that of self-identifying as a global energy power.<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, Neumann points out that one of Russia's most noteworthy self-proclaimed Westernisers, Anatoly Chubays believed Russia was destined to be an empire, but with the Western liberal values, a liberal empire.<sup>54</sup> This understanding of Russian development and Russia's developmental path as mirroring the West and seeking to replicate Western institutions is debated in the literature.

There is a strong tendency amongst academic literature to fundamentally associate Russian progress in reference to the West. The debate therein revolves around whether Russia is 'better' or 'worse' than the US or Europe, developmentally, morally, or otherwise. Whilst Neo-Eurasianism, a theme I will address later, suggests that there is a tension between understanding Europe as in an advanced stage of development that Russia must 'catch-up' to, vs. seeing Europe as having undergone (and undergoing) a specific developmental course which Russia cannot reproduce. Popov's suggestion that the communist regime was a deviation away from Russia's ultimate Westernisation trajectory, as well as the perspective that it was Russia's shotgun transition toward the Anglo-American model market economy implies a lack of domestic identity, or a borrowing of European identity which leaves Russia in a constant state of catch-up, i.e. definitionally inferior.<sup>55</sup> Hopf describes that Russian identity discourse in 1999 in reflected the attitude that the US couldn't be more dissimilar, referencing Russian movie critic Valentin Esphai, who called the presumed achievement of economic modernity, *suburbia*, a "comfortable hell", as well as suggesting that American neoliberal culture was not a multicultural utopia of liberals but a "monotonous hopelessness of a comfortable existence."<sup>56</sup> Hopf's work finds that Europe is, per Russian discourse, more comparable to Russia than the US. Western Europe symbolises quality, Europe's governments tend to be more paternalistic than the US, allowing a greater deal of state involvement with the people – something Russian's valued.<sup>57</sup> Gadzhiev who claims that whilst US pretends to be the city on the hill, Russians actually see that in Europe, he also makes that observation that East Asia is a more

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<sup>53</sup> Nikitin, Alexander. "Russian Foreign Policy in the fragmented post-Soviet space." *International Journal on World Peace* (2008): 7-31.

<sup>54</sup> Neumann 2016.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Esphai, Valentin, "from TV to the Boundaries of Our World," *IK*, no 10. (1998). 33-35. Quoted in Hopf *Social Construction of International Politics*.

<sup>57</sup> Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics*.

comparable source of democratic and economic values with Russia's reality, than with the US.<sup>58</sup> Neumann writing in 2008 explains where the fundamental divergence between Russia and Western Europe was in the nature of governance.<sup>59</sup> As liberalism flourished in England and France, whereby states let go of direct control of society, Russia found that by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries her enterprises could not match European productivity, in turn the Russian state considered it could not achieve these successes without system-wide changes.<sup>60</sup> Unwilling to face a complete domestic overhaul and potential existential crisis, Russia maintained a unique path that could be construed, internally as well as externally, as a laggard relative to Western Europe. This reinforces the Neo-Eurasianist idea that Russia is on a separate and therefore incomparable path to the rest of Europe. Though, interestingly this presents an aspect of the debate wherein Russia is more comparable to Europe over the US because Europe better suits the centrality of the state and has less extreme neoliberal principles. However, ultimately, China proves valuable as a point of comparison as the ideological and identity grounds they share as authoritarian states, the paternal relationship with their citizens, and neither society embraces the neoliberal 'American dream'.<sup>61</sup> Hopf offers a set of groups with which to compartmentalise the four modern identities some of which draw upon the Soviet experience. The New Western Russian (NWR), the New Soviet Russian (NSR), the Liberal Essentialist (LE), and the Liberal Relativist (LR).<sup>62</sup> NSR and NWR are, per Hopf, identities formed in relation to the Western Other and the Soviet Union historical Other, whereas the LE discourse rejects the Western present and Soviet past, and the LR discourse rejected all identity discourse as modern.<sup>63</sup> Hopf describes the Statist discourse as appearing within LE, but he attributes it to the Leftist NSR discourse.<sup>64</sup>

Any forms of cohesive Russian identity that can be found in the literature are also debated, yet the key strands all inform to an extent the discursive options principally

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<sup>58</sup> Gadzhiev, K. S. "Vvedenie v geopolitiku.: Uchebnik dlya vuzov. [Introduction to Geopolitics.: Textbook for universities]–M." *Logos* (2002): 274-79. Quoted in Hopf *Social Construction of International Politics*.

<sup>59</sup> Neumann, "Russia as a great power, 1815–2007."

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Note. Whilst China is an unambiguously authoritarian state, Russia is considered a hybrid combining authoritarian and democratic elements, see. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way. "The rise of competitive authoritarianism." *Journal of democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 51-65.

<sup>62</sup> Hopf *Social Construction of International Politics*.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 156.



available to foreign policy agents. There have been described three key schools of thought in Russian self-identity; the Westernisers, the Statists, and the Civilisationalists or Neo-Eurasianists. Tsygankov explains that the identity of the Westernisers belongs to those who have Pan-European identity, who within Russia use discourse of freedom and democracy, and pro-west relations, reflected in Gorbachev's 'new thinking', Milyukov's 'Allied cause', and Medvedev's avocation of improved Western relations.<sup>65</sup> This identity framework sees Europe (including Russia) largely as the Self, where Asia may qualify as an example of an Other. Significantly this undermines comparative analysis between European and Russian identities, when they are inextricably related. Neumann writing in 1998, describes Russian discourse with broad brush strokes describing the discursive debate as being between Westernisers and Nationalists. Westernisers, per Neumann, needed to copy Western institutions and philosophies to attain membership in 'civilised' world.<sup>66</sup> Yet ultimately this theme does not work for Neumann as he believes Westernist thought came to nothing.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, Kubyshkin and Sergunin describe the dominant identity competition as being between the Neo-Eurasianists and the Atlanticists, where the latter sees that national interests should not play a decisive role, but that Russia should see the West as a natural partner, should engage in international organisations, and that the main threats to Russia lay in the East, not the West.<sup>68</sup>

Neo-Eurasianism which is the identity theme of geopolitics being inextricably linked with the so-called Civilisationalist approach, sees Russia as fundamentally different to the west, reminiscent of Ivan the Terrible's claim that 'Moscow is the third Rome'.<sup>69</sup> Neo-Eurasianism is an identity theme that is born in part from a perception amongst Russian intellectuals that Russia was rejected by the West.<sup>70</sup> Neo-Eurasianism suggests that Russia would enjoy greater stability through not identifying solely with

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<sup>65</sup> Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia's foreign policy: change and continuity in national identity*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.

<sup>66</sup> Iver B. Neumann, *Uses of the other: "the East" in European identity formation*. Manchester University Press, 1999.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Aleksandr Kubyshkin and Aleksandr Sergunin, "The Problem of the "Special Path" in Russian Foreign Policy: (From the 1990s to the Early Twenty-First Century)." *Russian Social Science Review* 56, no. 3 (2015): 31-42.

<sup>69</sup> Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*.

<sup>70</sup> Kubyshkin and Sergunin, "The Problem of the Special Path."

the European community, but through closer community with the East.<sup>71</sup> As stated previously, Neo-Eurasianism reflects a belief that Russia is not a laggard on the path of Westernisation, but is on a unique-Russian path. This belief finds its roots in intellectual discourse of the 19<sup>th</sup> C, with Pyotr Chaadayev stating “we do not belong to any of the great families of the human race; we are neither of the West nor of the East, and we have no the traditions of either.”<sup>72</sup> Similarly Dostoyevsky in 1881 was reported to have said “In Europe we are Tartars, but in Asia too we are Europeans.”<sup>73</sup> Key thinkers in Neo-Eurasianism are Aleksander Panarin, who wrote what was to be a highly valued work *Orthodox Civilisation in a Globalized World*, 2002, and Aleksandr Dugin. Dugin is perhaps the most publicised Neo-Eurasianist, also enjoying political influence and like Panarin his works are well-read in institutions of higher learning, he posits that Russia in principle must oppose the United States and that the world is divided into civilisational zones one of which Moscow is the capital of.<sup>74</sup> Key political figures of this philosophy were Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, politician and leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, who shared Dugin’s impression that great power expansion was “vertical,” i.e. expansion on a north-south axis, Yevgeny Primakov, minister of foreign affairs 1996-8, and Prime Minister 1998-9. Finally, Østbø in his work *The New Third Tome: Readings of a Russian Nationalist Myth*, attempts to clarify what it means to Russian citizens to be the inheritors of the Soviet Union. He finds that Russians were not the rulers of, but rather the victims of the Soviet Union, they did not have designated Russian territory, instead were left with what remained after the former Soviet states gained autonomy.<sup>75</sup> This leaves modern Russia as simply being the land and peoples as not having a national construction with the resolution of those peoples that constitute the nations of Latvia, Estonia, Armenia, and so on. Moreover, a Western construction of the Russian empire may have been one of one language, culture, religion and defined territory, the Russian’s themselves however held a construction of a Russian Empire as an imagined nation-state, which held multiple languages, cultures,

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> P.A. Chaadev, “Filosoficheskie pis’ma k g-zhe...” in *Sochineniia* (Moscow: Pravda, 1989, 508.) Quoted in Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: an ideology of empire*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008.

<sup>73</sup> Dostoevsky, F. *Sobranie sochineii v 15-I tomakh: Dnevnik pisatelii, 1881* (Moscow: Nauka, 1995, vol 14, 509. Quoted in Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Jardar Østbø, *The New Third Rome: Readings of a Russian Nationalist Myth*. University of Bergen, 2011.

and ethnicities, with an expanding territory.<sup>76</sup> The implications of this Neo-Eurasianist or Civilisational theme in Russian identity are naturally difficult to simplify. There is evidence that the effect of the holders of these constructions had on the greater social construction of what Russia is, made room for the fact that Russia is a unique entity, neither European nor Asian.

Statism is broadly considered the predominant influence over Russian foreign policy per the literature; and the discourse regards the values of power, sovereignty, and stability, over that of individual freedom, democracy, and the primacy of human rights. The Statist school of thought is not anti-Western but does seek to avoid capitalist institutional threats that can erode state sovereignty. Kasymov describes Statism as seeking to increase the role of the state with a view to maintain social, political, and international order.<sup>77</sup> He says, “for Statists, the West is seen as a threat to a strong state because Western interests are thought to weaken statehood.”<sup>78</sup> This is likely a reference to Western practises such as the Washington Consensus that has been criticised (in-part) due to problems of privatisation which weaken state control of business within its territories and allow outside investors influence. Tsygankov writes, “ever since the two-centuries-long conquest by the Mongols, Russians have developed a psychological complex of insecurity and readiness to sacrifice everything for independence and sovereignty.”<sup>79</sup> Some argue that there is an inherently expansionist and militarist streak, but others argue against this.<sup>80</sup> Original thinkers in this school are Prince Alexander Gorbachev, Peter the Great, and Stalin. Laruelle, writing about Russian identity debates notes that “the Kremlin's promotion of its very Statist patriotism is designed to respond to a social demand from ‘below’.”<sup>81</sup> Statism proves the most consistently favourable identity when describing Putin’s tenure. Tsygankov describes Putin as a Moderate Statist.<sup>82</sup> Yet, Statism as an identity in itself is lacking in definition. Kasymov claims

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Shavkat Kasymov, "Statism in Russia: The implications for US–Russian relations." *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 3, no. 1 (2012).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Tsygankov, *Russia's foreign policy*, 6.

<sup>80</sup> Luke March, "Is nationalism rising in Russian foreign policy? The case of Georgia." *Demokratizatsiya* 19, no. 3 (2011): 187.

<sup>81</sup> Laruelle 2016.

<sup>82</sup> Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Russia's Afghanistan Debate: Managing Fear of and in the West." *Problems of Post-Communism* 60, no. 6 (2013).

that Statism is “reinforced and accompanied by a strong national idea.”<sup>83</sup> This ‘national idea’ proves to lay somewhere between Early-Soviet Civilisationists and Alexander Dugin’s neo-Eurasianist framework.<sup>84</sup> There is far from consensus in the available literature regarding the defining characteristics of Putin’s regime or of Russian identity constructions. This provides a critical basis for comparison to China as it subsumes Statist discourse whilst not rejecting the Western origins of identity aspects within Russian discourse. The goal therein is to test the Civilisationist discourse using Hopf’s NSR identity to find the limits of discursive options to foreign policy agents in Russia. Hopf’s four Russian discourses and the identities that constitute them provide excellent comparative grounds in relation to China’s predominant identities when trying to identify the discursive limits and how this impacts the relative state relations with the Middle East.

Identity construction vis-à-vis Others plays an important role in the identity experience. In Russia’s case, there are a multitude of potential Others with which Russian identity is defined in relation to. Neumann suggested that Russia has constructed its identity in reference to many others: Western Europeans, Eastern Europeans, Asians, and (internally) Jews.<sup>85</sup> He also argued that Westernists had Othered Western Europe as a superior on the road of development.<sup>86</sup> Whilst I have previously shown that Hopf shows that the relationship between the contemporary Russian and the Soviet past is a nuanced relationship, Hopf writes that the Soviet Union is constructed as a negative Historical Other in his review of discourse from a large sample of public remarks from Putin and Medvedev from 2005-2014.<sup>87</sup> Hopf found that Putin blamed the Soviet Union for minimising the role of religion and creating a society without morality, for weak positions in and following WWI, for oppressing minority populations like the Chechens, and its inability to house people.<sup>88</sup> This Othering of the Soviet Union regarding these features implies that Russia sees itself as superior in these regards. Regarding the democratic West, a well-established Other, Putin and Medvedev’s discourse indicates viewing Russia more and more favourably. Hopf’s review found

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<sup>83</sup> Kasymov, Shavkat. “Statism in Russia,” 536.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Neumann, Iver B. *Uses of the other: “the East” in European identity formation*. Manchester University Press, 1999.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ted Hopf, “‘Crimea is ours’: A discursive history.” *International Relations* 30, no. 2 (2016).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

that whilst Russian democracy was described as ‘young’ and ‘immature’, Russia began to see the Self in relation to the Western Other as having comparable technology (Hopf finds the example of GLONASS a satellite navigation system comparable to GPS), and social achievements.<sup>89</sup> Hopf has also found that Russia sees Europe no longer as European, but as instead a ultra-liberal, secular, Americanised society.<sup>90</sup> This could infer that when Russia claims to be European, this is not to suggest Russia is comparable to European countries, rather that Russia is the a last bastion of a ‘true’ Europe.

### 2.3. Russian Identity in Foreign Policy

The identity of Russian foreign policy is unclear on two grounds, (1) what is Russia trying to achieve? And (2) whom, or what identity construct, are these achievements trying to satisfy? Whilst the identity challenges of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century continue in to the 21<sup>st</sup>, there is no clear dialogue between what the elites want, and what the public wants. Light, writing about the trends of Russian thinking, surveyed the Russian national security documents finding no trace of an ideology, “neither a description of the past nor the NATO blueprint of an ideal future.”<sup>91</sup> Yet, she also wrote that the elites were concerned by further NATO expansion in to the Baltic states.<sup>92</sup> Perhaps presenting the need for a flexible foreign policy that could work with (or in part define) Putin’s pragmatism. Such a lack of clarity opens criticism from observers. As such, some accuse Russia as trying to meddle in, or overreact to, whatever crises dominates international headlines in a bid to reinstate historical standing.<sup>93</sup> As an anonymous author writing for *the Economist* writes, “don’t be fooled by Syria. Vladimir Putin’s foreign policy is born of weakness and made for television.”<sup>94</sup> Though there is again a lack of clarity over whom Russia’s foreign policy is trying to satisfy. O’Loughlin writes that the Russian public opinion is disinterested in foreign policy goals, so long as they do not interfere with the day-to-day lives of citizens.<sup>95</sup> Therefore it could be inferred, as Sussex argues, that the identity that shapes foreign policy agenda is predominantly from

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Margot Light. "In search of an identity: Russian foreign policy and the end of ideology." *Journal of communist studies and transition politics* 19, no. 3 (2003).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Brett A. Schneider, “Russian Foreign Policy in the Middle East: Priorities and Effectiveness” master’s thesis, University of Denver, 2012. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing (1519979).

<sup>94</sup> "A Hollow Superpower; Russian Foreign Policy." *The Economist* 418, no. 8981 (2016). 11.

<sup>95</sup> John O’loughlin, "Geopolitical fantasies, national strategies and ordinary Russians in the post-communist Era." *Geopolitics* 6, no. 3 (2001).

the elites, and they are interested in “recapturing past splendour.”<sup>96</sup> Likewise, Schneider explains that by engaging in these ‘hot’ issues Moscow plays the part of Great Power.<sup>97</sup> Therein the confusion in relation to the two mentioned questions creates a mystique over Russian foreign policy that further complicates causality.

This lack of clarity lends credence to the narrative that Putin is limitlessly flexible and pragmatic in solution finding – an issue with the literature. Lo writes that whilst the cliché is to describe Putin as a ‘pragmatist’, it is “by and large a fair summation.”<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, Lo describes Putin as not necessarily influenced by domestic identity, stating,

*The operating principle of his conduct of foreign policy appears to be ‘whatever works’; he is not fixated on ideology, geopolitics or cultural and civilizational categorizations. He has shown that he is prepared to be whoever and whatever depending on context and timing. Thus, he is European in Europe, transcontinental ‘strategic partner’ when dealing with the United States, Asian and Eurasian in Asia, and cautiously integrationist in the CIS. At the same time, he does not subscribe to the infantile view that strategic and economic cooperation with the West (or East) must necessarily be at the expense of good relations elsewhere.*<sup>99</sup>

I believe this is a reflection not of an aloofness to identity constructs, but rather of the confusion as to what are the predominant identities in any given context, and the extent to which, which identities are limiting discourse. I.e. Putin’s apparent flexibility in identity may be because existing understanding of contemporary Russian identity is insufficient. This indicates a need for further study on Russian foreign policy under Putin as it is impossible for there to be no identity constructs constraining Putin, at the very least there must be a flexible identity construct. For example, Lannon highlights that for Putin, the East-West divide is an outdated mode of understanding Russian intentions, quoting Trenin, “The ‘East’ or Russia was no longer fit for—or interested in—a competition with its former rival, the United States. As soon as Russia faced a real challenge from the south, the Atlantic alliance ceased to be its most immediate

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<sup>96</sup> Sussexx, *Conflict in the Former USSR*, 205.

<sup>97</sup> Schneider “Russian Foreign Policy in the Middle East.”

<sup>98</sup> Lo *Vladimir Putin and the evolution of Russian foreign policy*, 129.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* 129.

concern.”<sup>100</sup> Putin’s pragmatism has also seen the foreign policy process become more centralised since the Yeltsin era allowing for a more unified foreign policy.<sup>101</sup> This provides an ideal scenario with which to understand how and what identity constructs are influencing foreign policy under Putin yet research therein is limited

## 2.4. Russia and the Middle East

The Middle East plays an important role for Russian foreign policy in that it allows Russia to engage in an environment where the Kremlin can act consistent with its national identity, demonstrate and utilise its global reach, and (potentially) attract thick recognition of its identity. A history of Russian involvement in the Middle East reflects both Russian capacity and identity in foreign policy. For example, Lo states that following the Soviet collapse “although Russia maintained its formal position as co-sponsor of the Middle East Peace Process, its contribution became increasingly negligible, a point noted by Arab leaders.”<sup>102</sup> Thus reflecting the Middle East’s position as a gulf between Russian identity and capacity. Some scholars argue that Russia uses the Middle East only to engage in attention grabbing crises.<sup>103</sup> Others argue that Russia had (historically) made genuine attempts at meaningful Middle Eastern engagement – such as the Soviets association with Arab quests for independence.<sup>104</sup> Khasan says studies of Russian Foreign Policy in the Middle East must draw on past episodes of Tsarist and Communist regional involvement.<sup>105</sup> We can see therefore that the Middle East reflects the general identity themes identified in the literature, great power, ideological alternate to the US, etc. but there exists a lack of capacity following the fall of the Soviet Union.

A more recent overview of literature regarding Russian involvement in the Middle East reflects a systemic effort by Moscow to engage with the region. Per Mason, Moscow’s 2007 launch of the Arabic branch of Russia Today (RT) has attracted great

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<sup>100</sup> D. Trenin, *The End of Eurasia: Russia on the Border between Geopolitics and Globalization*, (Washington, DC and Moscow: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002) 197. Quoted in, Gregory P. Lannon, "Russia's New Look Army Reforms and Russian Foreign Policy." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 24, no. 1 (2011).

<sup>101</sup> March, "Is nationalism rising in Russian foreign policy?"

<sup>102</sup> Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the evolution of Russian foreign policy*, 13.

<sup>103</sup> Schneider, "Russian Foreign Policy in the Middle East."

<sup>104</sup> Nikolay Kozhanov, "Russia and the Middle East: Adjusting to a New Political Vista." 89. In *The International Politics of the Arab Spring : Popular Unrest and Foreign Policy / Edited by Robert Mason.*, 2014.

<sup>105</sup> Khasan, "Russia’s Middle Eastern Policy."

attention from Arab society, almost 350 million people, and, this initiative was supported by a new governmental structure called *Russotrudnichestvo*.<sup>106</sup> This federal agency's purpose was to structure and develop humanitarian aid abroad, whilst facilitating a cultural presence. Per Mason, "rumours that this structure was created according to the personal will of Putin only boosted the development of this organization, which in no time had established itself in the representative missions to Syria, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt."<sup>107</sup> Suggesting that if Russia intends on spreading its ideational values throughout the Middle East, there must be reflection .

Literature surrounding Russian foreign policy during the Arab Spring detail Russian weaknesses in Middle Eastern foreign policy whilst displaying limited research in to how identity informed foreign policy. After a brief period of decided neutrality, the Russian Federation began to voice preferences and drew lines in the sands. Kozhanov states,

*Russian support for Bashar al-Assad shocked a large part of the Arab world. Moscow continuing to support the old dictatorial regimes contradicted the image of Russia as a supporter of the liberation movements in the Middle East that had emerged during the 1960s–1970s. Subsequently, this led to a cooling of Russian relations with a large part of the Arab world.*<sup>108</sup>

This depicts a tension in the literature regarding Russian identity. If the literature supports the narrative that Russian identity was the 'Soviet Union 2.0', then Russia would be engaging in an upending of 'old regimes' in favour of more proletarian tides. However, Putin's Russia standing by old allies depicts an ideological deviation from Soviet Union identity. Kozhanov depicts Russia as failing to see the region as valuable in its own right instead of an arena for games with Western powers. This is exemplified by using Libya as a tradable asset to bargain with the West for the preferences of Russia's pro-Western ruling elite.<sup>109</sup> Indicating that the Westernist identity discourse may have some traction. Yet, Moscow's foreign policy was perceived as having a lack of credibility; sometimes with contradictory policies, or ill-defined and implemented

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<sup>106</sup> Kozhanov, "Russia and the Middle East."

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.



strategy this is consistent with the disagreement in the literature about what Russia's identity is. Syrian representatives who were trying to persuade Western policymakers in Europe and the US to intervene, did so suggesting that Russia had no leverage against the West citing Yugoslavia in 1999, Iraq in 2003, and Libya in 2011 as examples.<sup>110</sup> This indicates that Russia has apparently not gained thick recognition as a great and influential power. Again, it is apparent that the lack of any mutually understood identity between Russia and the international environment clouds peoples' expectations of Russian actions begetting constant reference to Russia as a challenger to US global primacy. Research deviating from the narrative of Russia acting as an ideational opposite to the West would provide valuable insight and predictability regarding Russian foreign policy.

## 2.5. Summary

The literature on Russian identity and foreign policy is rich but somewhat inconsistent. Whilst there is a shared consensus that Russia is a former hegemon and current world power there is little consensus on what motivates Russian foreign policy. Some debate whether there is catch-up with Europe identity framework, others debate the ontological basis of the Soviet Union and how that informs modern Russian identity, others yet see Russia as at the mercy of its elite with foreign policy virtuoso Putin able to act unilaterally. Naturally there is nuance to be found amongst these generalisations. A comparative analysis predicated upon how Russian ontological standing compares with the authoritarian government of China, domestically and through foreign policy in the Middle East, will allow for an understanding of Russian identity beyond the existing literature.

Currently there is much discourse surrounding whether Russia is European or not, or if Russia still sees itself as a Soviet Union in so far as it seeks to displace the unipolar world order. These relationships are inherently relating Russia to the West and therefore not addressing certain considerations pertinent to understanding the character of the state itself. For example, the means in which a democratic society with free speech can share its expectations and demands of the state are significantly different than the means available to a centralised society. Comparing Russia to the fellow Eurasian great power China would allow for analysis of their respective identity constructs beyond the level

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

that the European nations can offer. As shown it is uncommon for the literature to compare Russia to the great Other of the East, China. This failure has produced themes in the literature that show Russia either as paving a way towards Westernisation, acting as a reinvented Soviet Union, or as having directionless foreign policy. This study aims to further understanding by analysing the gap in explorations of Russia's identity: the comparison to China.

## 2.6. Literature on China

Like Russia, the Chinese identity in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century underwent significant changes. Following the turbulent “humiliation” at the hands of colonial Western powers, being the victim of Japan's imperialist wars, and the experience of Mao Zedong's strong communist state, there has been little time for a social construction to commonly inform what being Chinese is. To an extent, the CCP using a strong state presence, use of public memorials such as museums, and nation-wide education, set to establish a unifying narrative. Yet efforts to do this may have undermined Chinese state leadership by limiting foreign policy options. Presently I will outline the common themes regarding China's identity per the literature, covering current theory on Chinese identity, foreign policy, and China's relations with the Middle East.

## 2.7. Chinese Identity

Chinese identity has only in the last fifty years had stable ground upon which to consolidate but the shared historical narrative which informs near all aspects of national identity begins in the 19<sup>th</sup>C. In 1839 the First Opium War in which the British imposed the Treaty of Nanking began China's so called “century of humiliation.” Peter Hays Gries summarises the key events of the century of humiliation as starting with the First Opium War in which the British gained Hong Kong in, then a period of major wars between China and Western powers and Japan; including the Second Opium War 1856-1860, the Sino-Japanese “Jaiwu” War 1894-1895, the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 which was an anti-imperialist uprising against an eight-nation alliance resulting in an Allied victory, and then finally the “War or Resistance against Japan” 1931/1937-1945.<sup>111</sup> This was declared over by Mao Zedong with the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, but others argue that China was only showing progression having

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<sup>111</sup> Peter Hays Gries, *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

successful bid for the Beijing Olympics.<sup>112</sup> Gries notes that the century of humiliation was largely defined by the unilateral treaties imposed after successive losses which challenged Chinese sovereignty.<sup>113</sup> Shambaugh, in his study of the changing nature of the Chinese state, argues that only following the century of humiliation was China's 'minimalist state' provided a common identity and fundamental state institutions under Mao.<sup>114</sup> The Chinese state was previously considered minimalist due to its inability to properly rule and govern the country, i.e. only a state in namesake. Mao's extremely strong state drew from a range of foreign states' institutions including Soviet, Japanese, German, British, and American. Shambaugh describes the post-1949 state as "High Stalinist", a Soviet communist state.<sup>115</sup> The fragility of modern China's early stages has informed a strong sense of need for nationalist identity in China, from which we can begin to understand China's values. Shambaugh's depiction of China as desperately trying to get her affairs in order, to prevent any form of repeated humiliation is apt. He describes that with the common understanding by Chinese elites of previous weakness, for China, state-building was equated with nation-building, and that for the Chinese they needed a strong state to guide economic and military development.<sup>116</sup>

Indeed, the people in China report high levels of satisfaction with their government indicating a harmonious national unity, but literature suggests that the means of national unity attainment has come at the cost of limited discursive scope. *When China Rules the World* by Martin Jacques finds the percentage of the population of China reportedly satisfied with the condition of their country was 72%.<sup>117</sup> Consistent with this, Jie Chen described China's middle class as supportive of the current party-state and unsupportive of any would-be democratic changes that may challenge the state.<sup>118</sup> Indicating an ontological 'buy-in' to the state identity. This theme of a people in support of the government is attributed to conscious attempts by the state to foster a sense of collectivism. Mao began the process of collective identity drawing from lessons from

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<sup>112</sup> Christopher R. Hughes, *Chinese Nationalism in a Global Era*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2006.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> David Shambaugh, *The Modern Chinese State / Edited by David Shambaugh*. 2000.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global*. 2nd ed. London: Penguin, 2012.

<sup>118</sup> Jie Chen, *A middle class without democracy: Economic growth and the prospects for democratization in China*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

capitalist countries, but critically Mao insisted that these foreign institutions being brought to China must be utilised to aid the state by being adapted to the unique Chinese state.<sup>119</sup> Wang examines the Chinese Dream as a master narrative or national story.<sup>120</sup> He elaborates that for political parties a master narrative serves as a compelling ethical and moral motive to inspire participation.<sup>121</sup> Wang says that the ideological campaign for national identity has been learned “through old family photos, diaries, and treasured articles passed down through generations” and that “countries must become social nations in order to mobilise nationalist behaviour.”<sup>122</sup> As Ferdinand remarks, under Hu Jintao this ‘dream’ reflects the ambition of China to collectively have success as oppose to valuing success of individuals.<sup>123</sup> Kerr describes the dream as a clever relationship between collective identity and individual aspirations suggesting that discourse of the ‘China dream’ encourages individuals not to deviate from the collective path.<sup>124</sup> Ferdinand also mentions by mid-2014, 8249 articles with China dream had already appeared in China.<sup>125</sup> Whereas I found that by late-2016, 14,718 articles with China dream were available through the same CNKI China academic journals database.

Whilst the efforts to impose a collective sense of what being Chinese means some scholars argue the small pool of shared historical moments chosen to represent national unity has left the CCP in a position of limited discursive range. Gustafsson writing about how the CCP gained legitimacy in the minds of the Chinese finds that discourse regarding China’s victimhood by Japanese aggression, and participating in the War of Resistance against Japan has now become institutionalised.<sup>126</sup> The consequence of this shared ‘patriotic education’ is that there are now discursive limits that can work against government interests particularly in foreign policy.<sup>127</sup> The push for a nationally unifying identity has left China as described by Gustafsson as ideationally fundamentally ‘anti-

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<sup>119</sup> Gries, *China’s New Nationalism*.

<sup>120</sup> Zheng Wang, "The Chinese dream: concept and context." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 19, no. 1 (2014).

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>123</sup> Peter Ferdinand, "Westward ho—the China dream and ‘one belt, one road’: Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping." *International Affairs* 92, no. 4 (2016).

<sup>124</sup> David Kerr, *China's Many Dreams Comparative Perspectives on China's Search for National Rejuvenation*, 2014, Springer EBooks.

<sup>125</sup> Ferdinand, “Westward ho – the China Dreama and ‘One Belt, One Road.’”

<sup>126</sup> Gustafsson, Karl. "Is China's Discursive Power Increasing? The "Power of the Past" in Sino-Japanese Relations." *Asian Perspective* 38, no. 3 (2014): 411-33.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

Japanese'.<sup>128</sup> Two counter-productive consequences occurred in response to this, one, through limiting discursive options there is a limitation to foreign policy avenues in Sino-Japanese relations, and two, particularly through Sino-Japanese relations, other states have, come to see China as Japan's authoritarian, human rights abusing neighbour.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, participation in the War of Resistance had already by 1949, per Van Ness, proved tentative ideological grounds as the anti-fascist alliance that China was (not least) ontologically a part of had broken down on the route to the Cold War.<sup>130</sup> With regards to these themes it is apparent that China needed a nationalist identity predicated on fundamentally Chinese characteristics in an effort to shore up ontological security. The world no longer recognises China as the victim, in fact an outcome of recent foreign policy positions such as with the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute, China came across the "bully."<sup>131</sup> Gustafsson explains that how other states in the world community understand your state plays a large part in your identity through his studies on recognition.<sup>132</sup> To this end, Gustafsson credits Japan's identity entrepreneurs as having emphasised Japan as the democratic state whereas China as authoritarian Other.<sup>133</sup>

Naturally, nationalism in China is not entirely about Japan's aggression and some scholars have found that with a new generation of Chinese nationalists, and through historical revisionism Chinese nationalism may have more breadth than originally considered. As Gries identifies the 'century' is constantly reworked and the narrative manipulated to suit contemporary historical narratives, which in turn can support policy.<sup>134</sup> For instance, in the 1950s, Mao utilised a 'victor' narrative, depicting the proletariat Chinese as having shown courage and heroism in their fight against imperials. Gries shows that the 1959 Chinese film *Lin Zexu*, demonstrates the anti-imperialist struggle, following the story of peasants in their quest for revenge against an evil British officer.<sup>135</sup> By the 1990s, the Maoist victor narrative had been replaced by

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<sup>128</sup> Karl Gustafsson, "Identity and recognition: remembering and forgetting the post-war in Sino-Japanese relations." *The Pacific Review* 28, no. 1 (2015).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Peter Van Ness, *Revolution and Chinese foreign policy: Peking's support for wars of national liberation*. No. 4. Univ of California Press, 1970.

<sup>131</sup> Gustafsson, "Is China's discursive power increasing?"

<sup>132</sup> Karl Gustafsson, "Recognising Recognition through Thick and Thin: Insights from Sino-Japanese Relations." *Cooperation and Conflict* 51, no. 3 (2016).

<sup>133</sup> Karl Gustafsson, "Identity and recognition: remembering and forgetting the post-war in Sino-Japanese relations." *The Pacific Review* 28, no. 1 (2015).

<sup>134</sup> Gries, *China's New Nationalism*.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

the narrative of victimisation at the hands of the West and Japan, with imagery of China as a raped woman, a narrative that made its way in to Western literature with the Nanking Massacre coming to be known as the Rape of Nanking.<sup>136</sup> This was typified by the 1997 film *Opium War*, which follows the same historical event as *Lin Zexu*, yet tells a story of dark depression, national tragedy, and emphasises Chinese opium addicts, though ultimately concluding with imagery of a reawakened lion, and the text, per Gries, “on July 1, 1997, the Chinese government recovered sovereignty over Hong Kong.”<sup>137</sup> The power of manipulation of the historical narrative was emphasised in the wake of Tiananmen Square. What Béja Jean-Pilippe described as six weeks of pro-democracy demonstrations in Beijing and hundreds of other cities across China, predominantly led by students engaging in a hunger strike, was met by brutal repression ending in a still unknown number of deaths.<sup>138</sup> Jean-Philippe argues that the rise of liberalism in China, and critique of Marxism-Leninism philosophies, as well as a growing confidence in the market to tackle issues of social inequality alerted the CCP to the insufficient levels that the youth were buying in to the state propaganda at.<sup>139</sup> As Hughes emphasises, even in the authoritarian environment the Chinese population will hold the regime accountable on perceived failures. As seen when Premier Zhu Rongji failed to gain accession to the WTO in 1999, or when the US bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, these events incur ‘nationalist passions.’<sup>140</sup> Inversely, Deng gained huge political points for having a nine-gun salute of the White House lawn.<sup>141</sup> This imagery would have cohered with the construction that China will outlast the American superiority. This is an important aspect as there is an element of patience in China’s foreign policy informed by the civilisational construct – a nation as old as China that has the ability to outlast its rivals does not need to act with aggression or assertiveness in international affairs.

Sinkkonen, drawing conclusions from a study of Chinese university students on nationalism finds that nationalism is strongly linked with foreign policy and that of the students that were nationalist, their foreign policy orientations were in support of

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Jean-Philippe, Béja, *The impact of China's 1989 Tiananmen massacre*. Routledge, 2010.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Hughes, *Chinese Nationalism in a Global Era*.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

economic protectionism and prominent international standing.<sup>142</sup> This indicates a social construction of great power built on economic strength. Much like an overdependence on victimhood constraining discursive options in foreign policy, nationalism proves to be a double-edged sword. Zhao describes nationalism as a force in China akin to Pandora's box, the government wants to encourage shows of nationalism in the public so long as they are in line with national interests.<sup>143</sup> This was especially poignant after the global economy showed frailties in US hegemony, by 2008 Chinese nationalism was at an all-time high.<sup>144</sup> For Zhao Chinese nationalists are young, '*feng qing*' (angry youths), connected by the internet.<sup>145</sup> This indicates a potential new wave of nationalism. Consistent with a new generation's understanding of nationalism, Hughes finds a degree of historical revisionism. He finds in Jiang Rong, previously considered barbarians, the Mongols now are indigenous martial figures, Chinese writers are essentially rediscovering "militaristic spirit and harnessing it to a process of national regeneration that combines strength with benevolence."<sup>146</sup> Rozman writes that "the villains of earlier Chinese history have largely been transformed into patriots" exemplifying the Mongols and the Manchus, or Nationalists under Chiang Kai-Shek.<sup>147</sup> Finally, Wang finds that since Xi Jinping came to power, the "China Dream" narrative which has a dominant characteristic of reaffirming Chinese victimhood discourse, has transitioned from propaganda tool to signature ideology.<sup>148</sup>

The construct of authoritarianism imposed upon China is not without basis. Sarotte explains the levels of censorship by the government regarding Tiananmen Square; scholars cannot access Chinese archival source on the subject, web searches cannot mention it, school children cannot study it, and it remains a 'forbidden zone' in the press.<sup>149</sup> Therefore, the extent to which the brutal episode affects modern identity is

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<sup>142</sup> Elina Sinkkonen, "Nationalism, patriotism and foreign policy attitudes among Chinese university students." *The China Quarterly* 216 (2013)

<sup>143</sup> Suisheng Zhao, "Foreign Policy Implications of Chinese Nationalism Revisited: The Strident Turn." *Journal of Contemporary China*, 2013, 1-19.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Hughes, Christopher. "Reclassifying Chinese Nationalism: The Geopolitik Turn." *Journal of Contemporary China* 20, no. 71 (2011): 604.

<sup>147</sup> Gilbert Rozman, "Chinese national identity and its implications for international relations in East Asia." *Asia-Pacific Review* 18, no. 1 (2011).

<sup>148</sup> Zheng Wang, "The Legacy of Historical Memory and China's Foreign Policy in the 2010s." In *Misunderstanding Asia*, pp. 227-239. Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015.

<sup>149</sup> Mary Elise Sarotte, "China's Fear of Contagion: Tiananmen Square and the Power of the European Example." *International Security* 37, no. 2 (2012).

difficult to ascertain. While there are descriptions of how some will try avoid state security to be interviewed by foreign media, or attempt to unfurl banners in the square in remembrance, but it is never long before plainclothes police intervene.<sup>150</sup> A takeaway is that there are a degree of people living in fear following the brutal reprisals that have been reported to follow freedom expression but it is unclear how commonplace this is - due of course to the censorship. Carol Sorgenfrei describes in her publication on China's theatre following the Tiananmen Square massacre that there is an internal colonisation occurring in China making minorities, dissidents, and non-Communists into the Other.<sup>151</sup> The limited freedom of expression and the strong presence of the narrow identity predicated on victimhood at the hands of Japanese aggression strongly limits a comprehensive account of China's social construction which can impede China's foreign policy options.

Literature that considers China's identity vis-à-vis Others has drawn upon Japan, Europe, and the US as others that have made an influential contribution to Chinese identity. The Chinese construction of the Japanese Other had, per Perry, seen Japan as a 'little brother' civilisation, that learned the Westerners' tricks and used these tricks to defeat China in war.<sup>152</sup> Depictions of Japan in film are maintained at a standard by the Chinese Censorship Bureau to ensure that the Japanese characters are not portrayed in a nuanced way, and show nothing but aggression.<sup>153</sup> China's patriotic education has constructed an image of Japan that denies Japan's post-war peaceful development, fostering a one sided image of Japan.<sup>154</sup> Shambaugh, sees Japan as China's significant Other that China's identity is largely constructed in reference to.<sup>155</sup> Othering in this way shows a construction of China as rejecting Japanese aggression, and rejecting Japanese Western aided development indicating that China sees itself as on an independent developmental path, i.e. not catching up with the Western development and heading

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<sup>150</sup> Nick Frisch, "The Politics of Memory: Tiananmen at 27." *YaleGlobal Online*, 2016, YaleGlobal Online, June 14, 2016.

<sup>151</sup> Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei. "Orientalizing the Self: Theatre in China After Tiananmen Square." *TDR (1988-)* 35, no. 4 (1991).

<sup>152</sup> Link Perry. "What it Means to Be Chinese—Nationalism and Identity in Xi's China." *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 3 (2015).

<sup>153</sup> Karl Gustafsson. "Memory Politics and Ontological Security in Sino-Japanese Relations." *Asian Studies Review*, 2013, 1-16.

<sup>154</sup> Gustafsson, "Identity and recognition: remembering and forgetting the post-war in Sino-Japanese relations."

<sup>155</sup> Shambaugh, David L., ed. *Power shift: China and Asia's new dynamics*. Univ of California Press, 2005.



towards democratic, human rights based society, but rather pursuing a unique path. China had already rejecting European technologies and advanced societal products before the Century of Humiliation. This is reflected in Barr, who states that China's interpretation of advanced European theories and knowledge must not simply be incorporated in to China with 'Chinese characteristics' but must only seek to recognise this knowledge in relation to its own system, known as *tianxia*, meaning 'all under heaven'.<sup>156</sup> The US is an obvious Other that China has not recognised as a threat, nor as a point of emulation, but as an Other in the international framework that China must work with. Generally, the consensus in the literature is that China recognises the benefits of the US's global superpower status and responsibilities and therefore does not seek to challenge the US.<sup>157</sup> To the degree that China recognises itself a communist state, the US is an ideological Other.<sup>158</sup> China has utilised the popular 'American dream' mantra, China has responded with the 'Chinese dream' which prizes collective achievement over the American individual achievement.<sup>159</sup> As an Other then China cannot outright reject the constituent features with which China views the US as having. Finally, the Third World states as an Other offer China the ability to recognise others as being on the unique Chinese developmental path.

## 2.8. China Identity in Foreign Policy

The various aspects of China's domestic identity naturally affect China's foreign policy yet the extent to which are not definite. The struggle from being a developing country towards being a global power has, per the literature, left China with an affinity for the Global South. This identity has its genesis in Mao's attempts to utilise its commonalities with the Third World to rebalance against US imperialism. Lee writes that China in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century whilst struggling to find its place between the Soviet Union and the US, Mao's foreign policy, was for a time, trying to unite the forces of the Third World against 'US imperialism' and 'Soviet revisionism'.<sup>160</sup> Rozman sees this empathy for Third World nations as a product of the revival of Leninist and Maoist ideology and the shared victimhood with the "South" at the hands of colonialist

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<sup>156</sup> Michael Barr. "How Chinese Identity Politics Shapes Its Depictions of Europe." *Review of European Studies* 4, no. 3 (2012): 45.

<sup>157</sup> Alastair I. Johnston, "What (if anything) does East Asia tell us about international relations theory?." *Annual Review of Political Science* 15 (2012).

<sup>158</sup> Rozman, "Chinese national identity and its implications for international relations in East Asia."

<sup>159</sup> Heberer. "China in 2013." *Asian Survey* 54, no. 1 (2014).

<sup>160</sup> Lee, Joseph Tse-Hei, "China's Third World Policy from the Maoist Era to the Present" (2008). *Global Asia Journal*.

forces.<sup>161</sup> Shambaugh describes this affinity with the south as one of many of China's competing identities, arguing that China self-identifies as having South-South solidarity, heading off the West on issues such as human rights and climate change.<sup>162</sup> Shichor finds that China's image as representative of the Third World allowed a basis to rebuild its international image following the Tiananmen Square massacre.<sup>163</sup> This identity finds its way in to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, as Heberer identifies, through Foreign Minister Wang Yi's speech in 2013 where the minister identified acting as a spokesman for developing countries was a principle of Chinese foreign policy.<sup>164</sup> This relationship, per Shichor meant that Middle Eastern leaders would not openly criticise China's harsh response to the Tiananmen Square protests, with some leaders even expressing understanding.<sup>165</sup> Van Ness finds China's Third World endeavours not necessarily reflected of sympathetic identity, but condemns the unrealistic goal as means of battling US imperialism.<sup>166</sup> The relationship between China and the Third World proves murky at best, where some describe China as a strong ally to the Middle East through votes of non-intervention with the UNSC, others paint a picture of indifference to the struggles of the Third World concerned only with reliable resource extraction to fuel China's economic ascendance or as a strategic means of counterbalancing against US and Russian force.

Modern Chinese identity discourse shows that China is the willing and able economic partner. This is an identity ascribed to China that began with its regional engagements. Shambaugh in describing China's relationships within the Asian region sees a China no longer self-identifying as the victim, but as a willing partner in the internationally community.<sup>167</sup> Outside of Asia, Shichor describes China as acting with "purely economic considerations" when allocating construction contracts in the Middle East.<sup>168</sup> Likewise, Economy writes, "The willingness of the Chinese government and its state owned enterprises to do business anywhere, anytime, and at any price has become

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<sup>161</sup> Rozman, "Chinese national identity and its implications for international relations in East Asia."

<sup>162</sup> Shambaugh, David. "Coping with a conflicted China." *The Washington Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2011)

<sup>163</sup> Yitzhak Shichor. "China and the Middle East Since Tiananmen." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 519 (1992).

<sup>164</sup> Heberer, "China in 2013."

<sup>165</sup> Shichor, "China and the Middle East Since Tiananmen."

<sup>166</sup> Van Ness, *Revolution and Chinese foreign policy*.

<sup>167</sup> David L. Shambaugh, "China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order." *International Security* 29, no. 3 (2004).

<sup>168</sup> Shichor, Yitzhak. "China and the Middle East since Tiananmen."

legendary.”<sup>169</sup> Beckley in his comparative analysis of China and the current/past superpowers ultimately relates China to the others through economic strength – finding China lacking in intangible assets such as property rights, an efficient judicial system, as well as, skills, knowledge, and trust.<sup>170</sup> Costin describes China with a ‘single rational actor’ model (although makes room for interplay between politics and bureaucracy) with national economic goals succeeding over local parochial interests.<sup>171</sup> However despite the abundance of literature remarking on China’s economic successes, Jacques warns against a complacent reading of China, saying “it is banal, therefore, to believe that China’s influence on the world will be mainly and overwhelmingly economic: on the contrary, its political and cultural effects are likely to be at least as far-reaching.”<sup>172</sup> Though, as mentioned above, Gustafsson makes the point that China’s material growth has not been matched by an increase in discursive powers providing a small range of potential foreign policy choices for China’s leaders. These examples draw upon China’s foreign policy regionally, to which Shambaugh describes as reflecting China’s “constructivists with Chinese characteristics.”<sup>173</sup> These constructivists, per Shambaugh, reflect the Asia First identity, advocating for a stable Asian region.<sup>174</sup>

This economic potential has been viewed by some as a threat to US world hegemony while others argue it is a manifestation of its civilisational aspirations. John Mearsheimer and his theory of offensive realism depicts China as likely to convert its economic might in to an intense competition for regional dominance with potential for war with the US.<sup>175</sup> However, Shambaugh reflects that China does not have a history of coercive statecraft, and even the legendary “tribute system” was a combination of patron-client ties; economic interdependence; security protection; Confucian cultural assimilation; and benevolent governance -not conquest and coercion.<sup>176</sup> Reference to China’s position as heir to a great historical civilisation plays a strong role in understanding modern Chinese identity. Rozman writes that China’s rise was perceived

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<sup>169</sup> Elizabeth C. Economy, "The Game Changer: Coping With China's Foreign Policy Revolution." *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 6 (2010).

<sup>170</sup> Michael Beckley, "Excerpt from “China’s Century “Why America’s Edge Will Endure”." *International Security* (2011)

<sup>171</sup> Harry I. Costin, "China, an economic superpower: “Out of many, one?”." *Journal of Transnational Management* 13, no. 2 (2008).

<sup>172</sup> Jacques, *When China rules the world*.

<sup>173</sup> Shambaugh, “Coping with a Conflicted China.”

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> John Mearsheimer, "China's Unpeaceful Rise." *Current History* 105, no. 690 (2006).

<sup>176</sup> Shambaugh, "China engages Asia: reshaping the regional order."

as a success of Chinese socialism and that Confucianism as the centrepiece of the ideology was the determining factor that made “China superior to other civilisations over a thousand years and will enable it to prevail in to the future.”<sup>177</sup> This established a key element of China’s struggle for identity in the modern world; there is a difference between how it sees itself and how it is. As mentioned before, China struggles with the identity of victim and great power simultaneously.

There is also the theme of China identifying itself as a civilisation-state, whilst only securing recognition as a nation-state. Lucian Pye wrote “China is not just another nation-state ... [rather] a civilisation pretending to be a state.”<sup>178</sup> Jacques writes that “China should not primarily be seen as a nation-state but rather as a civilisation-state.”<sup>179</sup> Its economic performance, and similarly the CCP’s Chinese Dream and rhetoric regarding a collectivist mentality can all be understood as actions taken towards realisation of China’s civilisational identity. This is an integral facet of China’s character to understand when analysing Chinese foreign policy in that it informs every relationship China holds internationally. For example, Mason writes that in dealings with Egypt and China their comparable history of having descended both from culturally advanced civilisations informs their partnership.<sup>180</sup> Similarly Chinese-Iranian relations are informed by their respective roles as heirs to civilisations.<sup>181</sup> Therein, Stuart Harris explains for China, Confucian hierarchical thought prevents an understanding of the world as being fundamentally anarchic, rather it must be fundamentally hegemonic.<sup>182</sup> Suggesting that China sees itself amongst the global hegemony. Indeed, Heberer sees a China viewing itself as integral to world affairs.<sup>183</sup> Reminiscent of Kissinger’s observation that China considered itself the centre of the world, and all other societies were gradations away from itself.<sup>184</sup> This aspect echoes the Civilisationists approach to Russian identity which, as covered, is not a common identity related to in Russia. China’s demonstrations of commitment to the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention reflect its own nationalist ontological battles. Whilst

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<sup>177</sup> Rozman, “Chinese national identity and its implications for international relations in East Asia.”

<sup>178</sup> Lucian W. Pye. “China: erratic state, frustrated society.” *Foreign Aff.* 69 (1989): 56.

<sup>179</sup> Jacques, Martin. *When China rules the world.*

<sup>180</sup> Mason, *The International Politics of the Arab Spring : Popular Unrest and Foreign Policy.*

<sup>181</sup> Scott Warren Harold and Nader, Alireza. *China and Iran: Economic, Political, and Military Relations.* RAND Corporation, 2012.

<sup>182</sup> Stuart Harris, *China's Foreign Policy.* Oxford: Wiley, 2014.

<sup>183</sup> Heberer, Thomas. “China in 2013.”

<sup>184</sup> Henry Kissinger. *On China.* New York: Penguin Books, 2012.

such principles in foreign policy are internationally reframed by some as ‘free-riding’ the security work of NATO and the United States.<sup>185</sup> Lynch points out that Beijing views the Afghanistan security issues within the context of its Xinjiang challenges.<sup>186</sup> Zhu explains that Deng Xiaoping’s philosophies of biding time are still in effect.<sup>187</sup> Suggesting as well as balancing foreign policy engagement with its own domestic principles it attempts to stave off Western intervention with China’s domestic practises, i.e. do unto others as you would have others do unto you. China’s grand foreign policy strategy is of ‘peaceful rise and development, in essence of balancing internal and external elements as well as operating with US hegemony.’<sup>188</sup> This balancing refers to internally attempting to modernise China by the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century as well as overcome its under-development whilst externally military modernisation, engaging in economic statecraft and international institutions, and undermine US power.<sup>189</sup>

## 2.9. China and the Middle East

China’s relationship with various Middle Eastern states is an ideal environment to investigate China’s identity. As previously referenced, China uses its historical and cultural discourse with Middle Eastern states to strike a strong bond. Scholars also use a discourse of similarity to refer to China and the Middle East as commonly having experienced victimisation by Western powers, that they both defend against universal human rights, and that they both have limited sovereignty concepts in the international system.<sup>190</sup> The literature depicts a sense of Chinese familiarity with Middle Eastern states as something the West never had, or tried to have. Whilst frequently having to be wary of Western condemnations, namely in the form of trade sanctions on China, the literature frequently refers to China’s willingness to defend the Middle East and even criticise Western foreign policy practises in the Middle East.<sup>191</sup> More recently, literature circulates economic action in the Middle East through China. The Silk Road and Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB) being central to this theme.

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<sup>185</sup> Lynch, Daniel C. "Securitizing Culture in Chinese Foreign Policy Debates." *Asian Survey* 53, no. 4 (2013): 629-652.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Zhiqun Zhu, "Chinese Foreign Policy: External and Internal Factors." *China: An International Journal* 9, no. 2 (2011).

<sup>188</sup> Lynch "Securitizing Culture in Chinese Foreign Policy Debates."

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Harold and Nader, *China and Iran*.

<sup>191</sup> Mason, *The International Politics of the Arab Spring*.

The Middle East has proven a testing ground for China's strongly held principles of non-intervention and limited sovereignty. The literature indicates a myriad of ways in which academia has tried to understand the Arab Spring's relationship with China. Some reflect on China's role as world great power and the imperative for great powers to weigh in on such events. Chang wrote of the growing international pressure on China as a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) member to intervene on the domestic violence, yet Chang also notes that the large number of Chinese nationals in the country, as well as the lack of economic investment, and the criticism from the Gaddafi regime regarding Taiwan resulted in China abstaining from a vote.<sup>192</sup> Another route was trying to understand how the Arab Spring pushed China's principles of non-intervention. Change struggled with the US implementing a no-fly zone over Libya and the reaction within China to perceive the act as tantamount to a military intervention.<sup>193</sup> Another aspect was the Arab Spring and its aftermath as a security concern for China. Harris points to Islamic Militancy which has taken hold which could prompt sympathy from like-minded groups within China's borders.<sup>194</sup> Another yet, was the parallels drawn between the draconian response from Gaddafi towards Libyan protestors and how Beijing similarly handled the Tiananmen Square protests.<sup>195</sup> Indicating that it was not clear with whom China would empathise with in the conflict and that China had set the precedent for how authoritarian regimes can act with respect to regime threatening protests. Finally, Ghanem argues that economic issues were at the heart of the Arab Spring movement naturally predicting China and its recent trends towards foreign direct investment as needing to be scrutinised.<sup>196</sup> This spectrum of themes in the literature demonstrates the viability of the Middle East as an environment with which to understand China, but also the possible range of responses available to China.

## 2.10. Summary

The available literature on Chinese foreign policy has several constant themes as shown in this literature review. These themes are; China as the banal economic great power; China as the Western alternative, either through championing the Third World

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<sup>192</sup> I-Wei Jennifer Chang, in *The International Politics of the Arab Spring*, ed. Mason.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. 183.

<sup>194</sup> Harris, *China's Foreign Policy*.

<sup>195</sup> Courtney J. Fung, "Global South solidarity? China, regional organisations and intervention in the Libyan and Syrian civil wars." *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2016): 33-50.

<sup>196</sup> Hafez Ghanem. *The Arab Spring Five Years Later: Toward Greater Inclusiveness / Hafez Ghanem*. 2016.

or acting as foil through the UN; or, China as the civilisation-state recovering from its “century of humiliation”. Of these themes, China and its economic agenda are the dominant mode of understanding Chinese foreign policy. A comparison with Russia regarding foreign policy in the Middle East as informed by social constructivism would allow for greater scrutiny of these themes. It would also compliment the available literature because current literature does not examine enough the level to which identity relates to and informs China’s foreign policy.

There is considerable existing literature on the topics of Russian identity and Chinese identity respectively, a state-centric comparative analysis of these nations’ foreign policy with regards to how their actions in the Middle East reflect their identity constructions remains scarce. There have been some studies looking at Russian and Chinese foreign policy in a comparative manner, yet many of these studies rely on realist interpretations of international relations. Most identity based studies on these nations compares Russia to Europe, or China to Japan. These studies are valuable and provided this thesis with ample insights into identity relations whilst proving the value of a comparative study conducted with comparable nations that perhaps have not had their identity informed in opposition or direct relation to one another.

### 3. The Cases: Syria, Iran, and Israel-Palestine

The three cases of the Syrian Civil War following the aftermath of the 2011 Arab Spring, the Iranian nuclear framework deal and surrounding controversies, and the Israel-Palestinian conflict have been chosen as they each provide a strong basis for evaluating Chinese and Russian foreign policy. In this chapter I will provide an overview as to the key foreign policy actions taken in these countries by China and Russia. The Middle East is an important area through which to discern identity from foreign policy for a host of reasons. First, the Middle East begets a great deal of international attention due to the large reserves of oil of great geostrategic and economic value coupled with the prolonged instability and religious extremism emanating from the region. Second, recent history in the region has seen the US exert a large degree of influence through hard power, any foreign policy from other great powers now is seen through a dichotomous interpretation of for or against US involvement in the region. Third, due to a combination of the first two elements, activities by Russia and China in the Middle East must be presumed to involve a large deal of deliberation and intention. These cases show an array of potential problems and how China and Russia act towards

these problems with their foreign policy principles offer an account of their identity constructions.

### 3.1.Syria

Following the 2011 Arab Spring many of the long-standing dictatorships in the Middle East either fell or were severely challenged by a pro-democratic ‘spring’, sometimes in the form of peaceful protests, other times in the form of guerrilla fighting against pro-government forces. Where some governments fell, or made concessions in the wake of these uprisings, the al-Assad family who have ruled in Syria following a coup in the 1970s by Hafez al-Assad, have maintained what has come to be known as the Syrian Civil War (15 March 2011 – ongoing). Unlike some in the region, Syria did not yield to pressure nor fall to an allied coalition backed rebel force, rather the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (henceforth Assad) has found an alliance in both Russia and support from China in the ongoing civil war. Since the outbreak of the Civil War and because of events beyond the scope of this study, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS),<sup>197</sup> has managed to gain a significant portion of Syrian territory. With Russian military intervention and using extensive military support the Assad government has maintained a degree of control over the Syrian state.

The Syrian Civil War provides an interesting case as it is a clear example of the debates for and against humanitarian intervention and responsibility to protect (R2P), and it is an example of a case where China and Russia hold comparable positions in principle – being the only two of the UNSC P5+ that exercised a veto against UN intervention. There has been a significant amount of study regarding what China and Russia offer the global governance and humanitarian intervention debate. Snetkov and Lanteigne call Russia and China wary of Western intervention, even multilateral intervention and describe a Sino-Russian ‘bloc’ discouraging armed intervention even under the auspices of R2P.<sup>198</sup> They describe Russia as insisting there is no Western monopoly over what constitutes a human right.<sup>199</sup> Similarly they describe China in this context as promoting the respect for territorial integrity, non-interference in sovereign

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<sup>197</sup> ISIS, also known as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or by its Arabic language acronym Daesh, is a fundamentalist proto-state not unrecognised by the UN, following the Wahhabi doctrine of Sunni Islam. Formerly known as Al-Qaeda in Iraq, ISIS has been designated a terrorist organisation.

<sup>198</sup> Aglaya Snetkov and Marc Lanteigne. "‘The Loud Dissenter and its Cautious Partner’ –Russia, China, global governance and humanitarian intervention." *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 15, no. 1 (2015).

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.



affairs, and wary of past examples where the US hyperpower and its unilateral activism fared poorly in the eyes of the international community.<sup>200</sup> The recent examples of either unilateral or multilateral intervention providing cause for Chinese and Russian veto on future intervention is a common theme in the literature. The examples of Kosovo, Iraq, Rwanda, and Somalia influence particularly Chinese decision on the matter.<sup>201</sup> The most pressing determinant in the decisions of Russia and China to veto Syrian intervention is the ‘lessons’ learned from Libya following the Arab Spring. Andrew Garwood-Gowers, who writes that Libya an example of UNSC intervention was an exception to international norms reminds the reader of three key divisions within the UNSC regarding intervention.<sup>202</sup> (1) the accusations that Western powers whilst performing intervention exceeded the scope of *Resolution 1973*, accusing Western powers of arming rebels and attacking excessively broad range of targets, (2) utilising R2P discourse as a pretence for upending the Gadaffi regime, and (3) Western powers are accused of turning the Libyan crisis in to full scale civil war through use of military force.<sup>203</sup> Stahn suggests that there are blurred lines demonstrated through Western intervention in Iraq, and later in debates over Syria that lead to poor differentiation between R2P as ‘responsibility to protect’, and ‘responsibility to punish.’<sup>204</sup> This author also points out that when the debate shifted to Syria, they were determined to frame the Syrian conflict as violence that was “occurring in the context of a legitimate government response to attacks on state infrastructure by armed opposition groups.”<sup>205</sup> There is also reflection that, for Russia at least, the state-centred approach to IR is reflected in its decision-making concerning R2P.<sup>206</sup> Ultimately as concluded by Snetkov and Lanteigne, the Chinese and Russian point of view is that the West are capable of impulsive and disruptive actions that leave the countries in a worse position than before intervention.<sup>207</sup> And that there was bias in the Western powers in that they did not

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Andrew Garwood-Gowers. "Responsibility to Protect and the Arab Spring: Libya as the Exception, Syria as the Norm, The." *UNSWLJ* 36 (2013).

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Carsten Stahn "Syria and the Semantics of Intervention, Aggression and Punishment On ‘Red Lines’ and ‘Blurred Lines’." *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 11, no. 5 (2013).

<sup>205</sup> Ibid. p.610.

<sup>206</sup> Derek Averre and Lance Davies. "Russia, humanitarian intervention and the Responsibility to Protect: the case of Syria." *International Affairs* 91, no. 4 (2015).

<sup>207</sup> Snetkov and Lanteigne. "The Loud Dissenter and its Cautious Partner"

criticise the anti-Assad forces, but wanted regime change, as had occurred in Libya.<sup>208</sup> This study will use the Syrian Civil War and the discourse surrounding the veto, as well as Russian and Chinese media to see key themes that reflect the *Self*. This will enable understanding of whether the comparable foreign policy decisions were justified in similar ways, or whether there were fundamentally differing approaches.

### 3.1.1. Russia in Syria

Beginning with the decision to veto a Western coalition engaging in a military intervention Russia separated itself from the majority of the UNSC council. With the events of the Libyan war in mind, the official response to the UN from Russia considering the veto was as follows,

*The Russian Federation could not agree with the accusatory tone against Damascus, he said, nor the ultimatum of sanctions against peaceful crisis settlement. The Russian Federation's proposals on the non-acceptability of military intervention, among others, had not been taken into account. The collapse of President Bashar al-Assad's Government could provoke a conflict, destabilize the region, and create a destructive impact on the Middle East. The situation could not be considered apart from the Libyan experience. He was alarmed that compliance with Security Council resolutions in Libya had been considered a model for future actions by [NATO]. It was important to see how that model had been implemented. The demand for a ceasefire had turned into a civil war, the humanitarian, social and military consequences of which had spilled beyond Libya. The arms embargo had turned into a naval blockade on west Libya. Such models should be excluded from global practice. "We're not advocates of the Assad regime,"<sup>209</sup>*

Whilst this passage emphasises the Russian stance of no multilateral intervention, the key point here is the memory of Western intervention with Libya indicating a cognitive framework where the West are likely to undermine Russian values in the region. Russian memory of the intervention is that NATO tried to create a model out of what Russia considers an intervention with deplorable motives. Specifically, the regime

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<sup>208</sup> Justin Morris. "Libya and Syria: R2P and the spectre of the swinging pendulum." *International Affairs* 89, no. 5 (2013).

<sup>209</sup> "Security Council Fails to Adopt Draft Resolution Condemning Syria's Crackdown on Anti-Government Protestors, Owing to Veto by Russian Federation, China." *United Nations Security Council*. Published Oct. 4, 2011. <http://www.un.org/press/en/2011/sc10403.doc.htm>

change, and the evolution of a no-fly zone in to a naval blockade. There is a Russian understanding of broader geopolitical factors at play beyond humanitarian aid, therein, Russian foreign policy agents were wary of the Western civilisations institutionalising Middle Eastern governments. This coheres with the construction that the world is in blocs, a trait common with Soviet Russia further demonstration the diplomatic shield theme. Despite the assertion that Russia is not in support of the Assad regime specifically, they evidently consider the Assad regime as the sovereign and legitimate ruling body in Syria and do not seek to overthrow it.

The much publicised Russian military intervention in the Syrian Civil War by all accounts begins September 30, 2015. A series of airstrikes, in support of the Assad government ostensibly targeting the Islamic State in Syria.<sup>210</sup> Reports from a Syrian news agency indicated that strikes were targeting ammunition warehouses and command and control centres,<sup>211</sup> reports later verified by Western media.<sup>212</sup>

Both the Russian government and the Media heavily reported on what kinds of military hardware was being used, when, and to what effect. The Russian army was using long-range SS-N-30A Kalibr cruise missiles from ships in the Caspian Sea. These missiles were scrutinised for while they are known as effective in state-on-state engagements; capable of destroying command centres, radar installations, and such key targets, they are *not* known to be effective against highly mobile targets such as what ISIS presents, due to their relatively slow top speed.<sup>213</sup> There are many reports of a variety of weapons being used that are not suitable for the type of warfare being conducted. This is an important aspect to consider as it signifies that Russia may be demonstrating its military might and that Russia is capable of fighting conventional state warfare. A former US Navy Admiral noted that such military hardware could sink

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<sup>210</sup> McDonnell, Patrick J., Hennigan, W.J., and Bulos, Nabih. "Russia launches airstrikes in Syria amid U.S. concern about targets." *Los Angeles Times*. Published Sep. 30, 2015. <http://www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-kremlin-oks-troops-20150930-story.html>

<sup>211</sup> "Updated-Russian Airstrikes Against ISIS Sites in Syria Begin." *Syrian Arab News Agency*. Published Sep. 30, 2015. <http://sana.sy/en/?p=56330>

<sup>212</sup> "Russia jets airstrike Islamic State in northern Syria: al-Mayadeen TV." *Reuters*. Published Oct. 1, 2015. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-raqqa-idUSKCN0RV4UV20151001>

<sup>213</sup> Bronk, Justin. "Analysis: Is Russia flexing its missiles in Syria?" *Al Jazeera*. Published Oct. 8, 2015. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/analysis-russia-flexing-missiles-syria-151007184604543.html>

a US aircraft carrier due to its advanced technology providing agility in the air.<sup>214</sup> Similarly, the use of Su-30SM fighter aircraft,<sup>215</sup> use of long range bombers including Tu-160s, Tu-95MS, and Tu-22M3,<sup>216</sup> and footage of cruise missiles traveling 1,500km, and destroyed 11 targets while reportedly killing no civilians.<sup>217</sup> US Defense Secretary Ash Carter claimed "I want to be careful about confirming information, but it does appear that they (Russian airstrikes) were in areas where there probably were not ISIL forces."<sup>218</sup> In sum, the Russian army are using military hardware not designed to fight ISIS, whilst ostensibly fighting ISIS and are publishing their combat capabilities for all to see. This indicates that the Russian foreign policy as expressed through military action demonstrates a construction of capability of resisting the West.

There has also been much in the media concerning an apparent policy of Russia deliberately targeting civilians. These reports found that Russia was operating before these September 30 airstrikes, and that the first Russian raids were on Raqqa city in Syria. Reports suggested that the raid in to the city caused the death of 40 civilians, wounding as many as 75.<sup>219</sup> There have also been reports of SCUD missiles with Russian language on the debris found "far from any ISIS headquarters."<sup>220</sup> A 2017 report *Breaking Aleppo*, found evidence of systematic attacks on medical facilities purposed towards destroying the cities medical support,<sup>221</sup> consistent with Amnesty International's claims.<sup>222</sup> The reports also found evidence indicating the use of incendiary bombs and the use of thermite (used to melt steel) and phosphorous (used against human targets) identifying images of a aviation bomb with the Cyrillic

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<sup>214</sup> Akulov, Andrei. "Kalibr: Russia's Naval System Upping Cruise Missile Game." *Strategic Culture*. Published May. 24, 2016. <http://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2016/05/24/kalibr-russia-naval-system-upping-cruise-missile-game.html>

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Cenciotti, David. "25 Russian long-range strategic bombers in action over Syria for the very first time." *The Aviationist*. Published Nov. 17, 2015. <https://theaviationist.com/2015/11/17/russian-tu-22s-joined-the-syria-air-war/>

<sup>217</sup> "Russian missiles 'hit IS in Syria from Caspian Sea'" *BBC*. Published Oct. 7, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34465425>

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Raqqawi, Abu Ibrahim. "Russia lied about targeting ISIS." *Raqqa News*. Published Oct. 20, 2015. <https://web.archive.org/web/20151021063715/http://www.raqqa-sl.com/en/?p=1515>

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> *Breaking Aleppo*. Washington: Atlantic Council, 2017. Accessed March 6, 2017. <http://www.publications.atlanticcouncil.org/breakingaleppo/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/BreakingAleppo.pdf>

<sup>222</sup> "Syrian and Russian Forces Targeting Hospitals as a Strategy of War." *Amnesty International*. Published Mar. 3, 2016. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2016/03/syrian-and-russian-forces-targeting-hospitals-as-a-strategy-of-war/>

inscription: Зажигательная Авиационная Бомба (“incendiary aviation bomb”).<sup>223</sup> Phil Hammond, former Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, UK, said ““The Russians are deliberately attacking civilians, and the evidence points to them deliberately attacking schools and hospitals and deliberately targeting rescue workers ... If you go back for a second strike you know what you are doing.”<sup>224</sup> Russian military officials have denied such attacks.<sup>225</sup> This says two key things about Russian identity construction as demonstrated through foreign policy. It furthers the previous point that Russia is using military hardware beyond what is strictly necessary in the combat against ISIS, and two, the use of weapons to disrupt civilians is a rejection of the primacy of the individual, as European norm, instead Russia demonstrates that the state must be preserved at all costs.

Russia has included its allies in the efforts to support the Assad regime; India and Serbia have both been reported as delivering humanitarian aid to the civilians of Aleppo under Russian leadership.<sup>226</sup> Iran has provided air force bases and special forces for Russia,<sup>227</sup> as well as being actively involved as an ally to both Russia and Syria.<sup>228</sup>

Russia has strongly denounced the actions of Western states and attacked any claims that the West holds the moral high grounds in these conflicts. An article published by international television network known as RT (Russia Today), an outlet funded by the Russian government quoted Sergei Lavrov, Russian foreign minister, as saying,

*Resolving the crisis in Syria will be impossible without the suppression of [ISIS], Jabhat al-Nusra and other terrorist groups, which joined them. It's the key to strengthening the cessation of hostilities and achieving a nationwide ceasefire. [...]*

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<sup>223</sup> *Breaking Aleppo*, 2017.

<sup>224</sup> Wintour, Patrick. "Russia accused of deliberately targeting civilians in Syria." *The Guardian*. Published Jan. 15, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jan/15/russia-accused-of-breaching-norms-of-war-by-targeting-civilians-in-syria>

<sup>225</sup> Dearden, Lizzie. "Russia denies killing civilians in Syrian air strikes while threatening to reveal alleged US 'collateral damage.'" *Independent*. Published Jan. 15, 2016. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/russia-denies-killing-civilians-in-syrian-air-strikes-while-threatening-to-reveal-alleged-us-a6814951.html>

<sup>226</sup> Das, Koushik. "India, Serbia To Join Russian Aid Operation In Aleppo." *InSerbia News*. Published Oct. 24, 2016. <https://inserbia.info/today/2016/10/india-serbia-to-join-russian-aid-operation-in-aleppo/>

<sup>227</sup> Bassam, Laila, and Tom Perry "How Iranian general plotted out Syrian assault in Moscow." *Reuters*. Published Oct. 6, 2015. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-soleimani-insigh-idUSKCN0S02BV20151006>

<sup>228</sup> "Iran is taking over Assad's fight in crucial parts of Syria." *Business Insider*. Published Jun. 8, 2015. <http://www.businessinsider.com/iran-is-taking-over-assads-fight-in-crucial-parts-of-syria-2015-6?IR=T#comment-55761701ecad046e21e8f259>

*The arrogance and self-righteousness in pushing through unilateral, adventurous solutions to complex conflicts is visible in the examples of the bleeding regions of the Middle East and North Africa. ... Largely due to Russian military assistance, provided to the legitimate Syrian government in response to its request, it was possible to prevent the collapse of the country under pressure from terrorists,” he added.*<sup>229</sup>

This extract conveys the Russian belief they have a unique and ‘objective’ understanding of the issues in Syria, and that they play a meaningful role in blocking the UN and by extension the West of its subversive intentions, reiterating the threat of regime change. This reflects the Statist belief of the need to avoid Western intentions of eroding state sovereignty by protecting the Syrian state. This also suggests that there is a Russian social construction that understands the necessity to protect the Syrian government from global forces validating itself as an alternative. This is reinforced by the condemnation of the US, who act in a *unilateral* fashion with reckless or *adventurous* solutions, implying a lack of a coherent plan and an unclear endgame, ostensibly unlike Russia. Finally, Lavrov ends by emphasising the importance of the Russian military in protecting the Syrian state, underpinning the need for Russian involvement and importance in the region. Notably neither this passage nor the article it came from included the need for multilateral military intervention, be it UN, NATO, or a coalition of forces, also, there is an absence of reference to any end beyond simply propping up the Assad-led state, no reference to the origins of the Arab Springs or calls for democracy.

A statement by the Foreign Minister of Russia and the League of Arab States on the Syrian crisis is a strong example of Russian policy as it seeks to “End of violence from all sources,” and allow “no outside interference,” whilst respecting the humanitarian work by the UN.<sup>230</sup> Likewise, the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation says,

*Russia stands for a political settlement in the Syrian Arab Republic and the possibility for the people of Syria to determine their future based on the Geneva*

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<sup>229</sup> “Lavrov to UN: Important not to let US-Russia agreements on Syria collapse.” *RT*. Last modified, Sep. 24, 2016. <https://on.rt.com/7q47>

<sup>230</sup> “Joint statement by the Foreign Ministers of Russia and the League of Arab States on principles of settlement of the Syrian crisis.” *Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the European Union*. Published Mar. 10, 2012. <https://russiaeu.ru/en/news/joint-statement-foreign-ministers-russia-and-league-arab-states-principles-settlement-syrian-cr>

*communiqué of June 30, 2012, statements by the International Syria Support Group and relevant UN Security Council resolutions. Russia supports the unity, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic as a secular, democratic and pluralistic State with all ethnic and religious groups living in peace and security and enjoying equal rights and opportunities.*<sup>231</sup>

There is evidence that Russia alone considers itself as uniquely able to maintain a national identity where many different ethnic and religious groups can live together, and this is reflected in foreign policy principles. Russia has demonstrated that for the sake of reaffirming its great power and alternative to the West constructions are true, it is willing to use military power to undermine UN, or Western state backed efforts. This has been interpreted as consistent with the belief that the consequences of Western-led international interventions would conflict with Russian global values. Through Russian aid, Syria has accumulated debt levels in the billions.<sup>232</sup> Whilst this debt manifests in political influence in Syria, there is little denying that policy that prioritises values over economic gains coheres with the Russian Statist model of values as these arms sales help fight against anti-Assad forces, ensuring the strength of the sovereign government. Allison suggests that the Russian leaders seek through diplomatic shielding from the UN and arms supplies, to prevent a regime collapse in Syria, an event they see as a Pandora's box.<sup>233</sup>

### 3.1.2. China in Syria

China has maintained a largely quiet presence regarding the Syrian Civil War. Notably, China began its stance on the Syrian issues by vetoing UNSC intervention efforts. Since then, practical steps to aid Syria have been hard to identify. Though, there was a captured Chinese cargo ship carrying North Korean ballistic missiles on the way to Syria, though China has plausible deniability in this instance in 2012.<sup>234</sup> Though as China became increasingly aware of the potential danger that the Syrian war could have on the Muslim population in the Xinjiang region of China, China dialled up the

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<sup>231</sup> "FOREIGN POLICY CONCEPT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*. Published Nov. 30, 2016.

[http://special.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248](http://special.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248)

<sup>232</sup> Allison 2013.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> "Chinese Freighter Caught with N.Korean Missile Parts" *The Chosunilbo*. Published Nov. 15 2012.[http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2012/11/15/2012111501361.html](http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/11/15/2012111501361.html)

denouncing of Syrian opposition forces.<sup>235</sup> By 2016, there were reports of China stepping up personnel training and humanitarian assistance to the Syrian government, including a dispatch of senior Chinese military personnel indicating a beginning of involvement.<sup>236</sup> By late 2016, China had taken a decidedly supportive role to Russia within the UNSC.<sup>237</sup> Typically, China might have first deferred to the regional multilateral council for legitimate consent to form a stance. Courtney Fung describes the League of Arab States' (LAS) role in China's voting decisions regarding Libya as 'crucial', as well as referring to Gadaffi's speech which referenced China's response to the Tiananmen Square protests as a legitimising precedent for backlash in Libya.<sup>238</sup> However, in the case of Syria, the LAS lacked any cohesion, demonstrating no moral or practical guidance, and providing no consensus on good behaviour, China thus dismissed the LAS as a guide in the Syrian crisis.<sup>239</sup>

China has sent humanitarian aid to Syria, with reports ranging from US\$16 million worth of aid,<sup>240</sup> to US\$29 million,<sup>241</sup> out of a reported total humanitarian assistance of US\$3 billion.<sup>242</sup> Whereas the US has sent a reported US\$364 million as of late 2016, bringing the total amount the US has donated to near US\$6 billion.<sup>243</sup> Chinese officials could interpret the Syrian crisis as an opportunity to reaffirm its social construction as representative of the Third World, a dominant theme in China's foreign policy as I have argued earlier. Yet, China has consistently sought to displace responsibility of veto away from itself, to a shared initiative with Russia. There is a lack

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<sup>235</sup> "China state media blames Syria rebels for Xinjiang violence." *The Star*. Published Jul. 1, 2013. <http://www.thestar.com.my/news/world/2013/07/01/china-state-media-blames-syria-rebels-for-xinjiang-violence/#yzoWBsoMwkYHeVQK.99>

<sup>236</sup> "China steps up 'military cooperation' with Assad as top admiral visits Damascus." *The Telegraph*. Published Aug. 16, 2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/08/18/china-steps-up-military-cooperation-with-assad-as-top-admiral-vi/>

<sup>237</sup> Morris, Harvey. "China pursues active role in Syrian solution." *China Daily Europe*. Last Updated Oct. 21, 2016. [http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2016-10/21/content\\_27126608.htm](http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2016-10/21/content_27126608.htm)

<sup>238</sup> Courtney J. Fung "Global South solidarity? China, regional organisations and intervention in the Libyan and Syrian civil wars." *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2016).

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> "China to provide Syria with \$16 million worth of humanitarian aid." *PressTV*. Published Feb. 6, 2017. <http://www.presstv.com/Detail/2017/02/06/509318/China-Syria-Russia-Turkey-Iran-Lavrov-Astana-Geneva>

<sup>241</sup> "China to Provide More Aid to Syria, President Says." *Sputnik News*. Published Jan. 19, 2017. <http://sptnkne.ws/ds6S>

<sup>242</sup> "China." *Global Humanitarian Assistance*. Date Accessed, Mar. 1, 2017. <http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/countryprofile/china/>

<sup>243</sup> Serhan, Yasmeen. "The United States's \$364 Million Humanitarian Aid to Syria." *The Atlantic*. Published Sep. 27, 2016. <https://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2016/09/united-states-364-million-pledge-syrian-refugees/501890/>



of reference to China's historic association with liberation movements, as part of its social construction as a Socialist with Chinese values state. The state news site *Xinhua*'s statement on aid was as follows,

*China has decided to provide an additional 200 million yuan [US\$29,000,000] of humanitarian assistance for refugees and the displaced of Syria. As terrorism and refugee crises are closely linked to geopolitical conflicts, resolving conflicts provides the fundamental solution to such problems. Parties directly involved should return to the negotiating table, and other parties should work to facilitate talks for peace, and we should all respect the role the UN plays as the main channel for mediation.*<sup>244</sup>

This publication presents a construction of sympathy with the humanitarian cause but a lack of imperative to make a credible contribution. Given that the Civil War has been ongoing for five years, it seems unlikely that a call to the negotiating table will come across as anything more than a token gesture. As Wang Yi states, China deferred primary responsibility for Syria to Russia, not wanting to be the only state to veto UNSC intervention.

*Russia is indeed playing a key role in the evolution of the situation of Syria at the moment. Russia has repeatedly stated that Russia sends troops to attack terrorist forces in Syria at the invitation of Syrian government. "The UN Security Council Resolution 2254 clearly stipulates that the future of Syria should be decided by Syrian people independently."*<sup>245</sup>

Yu Bin writes that China sees itself as having an important part to play in Middle Eastern affairs.<sup>246</sup> Whilst, crucially, indicating that not only does China not want to replace the US in its position of global hyperpower a theme indicated in the literature, but is also willing to work with fellow superpower. This may not show in Syria where China's role has been limited to the (important) step of vetoing Syrian intervention, but China has engaged actively in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Iranian nuclear framework. China also vetoed several UN initiatives including referring the Syrian

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<sup>244</sup> "Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind" *Xinhua*. Published Jan. 19, 2017. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-01/19/c\\_135994707.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-01/19/c_135994707.htm)

<sup>245</sup> "Wang Yi Gives Exclusive Interview to Reuters on Syrian Issue and Korean Peninsula Nuclear Issue." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*. Date Accessed, Jan 5, 2017.

<sup>246</sup> Bin, Yu. "China-Russia Relations: H-Bomb Plus THAAD Equals Sino-Russian Alliance?" *Comparative Connections* 18, no. 1 (2016): 127.

regime to the International Criminal Court (ICC).<sup>247</sup> The official position of the Chinese government is to denounce any unilateral action by the West and maintain an “objective and just position” whilst remaining “committed to protecting the fundamental interests of the Syrian people.”<sup>248</sup> China consistently maintains the roles of diplomacy, multilateral agreement, and autonomy of the Syrian people as fundamental to resolving the crisis. China, through their foreign policy towards Syria and diplomatic shielding, shows itself as pro-sovereignty, territorial integrity, and promoting agency on the Syrian people.

*China consistently supports the mediation efforts made by the UN and Secretary General on solving the Syrian issue, and supports appointing a successor to the Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi as soon as possible in order to maintain and push forward the momentum of political settlement. China attaches high importance to politically solving the Syrian issue and insists the following 5 principles be upheld: we insist that the issue of Syria be resolved through political means, the future of Syria be decided by its own people, an inclusive political transition process be promoted, national reconciliation and unity be achieved in Syria and humanitarian assistance be delivered in Syria and its neighbouring countries.*<sup>249</sup>

This was Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying reiterating China’s stance on solving the Syrian crisis, this is a typical government response on behalf of China and is reflective of China’s position regarding Syria. Instilling agency upon the Syrian people, as oppose to insisting the UNSC play the agentic role in the Syrian crisis reflects value for non-interventionism. A popular theme is to understand China’s unwillingness for intervention as reflecting China’s fear that intervention will then be justified against China and that remembers strongly its own humiliation at the hands of Western powers.

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<sup>247</sup> “Referral of Syria to International Criminal Court Fails as Negative Votes Prevent Security Council from Adopting Draft Resolution.” *UN*. May. 22, 2014. <http://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11407.doc.htm>

<sup>248</sup> “China’s Position on Syria Issue.” *Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Botswana*. Accessed, Dec. 4, 2016. <http://bw.china-embassy.org/eng/xwdt/t1076201.htm>

<sup>249</sup> “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying’s Regular Press Conference on June 23, 2014” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*. Published Jun. 23, 2014. [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/t1168011.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1168011.shtml)

### 3.2.Iran

The issue of sovereignty is not unique to the Iranian nuclear framework and agreements but this case demonstrates repeated tensions over Iran's alleged right to nuclear power, and debates amongst world powers about how that should be implemented and whether a sovereign state should be allowed the right to unmitigated nuclear power. Within the debate, Russia and China find themselves frequently with comparable stances on the matter. Originating with former US president Dwight D Eisenhower and his 'Atoms for Peace' initiative, the US worked towards providing Iran with nuclear power. The modern day issues stem from the ability to turn nuclear material that is used for peaceful power, in to weapons grade nuclear material. Iran has been criticised for not following the guidelines set by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and has been accused of a lack of cooperation. The low-enriched uranium of 3-4% concentration of the isotope U-235 capable of being used to fuel nuclear power plants can be enriched to 90%, as required for nuclear weapons.<sup>250</sup> However, as Mousavian notes, following the 1979 Iranian Revolution the West withdrew all nuclear agreements and contracts, and sought to isolate Iran from the world community through sanctions and other means.<sup>251</sup> Lounnas Djallil notes that one of the key features within Iran during the revolution was a shared identity of opposing the United States.<sup>252</sup> This established Iran as the only oil producing company in the Middle East that is fundamentally anti-US. Therein, much of the academic debate around Iran's nuclear framework is concerned with the geopolitical nature of Iran, nuclear power, its ability to sell oil, and whether or not these events will tip the balance of power in the region. Nicolo Nourafchan suggests that China is advocating on behalf of Iran in the UN as part of China's attempt to create a multipolar environment, or challenge us dominance in the Middle East.<sup>253</sup> Russia and China are bidding for multipolarity and allowing Iran to have a nuclear programme concern self-determination, rights, and sovereignty. Djallil notes that former president Hu Jintao, spoke of Tehran's 'right' to develop civilian nuclear technology, whilst encouraging Tehran to engage with non-

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<sup>250</sup> "Russia resumes nuclear trade with Iran as sanctions lifted." *BBC*. Published Nov. 23, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34899486>

<sup>251</sup> Hossein Mousavian. "The Iranian nuclear dispute: origins and current options." *Arms Control Today* 42, no. 6 (2012).

<sup>252</sup> Lounnas Djallil. "China and the Iranian nuclear crisis: Between ambiguities and interests." *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 10, no. 2 (2011).

<sup>253</sup> Nicolo Nourafchan. "Constructive Partner or Menacing Threat? Analyzing China's Role in the Iranian Nuclear Program." *Asian Security* 6, no. 1 (2010).

proliferation.<sup>254</sup> Moritz Pieper wrote that both Putin and China emphasised Iran's legitimate right to nuclear power, whilst denouncing Western as "[aiming] to deprive Iran of technology it has a legal right to use."<sup>255</sup> Moreover, the author states that Chinese and Russian officials advocate for norms of non-interference and sovereignty in regard to this issue.<sup>256</sup> This issue of Iranian nuclear framework reflects a shared commitment to the values of sovereignty, and self-determination. Again, Russia and China share a comparable foreign policy agenda. Therein, this study seeks to understand how the discourse expressing this agenda reflects the *Self*. Using discourse of sovereignty and self-determination, values that both Russia and China hold dear, this study will seek to show whether Russian and Chinese ontological conception of the Self are on comparable grounds – whether they share a Sino/Russo-centric uniqueness, or whether the concept of the Self is contingent on regional relationships.

### 3.2.1. Russia and Iran

Russia has long played an active role in the Iranian nuclear framework and solution attempts, generally Russia prizes Iran acquiring peaceful use of nuclear power without encouraging a solution that could see Iran weaponize nuclear technology. To that extent, Russia has sought practical steps to help build Iranian nuclear facilities and break the international impasse that risk harsh Iranian sanctions. Nuclear power plants like the one in Bushehr, which was started in the 1970s by a German company, but after US embargo following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the German construction effort was indefinitely postponed, ultimately to be continued by Russia in the 1990s.<sup>257</sup> The Russian's agreed to the construction and supply of materials for several nuclear power facilities.<sup>258</sup> Yet aiding Iran's ostensibly peaceful nuclear ambitions comes with major opposition from the US. Consistent with Iran being considered an anti-Western nation and suspicion concerning nuclear intentions the UN has successfully passed nuclear sanction on Iran to gain leverage with which to force compliance with the IAEA. Yet Russian and Chinese efforts ensured a "watered down" resolutions – an effort chalked

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<sup>254</sup> Djallil. "China and the Iranian nuclear crisis".

<sup>255</sup> Pieper, Moritz. "Chinese, Russian, and Turkish Policies in the Iranian Nuclear Dossier: Between Resistance to Hegemony and Hegemonic Accommodation." *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 2, no. 1 (2014): 25.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> "Iran's Bushehr NPP no threat to its neighbors – experts." *Sputnik News*. Published Mar. 13, 2009. <http://sptnkne.ws/dPMY>

<sup>258</sup> Sahimi, Mohammad. "Iran's Nuclear Program. Part I: Its History." *Retrieved February 20* (2003): 2006.

up to their financial investment in the nuclear efforts.<sup>259</sup> Though there may be a strong financial incentive for Russian involvement in the Iranian nuclear deal, for it paves way for the exporting of nuclear materials to Iran, which in turn facilitates a strong trade relationship more generally. And importantly, it sets the precedent for work on future industrial projects such as reports of a \$10 billion nuclear project following the Bushehr's successful construction,<sup>260</sup> and a heavy water reactor at Arak.<sup>261</sup>

Russia defends Iran's right to nuclear programmes in accordance with the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of which Iran is a signatory to.<sup>262</sup> Per a statement made by the Russian Embassy in the UK,

*We respect the right of Iran to peaceful use of atomic energy and cooperate with the Iranians in developing their nuclear energy sector. At the same time, we are resolutely against any possibility of a military dimension of the Iranian nuclear programme. We believe that concerns of the international community with regard to some aspects of the programme have to be seriously addressed. That is why Russia has supported UN Security Council resolutions on Iran.*<sup>263</sup>

It is clear therefore that Russia intends on defending Iran's right to nuclear arms without unilateral unconditional support.

A strong nuclear relationship with Iran has provided Russia with the ability to sell Iran weapons under the pretence of protecting their nuclear capabilities. Despite intense lobbying from Israel and the US, Moscow was able to sell the S-300 and successor S-400 missiles to Tehran, which put Israel in range, while Lavrov insists such sales were for purely defensive purposes.<sup>264</sup> Russia has sought to use its great power potential to aid Iran through the deployment of surface-to-air missile defence systems protecting

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<sup>259</sup> "UN passes Iran nuclear sanctions." *BBC*. Last Updated Dec. 23, 2006.  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/6205295.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6205295.stm)

<sup>260</sup> "Iran, Russia start construction of new Iranian nuclear plant." *Reuters*. Last Updated Sep 10, 2016.  
<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-russia-nuclearpower-idUSKCN11G0EB>

<sup>261</sup> "Russia resumes nuclear trade with Iran as sanctions lifted." *BBC*. Published Nov. 23, 2015.  
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34899486>

<sup>262</sup> Ghoshal, Debalina. "Iran-Russia Relations Post Nuclear Deal." *Forbes*. Published Oct. 5, 2016.  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2016/10/05/iran-russia-relations-post-nuclear-deal/#7a8e9554ad77>

<sup>263</sup> "Russian Approaches Towards the Iranian Nuclear Programme." *The Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*. Date Accessed, Dec. 10, 2016.  
<http://www.rusemb.org.uk/in4b/>

<sup>264</sup> Borshchevskaya, Anna. "Russia's Cooperation on the Iran Deal Is No Favor to Washington." Published Jul. 7, 2016. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/russias-cooperation-on-the-iran-deal-is-no-favor-to-washington>

Iranian uranium enrichment facilities.<sup>265</sup> This reflects a construction of Russian great power as Russia understands itself as capable, and obliged to tilt material force into Iran's favour. Foreign policy towards the Iranian nuclear framework shows a both regional engagements and multilateralism. Russia is a signatory to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Russia has sent experts to Iran to design the reactor,<sup>266</sup> yet Vladimir Putin downplayed any special significance to aiding Iran. At the 2013 annual news conference, an event hosted by Putin where both state employed and foreign journalists ask Putin questions, Putin was asked about Russia taking initiatives in the international community, especially in response to Syria and Iran, Putin responds,

*I consider that we really have made a significant contribution to solving the acute and long-standing problems associated with both Syria [regarding gas attacks] and Iran's nuclear programme. But we are far from the only ones whose work has helped the international community make progress in addressing these challenges. Without joint work with the Americans, the Europeans, and our Chinese friends, it would have been impossible to achieve these results. Of course, you and I are in Russia, we are Russian citizens, and we can be proud of what we do and how we do it in the international arena. I think we are justifiably proud of our principled positions on all these issues. We did not waver, as they say, we did not wander from one side to the other; we took a principled approach to these problems, based on the fundamental principles of international law. But let me repeat, without joint work with our partners it would not have been possible to achieve these results. Therefore, we are grateful to our colleagues from the US State Department, the European Commission, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, grateful to their political leaders for their cooperation. You know, to be honest, these decisions were composed of something we suggested, and something the Americans, Chinese, and Europeans suggested. This is all the result of teamwork, and must be considered as such.*<sup>267</sup>

Putin emphasises Russia's uniqueness, value, and legitimacy in the international environment, through work in the Middle East by explaining that Russia is an equal to

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<sup>265</sup> "Iran deploys Russian-made S-300 missiles at its Fordow nuclear site: TV." *Reuters*. Published Aug. 29, 2016. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-missiles-fordow-idUSKCN1140YD>

<sup>266</sup> "Russian experts in Iran to help redesign Arak reactor." *TehranTimes*. Published Nov. 1, 2016. <http://www.tehrantimes.com/news/407894/Russian-experts-in-Iran-to-help-redesign-Arak-reactor>

<sup>267</sup> "News conference of Vladimir Putin." *Official Internet Resources of the President of Russia*. Published Dec. 12, 2013. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19859>

the Chinese, American, and European civilisations. Here Putin is going to lengths to show that by acting on Russia's unique principles Russia is par with the other great powers. There is also acknowledgement that Russia can make a significant contribution to Middle East affairs, indicating that there must be a social construction of great power. Regarding the social construction of having European or unique Russian identity, Putin shows a hybrid of seeking to be understood as pan-European and as uniquely Russian.

Sergey Lavrov the Russian minister of foreign affairs, makes a statement after nuclear negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran, demonstrating the construction of great power,

*I will briefly touch on the most important points. First, the parties agreed a joint comprehensive action plan consisting of the main document and five technical annexes, as well as a draft UN Security Council resolution that all the participants in the talks will soon submit, as co-authors, to the UN Security Council to be considered and voted on. We hope that the draft will be unanimously approved. Throughout all these years we have actively participated in the negotiation process. Importantly, three years ago, the parties managed to break the impasse in negotiations by relying on the concept of gradualism and reciprocity proposed by Russian experts, whereby every step taken by Iran in order to meet the demands of the international community was matched by steps from the P5+1 and the United Nations to ease sanctions until all the restrictions are finally lifted.<sup>268</sup>*

Here, Lavrov refers to a multilateral initiative hoping to appease all parties, with a method of *gradualism*. Whilst Russia is singled out as uniquely integral as far as proposing a means to resolve an impasse, Lavrov's presentation of the facts reflect a social construction of Russia bringing a level of influence to the negotiations. Editorial pieces in the same Russian news sites showed a greater propensity for arguing that the US is the Other, in this case framing the US as a spanner in the works and indicating a social construction of great power parity. Similarly Speaking at the 2007 Munich Conference, Putin defends Russian foreign policy towards Iran, reflecting a need to attain recognition internationally, showing that Putin, as an agent of Russian identity,

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<sup>268</sup> "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's statement and answers to media questions following the conclusion of nuclear negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran, Vienna, July 14, 2015" *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. Date Published Jul. 14, 2015. [http://special.mid.ru/en/web/guest/maps/ir/-/asset\\_publisher/HUPBmpXjn4Ob/content/id/1577220](http://special.mid.ru/en/web/guest/maps/ir/-/asset_publisher/HUPBmpXjn4Ob/content/id/1577220)

wished to secure recognition of Russian great power identity.<sup>269</sup> This relates to Gustafsson's definition of thick recognition, Putin is emphasising that Russian foreign policy, in this context, explicitly should not be viewed through the lens of Cold War blocs, but recognition should be given to Russia's ostensibly altruistic intentions.

To this end, the social construction of Russia having a near-moral obligation to protect small states from Western initiatives that violate Russian principles are reflected in Putin's defence of the Iranian nuclear programme, speaking at the 2007 Munich Conference,

*Iranians are constantly saying that their nuclear programme has a peaceful character. But I agree with you that the international community has concerns about the character and quality of Iran's nuclear programmes. And Mr El-Baradai recently stated these concerns in what I think were six or seven points. I agree with you about this. And I do not understand why the Iranian party has still not reacted in a positive and constructive way to the concerns that Mr El-Baradai stated and therefore assuaged these concerns. I do not understand this just as you do not understand it. [...] Our military and technical cooperation with Iran is minimal. Simply minimal. I am not sure what minimal figures it is estimated at. In general, we deliver much less arms to the Middle East than other countries, including the United States. No comparison is possible there. We recently delivered an anti-aircraft weapon system to Iran – that is true – with a medium range, approximately 30 to 50 kilometres. That is true. Why did we do this? I can explain why. We did this so that Iran did not feel it had been driven into a corner. So that it didn't feel that it was in some kind of hostile environment. Rather that Iran could understand that it had channels of communication and friends that it could trust.*<sup>270</sup>

This extract produces a few noteworthy points for analysis. First, there is again Russia taking an alternative stance from the Western norms in trying to protect Iran, ensuring Iran did not *feel* trapped by UN initiatives. Leading to the next key point which is that excerpt from the conference shows Putin downplays Russia's relationship with

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<sup>269</sup> "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy." *Official Internet Resources of the President of Russia*. Published Feb. 10, 2007.

<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>

<sup>270</sup> "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy." *Official Internet Resources of the President of Russia*. Published Feb. 10, 2007.

<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>



Iran, at length Putin suggested that Russia's involvement in the region is not the most noteworthy or definitive. Nor is Russia making a point of regional hegemony, only that Russia sympathises with Iran. It is important to note that this speech is in 2007, before Russia stepped up efforts to aid Iran, yet, Russia plays down the significant relationship it could be utilising as a means of securing an anti-Western alliance. The justification is not consistent of a Statist perception of the international community, where there would be no need for an appeal to Iran's vulnerability, but instead presented as business as usual for two sovereign states. This could suggest that Russia feels that in this context where it's initiatives to help Iran have been blocked, there is an attack on Russian ontological security. This extract does not reflect the kind of social construction forming through analysis of the Syrian civil conflict. There is evidence in this discourse of ontological uncertainty with regards to whether others recognise Russia the way it wishes to be recognised. This relates to Gustafsson's definition of thick recognition, Putin is emphasising that Russian foreign policy, in this context, explicitly should not be viewed through the lens of Cold War blocs, but through altruistic intentions. Editorials in Russia defend Russian protection of Iran,

*Caleb Maupin: Humanity is almost unanimous in wanting there to be an end to the sanctions on Iran and peace between the two countries. So he needs to stand up to the pressure of those who have another agenda. What's preventing a deal from being signed at this point is the US making ridiculous demands here at the last moment, making impossible demands. What country in the world would allow every military site to be inspected by any foreign countries? That's an outrageous demand, especially for Iran, which has been under attack since 1979 and facing endless attacks, subversions, invasions, protecting itself ever since its 1979 revolution.<sup>271</sup>*

This passage is from an opinion piece on RT presented in the format of an interview. There are reflections of Russia defending the Iranian territorial integrity and right to self-determination suggesting the US position is *ridiculous*. This piece also refers to the Iranian revolution, a revolution which was in part an overthrow of the US backed Pahlavi dynasty. This article concludes with another RT journalist Soraya Sepahpour-Ulrich concluding "the Iranian people, after 36 years of fighting for their

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<sup>271</sup> "Ged of Wall Street prevents Iran nuclear deal from being signed" RT. Last modified, Jul. 10, 2015. <https://www.rt.com/op-edge/272848-iran-us-nuclear-deal-talks/>

rights and their sovereignty and everything they've given up, they are not going to give to these demands.”<sup>272</sup> There is reference to rights, but this is not necessarily Western rights of democratic value, but the Russian valued right of self-determination – to be utilised by the state. The discourse expressed in these editorials and the foreign policy of Russia not only to Iran, but to the other cases also, indicates that the values of sovereignty, self-determination, primacy of the ruling government are strongly held, especially over the Western values of primacy of human rights and democratic government.

### 3.2.2. China and Iran

China has a history of aiding Iran through the Nuclear framework deals and sanctions. In 1991, China provided Iran with uranium hexafluoride which is under the IAEA safeguard, which was acknowledged in 2006 as being part of a negotiation with 400kgr of uranium tetrafluoride and 400kgr of uranium dioxide, without reporting them to the IAEA – indicating China is willing and has a history of subverting international frameworks for safe nuclear practises.<sup>273</sup> Like Russia, China has taken a constructive role through agreement to construction of new nuclear facilities.<sup>274</sup> This has been linked to China's increasing energy demand as Iran is China's third largest supplier of crude oil (in 2012) supplying 500,000 barrels per day.<sup>275</sup> China has also assisted easing the economic sanctions as a result of Iran's failure to comply with IAEA through the Silk Road Economic Fund,<sup>276</sup> as well as 17 trade agreements reportedly boosting trade to US\$600 billion.<sup>277</sup> Suggesting China has a financial interest in preventing Iranian sanctions.

This is exemplified by China's use of the so-called “arms for oil” formula, as well as the deployment of Chinese made C-801 and C-802 anti-ship missiles to protect the Strait, presumably to prevent a potential blockade.<sup>278</sup> China has also sought to aid Iran

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Sahimi, Mohammad. "Iran's Nuclear Program. Part I: Its History." *Retrieved February 20 (2003): 2006.*

<sup>274</sup> Goodenough, Patrick. “China, Russia to Help Iran Build New Nuclear Facilities. *CNSnews.com*. Published Jan, 20, 2016.

<sup>275</sup> Pei, Minxin. "Viewpoint: China's Iran dilemma." *BBC*. Published Jan. 20, 2012.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-16607333>

<sup>276</sup> "First train from China to Iran stimulates Silk Road revival." *ZeeNews*. Last Updated Feb. 16, 2016. [http://zeenews.india.com/news/world/first-train-from-china-to-iran-stimulates-silk-road-revival\\_1856020.html](http://zeenews.india.com/news/world/first-train-from-china-to-iran-stimulates-silk-road-revival_1856020.html)

<sup>277</sup> "Iran and China agree closer ties after sanctions ease." *BBC*. Published Jan. 23, 2016.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

and its confrontation with the West over the Nuclear framework. Whilst the US sought to implement economic sanctions upon Iran as leverage for a nuclear deal that would prevent Iran producing an atomic bomb, China has provided trade and investment in effect diminishing the leverage of Western led sanctions as well as delaying the implementation of sanctions.<sup>279</sup>

For instance, an article from *Xinhua* reflects the social construction that not only China sees itself as being a civilisation, but that it sees the world in terms of civilisation states,

*China and Iran, two ancient civilizations, agreed Saturday to elevate their ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership to boost cooperation on all fronts and carry forward their millennia-old friendship. The consensus was reached during President Xi Jinping's visit to Iran, the first in 14 years by a Chinese head of state. China and Iran have no fundamental conflicts, and there are only consistent mutual support and mutual benefit between them, Xi said during summit talks with his Iranian counterpart, Hassan Rouhani. In history, there had been no wars or disputes between the two nations, and the two nations had conducted time-honoured friendly exchanges and sincere cooperation, which date back to 2,000 years ago thanks to the Silk Road, Xi said. [...] Xi also pointed out that China respects and supports the nations and peoples in the region to independently pursue the political systems and development paths suited to their national conditions, and the international community should help the region achieve economic and social development.*<sup>280</sup>

This is consistent with China's ambitions to rebuild the Silk Road as an economic belt.<sup>281</sup> These are straight forward examples of China holding a conception of itself as heir to the Han civilisation that produced the original Silk Road around 120 BCE. Again, when Xi Jinping spoke of Sino-Iranian relations the discourse related the two nations to their shared civilisational attributes.

*This will be my first trip to Iran, yet like many other Chinese, I do not feel like a stranger in your ancient and beautiful country, thanks to the Silk Road that linked our*

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> "China, Iran upgrade ties to carry forward millennia-old friendship." *Xinhua*. Jan. 24, 2016. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2016-01/24/c\\_135039635.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2016-01/24/c_135039635.htm)

<sup>281</sup> Tiezzi, Shannon. "China's' New Silk Road' Vision Revealed." *The Diplomat* 9 (2014).

*two great nations for centuries and to the many legendary stories recorded in history books of our friendly exchanges. [...]*

*On the nuclear issue, China appreciates Iran's assurance of not intending to develop nuclear weapons, supports Iran in upholding its legitimate rights and interests, and fully recognizes Iran's contribution to the conclusion of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). In the next stage, we will work closely with Iran to ensure the smooth implementation of the JCPOA.*<sup>282</sup>

Discourse towards Iran is saturated by references to shared historical greatness, this is reflective of China's own construction as a civilisation state and reinforces the observation that China sees the world in civilisational blocs.

Though, it has been found that China's relationship with Iran, despite calls of civilisational fraternity, is opportunistic, and not based in identity nor ideology. Joel Wuthnow calls China a 'fair-weather friend' of Iran in contrast to its more robust relationships with Pakistan and North Korea.<sup>283</sup> However, consistent in Chinese discourse and in the discourse of literature analysing Chinese foreign policy towards Iran is reference to the two great civilisations. Zhao Hong suggest that the Chinese and Iranian foreign policy is underpinned by the shared victimisation and domination by Western powers.<sup>284</sup> Yet, per the literature, the shared civilisational roots do not weigh heavily on China's decision making, as Beijing had adopted a "double-track strategy" of diplomatic effort, in which China submits to US pressure and joins the sanctions.<sup>285</sup> A decision made over concerns of losing access to the United States US\$15 trillion-dollar economy.

### 3.3. Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The search for a solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict has lasted many years, with most perceiving that there is potential in a two-state system. Finkelstein writes that for the Palestinians they do not view themselves as responsible for the suffering of Jews in

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<sup>282</sup> Jinping, Xi. "Work Together for a Bright Future of China-Iran Relations." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*. Published Jan. 21, 2016.

[http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/zyjh\\_665391/t1334040.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1334040.shtml)

<sup>283</sup> Wuthnow, Joel. "Posing Problems without an Alliance: China-Iran Relations after the Nuclear Deal." In *Strategic Forum*, no. 290, p. 1. National Defense University Press, 2016.

<sup>284</sup> Hong, Zhao. "China's Dilemma on Iran: between energy security and a responsible rising power." *Journal of Contemporary China* 23, no. 87 (2014): 408-424.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

Europe, yet they suffer the costs.<sup>286</sup> Contemporary accounts of the Israel-Palestine conflict depict the Palestinians as at their weakest since Israeli occupation began in 1967. This is due to the Arab world being severely weakened following (1) the Gulf Wars, decreasing their interest in Israel-Palestine conflict; (2) Hamas, the Palestinian organisation that is the governing of the Gaza Strip, hedging bets with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Morsi government in Egypt whilst severing ties with Syria leaving it isolated following the overthrow of the Egyptian government; and (3) the Palestinian people being despondent and without the nationalist leadership of Yasser Arafat.<sup>287</sup> For Russia the Israel-Palestine conflict is a multi-faceted engagement with many Israeli tracing their origins to Russia, Israel having the largest diaspora outside the former USSR, and Israel's interest in buying Russian fossil fuels and selling Israeli technologies.<sup>288</sup> Yet, Russia has also for a long time shown continued support for the Arab world, including Palestine in their campaign for recognition.<sup>289</sup> Similarly, China has an affinity for Israel, for the high-technology trade, as well as conflating Israel and Jews, "whom many Chinese respect as an ancient people."<sup>290</sup> Regarding Palestine, Rabkin writes that China used to relate itself to international liberation struggles, and even "compete with the Soviet Union for a place of honour in supporting the Palestinian struggle," yet this was dampened by growing ties with Israel.<sup>291</sup> A key theme in the Israel-Palestine conflict and the basis for analysis is the value of recognition. As Ilan Pappé relates, the Israeli's demand of the Palestinians a recognition of the Zionist narrative.<sup>292</sup> While, Palestinians demand from the Jews the Right to Return to their lands. Finkelstein accuses the Israeli's of pocketing Palestinians recognition of them, whilst denying Palestinian rights and statehood.<sup>293</sup> While the UN recently acknowledged Palestine as a non-member observer state in the UN, and to be given the designation 'State of Palestine' in all official UN documents. Notably, Russia and China agreed on these issues.

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<sup>286</sup> Norman G. Finkelstein. "The Camp David II negotiations: How Dennis Ross proved the Palestinians aborted the peace process." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 36, no. 2 (2007).

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Yakov M. Rabkin. "Russia, China and India and the Israel-Palestine Conflict." *Holy Land Studies* 12, no. 1 (2013): 9-24.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>292</sup> Ilan Pappé. "The One Palestine: Past, Present and Future Perspectives." *Nebula* 5, no. 3 (2008): 61-78.

<sup>293</sup> Finkelstein. "The Camp David II negotiations."

### 3.3.1. Russia and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Russia has a history of protecting the Palestinian state against the US-backed Israeli attempts to gain full sovereign control over the contested territory. Russia plays an important role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a mediator in the Middle East “Quartet.” An entity involved in the Middle East peace negotiations. Within the Quartet’s peace negotiations Russia has been attempting to ensure that the Palestinian voice be heard in the negotiations, and Russia has repeatedly stressed that the US must not be allowed to dictate terms in this arena.<sup>294</sup> Consistent with attempts to mediate the disputes between Israel and Palestine Russia has attempted to arbitrate the conflict through hosting negotiations in Moscow, an effort that for some signals Russia’s growing influence in the region.<sup>295</sup> A large role of Russia’s has been to rebuff unilateral action from the US, notably in recent times this has meant Lavrov’s rejecting former US Secretary of State, John Kerry’s proposals.<sup>296</sup> For Putin the events in Syria and Iran influence attitude towards conduct in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, and has warned Israel against preemptive strikes against Iran’s nuclear facilities,<sup>297</sup> indicating that for Putin there may be a larger framework of working against Western-supported insurgencies and initiatives. A *New York Times* article stated, “they’re eager to become an important player, a big shot in the Middle East,” quoting Zvi Magen, former Israeli ambassador to Russia working in Tel Aviv. “The idea is not to reach any specific results, but it’s good for Russia. They don’t need results. They need the process itself.”<sup>298</sup>

Though in Russia there is push back, suggesting this identity construct has little purchasing power in Russian foreign policy, as an opinion piece shows,

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<sup>294</sup> Withnall, Adam. "Vladimir Putin says Russia will fight for the right of Palestinians to their own state." *Independent*. Published Mar. 29, 2015. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/vladimir-putin-says-russia-will-fight-for-the-right-of-palestinians-to-their-own-state-10141902.html>

<sup>295</sup> McKernan, Bethan. "Russia: Israeli and Palestinian leaders have agreed to meet for talks in Moscow." *Independent*. Published Sep. 8, 2016. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/russia-israel-palestine-meeting-moscow-a7231781.html>

<sup>296</sup> Ravid, Barak. "Russia Rejects Kerry’s Proposal for Quartet to Adopt U.S. Principles on Israeli-Palestinian Conflict."

*Haaretz*. Published Dec. 28, 2016. <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.761803>

<sup>297</sup> "Putin: Russia already recognizes 'Palestine' and won't tolerate Israeli Schemes to annex West Bank land." *AWDNews*. Dec. 22, 2016. <http://awdnews.com/political/putin-russia-already-recognizes-palestine-and-won-t-tolerate-israeli-schemes-to-annex-west-bank-land>

<sup>298</sup> Baker, Peter, and Isabel Kershner. "Russia, Already Reinserting Itself in Middle East, Enters Israeli-Palestinian Fray." *The New York Times*. Sep. 9, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/10/world/middleeast/russia-israel-palestinian-peace-talks.html>

*Among members of the Middle East Quartet, Russia enjoys perhaps the warmest relationship with Hamas, the radical Islamist party that controls the Gaza Strip. Yet when Hamas and Israeli representatives sat down last week to halt a week of bloody clashes in and around Gaza, all Russia could do was watch from the sidelines as Egyptian and American mediators hammered out the deal. Russia has positioned itself as a potential mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but an analysis of its interests and influence, as well as changes in the region's political landscape, should prompt a rethink of that stance, experts said. Alexei Malashenko, an analyst with the Moscow Carnegie Centre, said Russia should put its natural links to Israel ahead of its desire to be seen as an international power player. "Russia wants to be a mediator, but it leads to nothing," he said. "What is the reason for becoming a mediator? To show America and Europe that Russia is able to perform a so-called 'independent,' special role in the Middle East," he said by telephone on Friday.<sup>299</sup>*

This excerpt from the *Moscow Times* quoting a Russian Scholar, shows frustration with the lack of a meaningful participation from Russia in the Israel-Palestine negotiations. Even so far as criticising Russian *desire to be seen as* important over making genuinely meaningful contributions. Suggesting that the social construction of meaningful great power, of the tier of civilisational status, is not yet attained therefore any indications that the Russian state is not capable of achieving this self-accredited status are threats to the regime. Therein, Both domestic and international politics rely heavily on Russia's foreign policy approach to the Israeli-Palestine conflict.

From the 1990s onwards Russian attitudes towards the Middle East and toward the Israel-Arab conflict specifically reflected the three main Russian interests in the region. The interests in Israel, according to Freedman writing in 1998 were; (1) economic, this was the primary interest, and securing Israel as a trading partner; (2) diplomatic, maintaining good relations with Israel ensured that Russia (at least) appeared to maintain an important player in the Middle Eastern region; and (3) cultural, Russia sought to maintain strong links with the large Russian diaspora in Israel.<sup>300</sup> Yet, despite this, Russian relations with the Arab-Israeli conflict have been largely pro-Arab. Writing in 2010, Freedman emphasises that Russia has an alternate agenda, that Putin

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<sup>299</sup> "Russia Sidelined In Israeli-Palestinian Conflict". *Themoscowtimes.Com*. Published Nov. 25, 2012. <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/russia-sidelined-in-israeli-palestinian-conflict-19640>.

<sup>300</sup> Robert Owen Freedman. "Russia and Israel under Yeltsin." *Israel studies* 3, no. 1 (1998).

was eager to keep Chechen rebels isolated, adding that by inviting Hamas, a Palestinian Sunni-Islamic fundamentalist organization, to Moscow there was an undermining of the Middle Eastern Quartet, which had collectively agreed not to engage with Hamas until Hamas had recognised Israel.<sup>301</sup> An article from *Sputnik News*, shows the Russian desire to see the two-state solution, to play a role of leadership, and the construction that Russia is a *major player*,

*"The Russian Federation voted for [UNSC Resolution 2334] because the resolution is based on tested formulas reflecting the general view of the international community, which has been reaffirmed many times, on the illegality of Israeli settlement plans in Palestinian territory," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation said in its official statement, published on the Ministry's website.*

*"Our experience shows convincingly that a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is only possible through direct talks between Palestinians and Israelis without any preconditions," the statement reads, "We would also like to reaffirm our readiness to host a meeting between the leaders of Israel and Palestine in Moscow." Muhammed Asad al-Awawi, who teaches history and Palestinian issues in the Open University in Jerusalem, believes that the Palestinians should seek closer cooperation with Russia, since Moscow has become one of the major players in the Middle East.*<sup>302</sup>

This piece suggests that the construction of the Self is an involved member of the international community, that believes in the use of dialogue and diplomacy for resolving conflict, and is willing to play the role of leader and mediator between the two conflicting states. Critically, that Russia is not driven by ideological necessity either way and can play a decidedly neutral ground.

### 3.3.2. China and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

In the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict China has in one way or another aided both sides, Palestine through reassurances and acknowledgements of nationhood and Israel beginning with somewhat covert ties with Tel Aviv securing for China, high

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<sup>301</sup> Robert Owen Freedman. "Russia, Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict: the Putin years." *Middle East Policy* 17, no. 3 (2010).

<sup>302</sup> "Russia Emerges as Arbiter to Settle Israeli-Palestinian Conflict." *Sputnik International*. Last modified Dec. 27, 2016. <https://sputniknews.com/politics/201612271049039571-russia-israel-palestinians/>



technology, whilst in turn acknowledging “Israel’s right to security and existence.”<sup>303</sup> China’s relationship with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) became an alliance in the 1960s when Beijing suspended relations with Israel and expressed support for Palestinian self-determination.<sup>304</sup> In the 1970s China established a PLO embassy in Beijing and supported a UN resolution equating Zionism with racism, and in 1988 China diplomatically recognised the self-declared independent state of Palestine.<sup>305</sup> More recently, China has used its permanent member of the UNSC position to support Palestinian self-determination movements and aided Palestine in achieving non-member observer state status in 2012. China has also condemned Israel’s construction of settlements in the West Bank and pressured Israel to withdraw from Jerusalem’s Palestinian territories.<sup>306</sup> Per China’s official Arab Policy Paper, China supports “the Middle East peace process and the establishment of an independent state of Palestine with full sovereignty, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.”<sup>307</sup>

Whilst China has maintained support for Palestine in the conflict, China has also sought to strengthen its relations with Israel. After Tiananmen Square most Western countries imposed arms embargoes on China which allowed Israel an opportunity to strengthen military cooperation with China, by 1990s establishing itself as the largest arms exporter to China after Russia – resulting in a decrease in Chinese antagonism against Israel.<sup>308</sup> Despite strong links with regional rivals of Israel (Iran, Syria, Palestine), Sino-Israeli ties have continued to grow on the basis of a strong economic partnership where China has placed a “high-premium” on the relationship.<sup>309</sup>

Yet, despite having taken a strong anti-Israeli stance initially, Chaziza indicates that China dialled down the rhetorical support for Palestine and Arab causes in order to strengthen relations with Israel – a move seen as necessary to be influential in the

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<sup>303</sup> Assl, Nima Khorrami. "Palestine UN bid: Where does China stand?" *Al Jazeera*. Published Sep. 20, 2011. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/09/2011928163950390354.html>

<sup>304</sup> Ramani, Samuel. "Why Palestine Supports China on the South China Sea." *The Diplomat*. Published Jul. 26, 2016. <http://thediplomat.com/2016/07/why-palestine-supports-china-on-the-south-china-sea/>

<sup>305</sup> Ramani, Samuel. "Why Palestine Supports China on the South China Sea." 2016.

<sup>306</sup> Ramani, "Why Palestine Supports China on the South China Sea."

<sup>307</sup> "Full text of China's Arab Policy Paper." *Xinhua*. Published Jan. 13, 2016.

[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2016-01/13/c\\_135006619.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2016-01/13/c_135006619.htm)

<sup>308</sup> Ramani, "Why Palestine Supports China on the South China Sea."

<sup>309</sup> Chris Zambelis. "China’s Palestine Policy ." *China Brief* 9, no. 5 (2009).

Middle Eastern peace process.<sup>310</sup> And so China's foreign policy towards the Israel-Palestine conflict evolved in to one of decided neutrality, endorsing both a Palestinian statehood, and Israeli relations. This is reflected by China's support and involvement in the 1991 Madrid Conference, the Oslo Accords, 2002 Road Map, and the 2007 Annapolis Conference, amongst other initiatives.<sup>311</sup> Yiyi Chen suggests that China sees Israel as in-part being a creation of Imperial powers, whereas Palestine is a victim of imperialism.<sup>312</sup>

*Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi emphasised China's support for the Palestinian people's rights and for their bid for UN membership. Yang said: "China is ready to continue coordination with the Palestinians on all fronts in order to gather support for the Palestinian effort," he further stressed the "right of the Palestinians to end occupation as soon as possible, establish their independent state and achieve peace in the region."*<sup>313</sup>

This excerpt reflects China's support for recognition of statehood for the Palestinians and China's ambition for a Middle East without military conflict. It also shows that China sees itself as in a position of support for the Palestinian cause, despite, as mentioned previously, China's economic ties to Israel.

China seems to be outwardly very concerned with the economic potential of the Israel-Palestine problems, a fact reflected in the foreign policy. Chen, despite suggesting that China would favour Palestine on an ideological level, does not forget that China's economic interests ensure continued cooperation with Israel.<sup>314</sup> This is in no small part due to Israel's military technology, due to which Israel is a very important investor in Chinese military development.<sup>315</sup> Therefore, China seeks to play a decidedly neutral ground,

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<sup>310</sup> Mordechai Chaziza. "China's Policy on the Middle East Peace Process after the Cold War." *China Report* 49, no. 1 (2013).

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Yiyi Chen. "The Basis of China's Pro-Palestine Stance and the Current Status of its Implementation." *Digest of Middle East Studies* 22, no. 2 (2013).

<sup>313</sup> Samantha Hoffman. "China's rise: a game changer for Palestine?" *Third Edition Journal of Palestine Refugees Studies*. 2, no. 01 (2012).

<sup>314</sup> Chen, "The Basis of China's Pro-Palestine Stance and the Current Status of its Implementation."

<sup>315</sup> Mordechai. "China's Policy on the Middle East Peace Process after the Cold War."

*In May this year, China received the [sic] visits by Palestinian and Israeli leaders at the same time. President Xi Jinping went out of his way to work on them respectively and made a four-point proposal to resolve the Palestine-Israel issue. He stressed that an independent Palestinian State and the peaceful co-existence between Palestine and Israel is the right direction of a settlement, that peace negotiation is the only realistic way leading to Palestine-Israel reconciliation, that "land for peace" and other principles are the important foundation to advance the Middle East peace process, and that international support is a necessary guarantee for moving the peace process forward.*<sup>316</sup>

Xi Jinping's involvement in the process emphasises the value of playing a meaningful role in the negotiations. Xi Jinping's intentions as expressed by this article reflect China's repeated commitment to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, a series of principles originating between China and India's relationship.

*As a nationality having the right to national self-determination, Palestine has inalienable legal right to establish sovereign state. In this process, the Palestine Liberation Organization expresses Palestinian people's claim to establish a sovereign state and takes part in international connections independently as the only legal representative of Palestinian people in international community. Palestinian National Authority governs the occupied territories as municipal government elected by Palestinian people. Both exercise some functions of a state respectively. However, Palestine's sovereign rights are restricted. Its interior rights of jurisdiction and external rights in foreign relations are restricted by the treaties between Palestine and Israel. The subjects of powers are not unified. The Palestine Liberation Organization and Palestinian National Authority are differed from each other legally, and the West Bank of Jordan River and Gaza Strip are controlled by different political persuasion. All these hinder Palestine to be a sovereign state under international law. Palestine is now in transition period or critical state between nation and state.*<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> "Wang Yi: China's Four-Point Proposal Well Received by Both Palestine and Israel and the International Community." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*. Published Jan. 6, 2014. [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/wjbz\\_663308/2461\\_663310/t1114997.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/2461_663310/t1114997.shtml)

<sup>317</sup> Liang Jie. "On the Palestinian Right of Establishing State and its Implementation." *Chinese Academic Journals Full-text Database*, (2017).

China has identified the principle need for Palestinian statehood, as well as identified the key issues with a lack of statehood, namely the restriction of rights and the impediment of judicial practises to the Palestinian people. In this passage China frames the issue as a matter of the Palestinian people, a disenfranchised population who need to be recognised as sovereign over their lands.

### 3.4. Summary

These three cases provide a basis for understanding Russia and Chinese approaches to R2P and intervention, sovereignty and self-determination, and recognition and ability to arbitrate as a great power. Thus, these cases provide a strong basis for this comparative study as discourse relating to these cases will allow for the differences in approach, to the extent they exist in a comparable outcome, to demonstrate differences in the conception and social understanding of the Self. These cases offer an avenue of exploring how Russia and China act towards non-neighbouring states where their power can produce a greater influence.

## 4. Results and Analysis

In this section I shall explore what identity constructions can be discerned from the foreign policies of Russia and China with regards to the Middle East. I find that predominantly there are themes of a great power social construction, themes pertaining to the identity as alternate to the West, as well as social constructions indicating an identity of civilisation-state ontology, and an identity as a leader amongst developing nations. The way in which these constructions were shown through foreign policy were different for Russia and China respectively, I will now interpret the ways in which these constructions were shown and how that reveals their unique identity constructions.

### 4.1. Great Power

A demonstration of the social construction of great power is that there is an expectation amongst foreign policy agents that as a great power, state foreign policy can engage with regional disputes with a reasonable expectation that the outcome can be influenced. For Russia and China, the identity of great power can immediately be seen as having a key role in foreign policy decision making. Foreign policy towards the Middle East has a strong relationship with the construction of great power as it requires a deal of capability to engage meaningfully in the Middle East. Yet, while great power status has been demonstrated in a materialist sense, both have acted in a way that

suggests that there is an ongoing desire for recognition of their great power identity constructions. The Middle East, as an arena in which there is no shortage of global attention, provides ample staging for great power identity to be projected through foreign policy in search for recognition. In turn, I could discern the great power identity from Russia and China's foreign policies. This was shown through attempt to influence outcomes of regional conflicts where there was an expectation of success.

Discerning a great power construction from Russian foreign policy towards Middle East cases did not require extensive digging. In the discursive texts, the use of military force, their insistence on playing arbiter for disputes, the pride in a leadership role in the UN, as well as strong bilateral ties all indicate a construction of power on behalf of Russian foreign policy agents. Such a construction is an intuitive conclusion based on Russia's position as primary inheritor of the Soviet Union's institutions and roles in international organisations such as the UNSC. Towards Syria, Russian foreign policy included actions only possible given a great power construction such as the 'protection' of Syria from UNSC intervention, as demonstrated by vetoing proposals of the no-fly zones; supplying military equipment vital for continued state monopoly of force; and, Russian military intervention in Syria against ISIS and other anti-Assad forces. Similarly, Russian foreign policy towards Iran seeks to assert that Russia can maintain an independent foreign policy stance even in the face of US pressure,<sup>318</sup> Russia can aid in the construction of Nuclear infrastructure and Russia can viably present itself as a reliable ally. Regarding the Israel-Palestine dispute, Russia has engaged as a leader, supporting an independent position to the West, seeking to maintain positive relations with both parties in the dispute. Russia's intervention in Syria marks the country's first direct engagement with the Middle East. The Russian military intervention into Syria began at the end of September 2015 with air strikes, ostensibly to maintain the Assad government's upper hand in the war and target terrorist groups threatening regime stability. Some suggest that this policy has triggered a proxy US-Russian conflict in the greater game between Moscow and Washington.<sup>319</sup> This is an accusation that recognises Russia as capable of engaging against US agenda. Accordingly, there are reports that Russia, against ISIS and other targets, was using military hardware that were designed

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<sup>318</sup> Robert O. Freedman "Putin, Iran, and the Nuclear Weapons Issue." *Problems of Post-Communism* 53, no. 2 (2006).

<sup>319</sup> Angela Stent. "Putin's Power Play in Syria: How to Respond to Russia's Intervention." *Foreign Affairs*. 95 (2016).

to be effective not against guerrilla forces, but against regular state armed forces. The construction of great power was further validated by Russian gains due to the involvement. Cooperation with the Syrian regime led to the recapture of nearly 600 settlements and 12,000sq km of territory.<sup>320</sup> Although Russian foreign policy agents maintain that they are acting in response to the Syrian regime's request for Russian direct intervention,<sup>321</sup> this manoeuvre aligns with a social construction of modern Russia as seeking to regain high-water mark of the Soviet Union, through re-establishing Russian presence in the Black Sea. Finally, there are indications that the great power construction is strong within Russia. Russian publication of footage of ships launching missiles from the Caspian sea and videos of Russian flags in Aleppo seem to show Russia as biding for recognition as a militarily capable. In effect, we see that while Russia is acting to maintain the Assad regime, the nation is projecting an image as a great military power, despite its worsening economic position. Such an assertive and well publicised approach to engaging in warfare in the Middle East demonstrates a construction of Russia that indicates an aggressiveness in achieving great power goals. There is little that suggests that Russia reluctantly engaged in this manner in the region.

China's actions towards the Middle East that could be construed as a great power were found to be lacking. Whilst China manifestly is a great power its actions towards the Middle East have not been indicative of a social construction of a great power that seeks to demonstrate its 'greatness' through global interventionist foreign policy. Indeed, China has in the case of Syria been largely quiet following its veto of Western-led military intervention efforts as well as reluctant to equal the US's humanitarian aid budget. Toward Syria, China made a stance as one of the five permanent members of the UNSC to veto intervention in Syria. Regarding Iran, China has used its economic power to counter US influence in the region and has demonstrated a willingness to cooperate through trade of nuclear materials and military hardware. Regarding the Israel-Palestinian dispute China has attempted to weigh in on the conflict as mediator and as an independent negotiator,<sup>322</sup> and China has been open to working with both

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<sup>320</sup> "Syrian troops aided by Russian jets recapture 586 settlements — defense minister." TASS. Published Jul. 15, 2016. <http://tass.com/defense/888512>

<sup>321</sup> Jiri Valenta and Valenta, Leni. "Why Putin Wants Syria." *Middle East Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (2016).

<sup>322</sup> "China Calls for Palestine-Israeli Peace Talks" *The National* May. 7, 2013. <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/china-calls-for-palestinian-israeli-peace-talks>

sides of the disputes, while maintaining a firm stance consistent with its principles of peaceful coexistence. China appears to have a social construction of great power evident through its foreign policy initiatives, yet China is evidently reluctant to assume the same kind of leadership roles that Russia does, most prominently evident in Syria. China shows deference to both the UN as the only authoritative body capable of being a global mediator,<sup>323</sup> and to regional multilateral organisations such as the LAS. China has been responsive to the need to move away from its historic role of the victim to Japan, towards the role of the willing and able economic power. In this respect, China must secure international recognition. This is reflected in repeated commitment to diplomatic resolutions through the UN, and maintaining the primacy of the Syrian government and territorial integrity in these efforts.

Definitive conclusions on whether Russia and China show their Great Power identity through foreign policy towards the Middle East are somewhat easier to make for Russia than for China. Russia showed a belief in its need to and capability of asserting influence in the region. Russia took roles of leadership in each of the given cases and demonstrated a willingness to defend its position unilaterally, bilaterally, or multilaterally. China on the other hand did engage with the Middle East in a way that only a Great Power can (i.e. veto as a member of the UNSC) but China failed to demonstrate an unambiguous claim to influence in the region preferring instead to utilise a hands-off approach or through a strong economic foreign policy. It is clear then that Russia and China, despite sharing a construction of being a Great Power, also perceive this as meaning different things. While for both Russia and China the construction of Great Power manifests in different foreign policy attitudes, for Russia it evidently means that military intervention as well as diplomatic negotiations are within Russia's diplomatic arsenal, whereas for China there is no grounds for military intervention. This could be for several reasons; for Russia, the Middle East is closer, the various wars and internationally watched disputes are on Russia's doorstep; there could be a perception of action being imperative. For China, the Middle East's conflicts matter, as seen by Chinese concern for the Muslim population in its far West. However, China, through its civilisational construction may see the world in blocs in which case the Middle East is beyond its purview. Therefore, any foreign policy action at all, be it a

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<sup>323</sup> "Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind" *Xinhua*. Published Jan. 19, 2017. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-01/19/c\\_135994707.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-01/19/c_135994707.htm)

veto, economic ties, or supply of equipment requires a greater deal of deliberation and justification than for Russia.

Importantly, reflected in the literature review and in the results section, there was a theme of Russia needing to prove that it was a great power to the international community. Despite having inherited the lion's share of the Soviet Union resources and land, and despite the people of Russia holding the construction of greatness, not least predicated on the geographic position and size, the international community recognises Russia as being severely hampered by economic sanctions, by insistence of comparison with Europe – which leaves Russia as a laggard, and through Western held constructions of Russia as inferior in reach and threat to the Soviet Union. This lack of *thick* recognition may compel Russian foreign policy agents to act so to secure the construction of great power. China on the other hand, is often lauded for being the economic miracle, the Chinese people understand China as a great power, and see that economic protectionism is an important aspect to this. Therefore, a costly military intervention, despite findings in the literature that China is nationalising martial figures, would not resonate well with the population. This indicates that the Chinese hold a construction of economic power but there are reservations regarding how that power must be used. Therefore, to act as a great power and make meaningful contributions to the Middle East, China needs to act in a way that secures returns, i.e. not through altruistic humanitarian aid, but through generous bilateral trade agreements and through economic initiatives such as the Silk Road economic belt which would provide much needed infrastructure and economic vitalisation following destructive conflict.

#### 4.2. Alternative to the West

Identifying as an alternative to the West is a broad theme, with precedence for it in the literature. An examination of foreign policy practice and publications indicates that this identity trait is apparent through the consistent initiation of policies that outright contradict well-established initiatives by Western powers, the EU or the US. Examples of this displayed by both Russia and China include 'diplomatic shielding', offering alternative consensus or priorities, offering alternative sources of materials or finance, or, forming or facilitating quasi-anti-Western alliances.

Evidence of Russia positioning itself as an alternative to the West is shown through diplomatic shielding against Western initiatives such as vetoes of UNSC initiatives,



protection against sanctions, or any other forms of protection from the diplomatic endeavours of which smaller states would not be able to resist on their own. Russia has been described as the ‘diplomatic shield’ for the Syrian state,<sup>324</sup> which has been interpreted as consistent with the belief that the consequences of Western-led international interventions would conflict with Russian global values. Yet there has been less acknowledgement of this being a consequence of Russia holding a social construction of itself as fundamentally anti-Western. Other instances of Russia positioning itself as an alternative include the numerous accounts of Russo-Syrian arms deals particularly as a response to the Syrian conflict.<sup>325</sup> Whilst arms deals are a little different from diplomatic shielding, they bolster a state when the perceived intention of the West, as informed by the social constructions held is that the West intended to weaken the state. Russian foreign policy agents have explicitly stated that the West acts with reckless intent and arrogance, suggesting that there is a construction of responsibility to shield weaker states from the ostensibly ill intentions of the west. Russia has also defended Iran’s position in the nuclear talks, and established that it will offer Iran communicative channels so that Iran does not feel isolated in the Middle East, and offered practical steps such as trade agreements for Nuclear infrastructure. In the Israeli-Palestinian dispute Russia has sympathised with the Palestinian cause despite strong ties to Israel. Whilst Russia has taken a relatively neutral approach through maintaining relations with both parties, support for Palestine in itself is an action that Western states are unwilling to take.

Evidence of China’s construction of alternative to the West can also be seen to a degree through diplomatic shielding, protection of Syria, and providing economic relief to states under sanctions. China has also promoted tangible means of displacing the primacy of Western values and initiatives through the region by using its economic power. I have shown China identifies with being an economic Great Power, aiming to displace the Washington Consensus with the Beijing Consensus, and the World Bank and IMF with the AIIB. Both these financial alternatives offer Syria and Iran means of mitigating the damage of sanctions, strengthen their existing governments, and offer a viable alternative developmental path.

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<sup>324</sup> Roy Allison. "Russia and Syria: explaining alignment with a regime in crisis." *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (2013).

<sup>325</sup> Luhn, Alec. "Russia’s campaign in Syria leads to arms sale windfall’." *The Guardian* 29 (2016).

The alternative views that Russia and China hold centre around the values of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and primacy of the state. Omelicheva, who tries to understand Russia's foreign policy with Iran as an expression of Russian identity refers to the Kremlin's doctrine of 'sovereign democracy' -a foreign policy line that suggests the primacy of non-intervention, but also the importance of Russian perspectives in global affairs.<sup>326</sup> Thereby, Russia's identity as a sovereign great power legitimises its interests and strategic independence in the Middle East.

When compared to findings in the literature, a key theme of Russian and Chinese foreign policy is that they, as great powers, offer an ideological alternative for smaller states to either opt-in to, or that smaller states might have a natural affinity for. For Russia, this is a rejection of the Westernist social construction that sees Russia as ultimately moving towards integration with the European community, and reinforces the Statist construction. Yet, as identified in the literature review, Statism lacks a clear definition. The results of this study indicate that Statism does reinforce internationally the values of primacy of sovereignty and self-determination. It also promotes values of equality in the international arena. Unlike the West which prizes equality on liberal grounds, i.e., everybody is equal until criminal actions are committed, at which point you are subject to having freedoms revoked, Russian equality extends beyond that to suggest that equality is maintained even after criminal charges such as accusations of human rights violations. Russian Statist foreign policy provides Russia with the cause for interaction with any faction or individual, whereas the West's values prevent negotiation with designated terrorist organisations. This also means that Russia has a basis for interacting with domestic actors such as the Chechens, legitimating past violence in the name of the state and providing an ability to reconcile and progress in the name of mutual gains through maintenance of the state.

Russia's Statist construction is also consistent with China's foreign policy practices. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an area in which China can reflect the image it wants to be perceived as having because it can act within international multilateral institutions to counter long-standing US practises in the region. Perhaps more assertively this also can be seen through China's steps towards engaging Iran as an "anti-Western

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<sup>326</sup> Mariya Y. Omelicheva "Russia's foreign policy toward Iran: a critical geopolitics perspective." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 14, no. 3 (2012).

partner.”<sup>327</sup> China has then been revealing itself as a viable strategic partner capable of offsetting the US in the region. In this sense, China’s decided neutrality is in itself an alternative to the Western narrative where there is a *right side* -generally the side with the least human rights violations. China has demonstrated that because of its principles of state primacy and China’s reputation to engage in infrastructure and trade deals with anyone, Russia’s Statist principles are common with China. However, this provides a complicated relationship with China’s Third World representative construction, to the extent that as a representative of the Third World, China is compelled to support wars of liberation. This has been found not to be the case, to the extent that China aids the Third World and prevents stronger communities from manipulating their domestic policy and conditions, China has been found to support the Third World states in this study.

However there have been indications from Russia that it does not want to isolate itself completely from the West. The following is an extract from Sergey Lavrov’s written piece where multilateral dialogue is emphasised in relation to, amongst other things, the Israeli-Arab situation where the author attempts to dispel this notion of Russia having inherited its position as anti-US,

*It would be a pity if a confident Russia by inertia triggers off a Cold War-style response for lack of other ideas. I am convinced that neither a remake of the Cold War, nor a Cold Peace are sensible choices for the world community if only because choices have no longer to be made behind closed doors and in the narrow circle of the select. Sometimes, Russia is accused of trying to live in several cultural dimensions. But it has always existed at the juncture of civilizations by virtue of its geography and history. Our historical destiny is rooted in a diversity of cultures and civilizations, which should be reflected in globalization. Russia is going to facilitate the solution of this problem at home and abroad by pursuing a vigorous, open and predictable foreign policy.*<sup>328</sup>

This extract shows that Russia’s social construction of the self lies between being an ideological alternative to the West, and aligning with the West. As I have argued earlier, misunderstanding the ontological basis of Russian identity can lead to seeing the Russian construction of the self as flexible. The problem identified by Lavrov is that

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<sup>327</sup> Parris H. Chang "China's Policy Toward Iran And The Middle East." *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* (2011).

<sup>328</sup> Sergey Lavrov. "Russia's Foreign Policy Independence \_ Implicit Imperative." *Knight Ridder/Tribune*, January 23, 2007.

there is a struggle to disassociate the Russian Federation from the Soviet Union ontologically. Russia is presented an alternative to the West, but not to the degree or threat that the Soviet Union was. This demonstrates the tension between the construction of the Russian foreign policy agents as ontologically different from the Soviet Union, yet unable to achieve *thick* recognition as such. Furthermore, Lavrov addresses the perceived flexibility found in the literature review, a ‘European in Europe, an Asian in Asia’ where Lavrov refers to accusations of living in *several cultural dimensions*, this indicates an awareness of (what has been called) ‘flexibility’ as an ontological vulnerability. Therefore, Lavrov reinforces the concept of Russia as a unique-civilisation state, yet one that is defined by its amalgamation of various ethnicities and cultures and this can manifest as presenting itself as an alternate to the US, or NATO initiatives, without necessarily evoking Soviet Union memories.

Likewise, China seeks to avoid being considered as a polar-opposite to the West, instead preferring a route that offers a separate but not competing developmental path from the West.

*The country has played a unique and constructive role by actively mediating between parties on regional topics such as the Iran nuclear issue. [...] Xi said China supports the Arab world to solve its problems on its own through development and dialogue, adding that the process of dialogue might be long but will yield the most sustainable results. This has been proved by China's successful experience over the past 30 years, while Western interventions in the region based on selfish agendas have provided counterevidence. Having achieved rapid economic and social development along an independent path with Chinese characteristics, China knows the importance of stability and a suitable path to fast growth, which are two elements critical to the development of the Middle East. Middle Eastern countries, which are currently undergoing reform and change, urgently need guaranteed political stability and dynamic economic growth.*<sup>329</sup>

This editorial piece again reflects the values of self-determination, whilst also showing values of independence from the West, value of stability, and the importance of dialogue. There is reference to the Chinese experience of rapid-economic growth

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<sup>329</sup> Shaohui, Tian. “China Voice: Chinese wisdom for Middle East problems.” *Xinhua*. Published Jan, 24, 2016. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-01/24/c\\_135040924.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-01/24/c_135040924.htm)

made possible through state-centric initiatives. This could be interpreted as a justification of China's social construction. Stability is also reinforced as an integral element to Middle Eastern peace, reflecting one of China's fundamental justifications of the civilisational social (discussed below).

While China is acknowledged as having a decided neutrality foreign policy, the international community nearly always recognises Russian intentions as a dichotomy between Russia and the West, regardless of Russian attempts to plead neutrality. In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, the US backed Israel and the Russian policy of supporting both the Israeli's and the Palestinians is interpreted as a Russian support of Palestine due to Palestinian organisations being designated terrorist. This appears to be the case despite strong links between Russia and Israel predicated on the large Russian diaspora and advantageous material ties to Israel as well as Russia justifying support for Palestine on grounds that there are Russians with sympathies towards Palestine. Katz, describing Russia's pro-Arab foreign policy in the Israel-Palestine context says that Israel was distanced from Russia because of Russia's strong ties with Syria, Iran, and Palestine, even suggesting that through Syria, Russia could supply Hezbollah,<sup>330</sup> indicating that Russia would be effectively supporting terrorists. Furthermore, Putin's declaration that the people of Palestine have a right to self-determination is often thought to be securing an Arab alliance consistent with Putin's determination to isolate the Chechen rebels inside Russia from outside Arab support.<sup>331</sup>

Russia and China do not necessarily have ontological constructions as dichotomous alternatives to Western hegemony, there are instances where there is a subversion of state primacy norms. Regarding R2P, China's role in the formulation of the concept is neither that of norm-marker, nor, norm-taker, but somewhere in-between.<sup>332</sup> Whilst similar to Russia in providing a shield against Western Liberal norms, China has demonstrated a willingness to subvert the primacy of the state, such as China's support of the passing of resolution 2165 which authorised cross border humanitarian aid in Syria without state consent.<sup>333</sup> With Russian foreign policy towards Iran there is an oscillation between diplomatic shield against the US and the UN, to supporting

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<sup>330</sup> Mark N Katz. "Putin's Pro-Israel Policy.(Vladimir Putin)." *Middle East Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (2005).

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

sanctions and de-escalation of Iran's demands. Freedman describes Russia's foreign policy towards Iran as being primarily economically motivated, as well as bolstering Putin's credibility as a foreign policy virtuoso.<sup>334</sup> Freedman suggests that Russia risks sanctions and international denunciation for cooperation with ostensibly benign Iran nuclear ambitions, because (a) Russia is keen to develop its nuclear industry, which creates thousands of top-tier employment opportunities for scientists, and for which Iran pays hard currency for; (b), this helps the Russian economy; (c) Russia cannot depend on the US stance as the US can undergo congressional shift in attitude and decide to stop economic aid to Russia; (d) Putin can demonstrate Russia's scientific pride; and finally, (e) Russia can demonstrate it has an independent foreign policy attitude.<sup>335</sup>

In summary, both China and Russia offer themselves as viable alternatives to the West through economic and technological support and investment, 'protection' from the UNSC, and political as well as military support for these three cases' future designs. Russian support however is internationally recognised as more antagonistic whereas China portrays a position of decided neutrality.

#### 4.3. Civilisation

Holding a social construction of being a civilisation state allows the state foreign policy actors to engage in foreign policy relations from a place of benign superiority. An essential component of holding a social construction of civilisation status is that there are subaltern others whom defer to you, and are degrees away from the civilisational centre. This can manifest as a patron-client relationship. This relationship exists when there is an expectation of defence of the client state from the patron state and inversely an expectation of deference from the client state towards the patron state. When such relationships are established there may be somewhat altruistic foreign policy measures taken by the patron in favour of the client. There are also assumptions of cultural superiority, recognising the world in civilisational blocs, there is supreme confidence in ethno-cultural permanence that reduces the need to recognition seeking behaviour.

Russian foreign policy towards Syria can be understood as indicative of a patron-client relationship, such as the foreign policy to protecting Syria from UNSC

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<sup>334</sup> Freedman, "Putin, Iran, and the nuclear weapons issue."

<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

intervention, behaviours of diplomatic shielding, the supply of military equipment vital for continued state monopoly of force, and, Russian military intervention in Syria against ISIS and other regime changing forces. These are all indicative of a patron-client construction of the Syrian state. According to Eurasianist scholars such as Dugin, India and Iran are positioned within Russia's North-South civilisational axis. However, whilst Russian relations with Iran were generally cooperative, they were not necessarily indicative of a patron-client basis of relationship, nor was Russian foreign policy towards Iran found to be overly generous, especially when compared to China's relationship with Iran.

China can be understood as seeing the world in terms of smaller states in need of patronage. China has shown altruism through its economic aid and the growing reputation as a country eager to invest and build infrastructure.<sup>336</sup> Essentially any state on the receiving end of China's generous Silk Road economic fund could be interpreted as a client state, Iran being one, Israel another. I do not believe the results indicate that the Silk Road reflects a 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics' as seen in China's 20<sup>th</sup> Century identity. Indication of this identity construct would have been through demonstrations and talk of sympathy with the parties attempting to overthrow the government. There has been no indication that China sees this as a liberation movement. This coheres with the identity featured in the literature of China moving away from the role of the victim, towards the role of the willing and able economic power. That being said, the literature suggests that China in the future may be likely to seek to convert economic influence into political power.

A construction of the patron-client style relationship can be seen in how China approaches the Israel-Palestine conflict. Chinese discourse pertaining to the Israel-Palestine conflict largely sees itself as a potential mediator and values its role in recognising Palestinian statehood. Perhaps more than in the other two cases, China sees its relationship within the Israel-Palestine conflict as reflecting its civilisational values, the need to ward off competitor values, and as an opportunity to promote the values of independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty.

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<sup>336</sup> "Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind" *Xinhua*. Published Jan. 19, 2017. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-01/19/c\\_135994707.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-01/19/c_135994707.htm)

There is continued reference in China's foreign policy and state diplomacy discourse of the shared characteristic as heirs of ancient civilisations, a form of mutually supporting recognition. Reflecting the opportunity to reinforce a civilisational construction in Tehran-Beijing relations there is lip-service strengthening the inter-civilisational relationship. The predominant themes in the discourse towards the Iranian nuclear framework was that of civilisational status, both of China and Iran; China's commitments to supporting Iran along their independent path and objectives, and notably, that by sticking by civilisational principles and patience they, implicitly, like China has already done, can outlast Western political intervention. The shows of explicit self-reference to China as civilisation-state and heir to the ancient Chinese civilisation. This corresponds with Premier Li Kequang's 2015 address at the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organisation in Beijing, "Three thousand years ago, the oldest written code of law in human history, the Code of Hammurabi, was enacted in Mesopotamia,<sup>337</sup> in an area where our two continents meet. At around the same time in China, known as the Western Zhou Dynasty, the ancient Chinese character which means "law" was invented."<sup>338</sup> This reflects a degree of ontological security as it rejects the explicit need for recognition from regional neighbours as Others, rather, drawing ontological security by Othering its historical self. This also reflects that China holds a construction of the world in terms of civilisations, as China evidently sees Iran as the civilisational heir to the Greater Persian civilisation. Similarly, in the discourse pertaining to China's stance on Syria there is reference to the right to self-determine government and sovereignty. Whilst acknowledging China and Iran as comparable heirs to civilisation, there are references to China's intentions to provide means for development and investment, as well as support for self-determination over the nuclear framework. This could reflect a construction China holds of a patron-client relationship. Though, where China identifies the Asian region as within the Chinese civilisational-bloc, China may see Russia as being the civilisational hegemon of the Middle East, as evidenced by China conceding leadership to Russia in the Syrian civil conflict. In an analysis of the mainstream media, Rabena contextualises Sino-Iranian relations by emphasising Iran's position in the Middle East, reaffirming China's principles of

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<sup>337</sup> Mesopotamia roughly corresponding with modern day Iraq, though also considered to be in Iraq-Iran.

<sup>338</sup> "Strengthen Asia-Africa Solidarity and Cooperation To Uphold World Peace and Justice."

*English.gov.cn*. Last modified, Apr. 14, 2015.

[http://english.gov.cn/premier/speeches/2015/04/14/content\\_281475088838014.htm](http://english.gov.cn/premier/speeches/2015/04/14/content_281475088838014.htm)



sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-intervention. Rabena finds that China's foreign policy conditions are (1) a UN mandate, (2) the relevant regional organisation has requested Chinese involvement, and (3) the sovereign government has approved Chinese involvement.<sup>339</sup> Therefore foreign policy shows that the China's civilisational construction is manifest in all of its bilateral relations as well as influences how China perceives the region.

Whilst China explicitly demonstrates the identity of civilisation-state, Russia on the other hand sees itself as distinctly on the juncture between civilisations, but never quite explicitly identifying as a unique civilisation -despite their being themes in the literature attempting to identify Russia as a Eurasian civilisation. As quoted earlier, Lavrov says, "[Russia] has always existed at the juncture of civilizations by virtue of its geography and history."<sup>340</sup> The results do not indicate of Russia being an independent Eurasian civilisation state as an active influence over foreign policy. Whilst attitudes of protecting Syria, Iran, and Palestine are necessary, they are not sufficient to identify a civilisational social construction, this is evident in comparison to China Which evidence shows does hold this construction.

#### 4.4. Developing Country

Discerning the construction of developing country from foreign policy towards the Middle East is to recognise the shared interest in fostering development and the priority of developing the state as a matter of foreign policy. It is to recognise a construction of tacit superiority over the state, at least in certain areas of technological, infrastructural, or financial development.

There is a consistent theme of an affinity for the developing nations of the world especially apparent in China's social construction of the Self. For China, this is predominantly seen in its construction of representative of the Third World as identified in the literature review. Whilst there are some who reflect on China being Syria's largest trade partner, including calls that China wishes to utilise Syria's modest oil reserves,<sup>341</sup> others suggest that trade and investment with Syria plays virtually no

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<sup>339</sup> Aaron Jed B. Rabena. "China's Role in the Iran Nuclear Deal: Perspectives From Mainstream Chinese Media." *Asian Politics & Policy* 8, no. 2 (2016).

<sup>340</sup> Sergey Lavrov. "Russia's Foreign Policy Independence \_ Implicit Imperative." *Knight Ridder/Tribune*, January 23, 2007.

<sup>341</sup> Chang, "China's Policy Toward Iran And The Middle East."

meaningful role in China's economy.<sup>342</sup> Syria has been in a Civil War so the extent to which China can reasonably enact its developmental agenda is minimal. China has been willing to facilitate development through the AIIB and Silk Road without stipulations such as seen in the Washington consensus and with generous loan offers. China has supported Iran's nuclear ambitions with agreements to build nuclear facilities, and to a greater extent than Russia, in that China has supported a fully independent peaceful nuclear ability. Israel has been identified as a location on China's Silk Road sea corridor.

For Russia, whilst the construction of willing developmental partner wasn't a key feature in the literature review, it is important to recognise Russian developmental endeavours to ascertain the extent to which Russia's developmental path reflects Russian social construction. The literature did identify that Russia's developmental path was unique to Europe's, in that it did not require entire state transformation in the democratic fashion that European countries underwent. Finally, as a reference point to China's construction as a developmental nation Russia's foreign policy is a valuable point of comparison. Russia in Syria has been identified as having a largely destructive presence with reports of infrastructural damage and damage towards non-military targets, though this is in the context of an ongoing war and so strategy may necessitate legitimate use of area denial attacks. Regarding Iran, Russia has demonstrated a willingness to aid and develop Iranian nuclear technologies, though this could be indicative of simply wishing to fulfil the construction of priority of state self-determination. Finally, Russia's support for Palestine in the conflict has been largely diplomatic, and would not constitute a developmental attitude.

In comparison China demonstrates a stronger affinity for developmental nations and the need to promote and supply developmental agenda through foreign policy. Whilst both China and Russia have near incomparable economic conditions, there has been a stark difference in the discourse and action pertaining to the importance of supporting peace and development. In this comparison, China strongly shows a sympathy to development. However, there are equal grounds for Russia and China to reject the neoliberal values often endorsed by the West as covered above. China's actions as a developing country cohere with such as China's One Belt One Road initiative that looks

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<sup>342</sup> Zheng Chen. "China and the Responsibility to Protect." *Journal of Contemporary China*, 2016.

to create a Eurasian infrastructural belt to increase trade relations westward, a major component of which is the Persian Gulf,<sup>343</sup> and the AIIB. Russia can be seen as lacking a social construction of its developmental model, which it understands as separate to the European model, as strong enough to confidently seek to emulate elsewhere, unlike China.

## 5. Conclusion

This section will seek relate the findings of this research to extant literature emphasising the extent to which this research challenged and agreed with themes in the literature as identified in Chapter 2. Then there will be a brief overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the research. Finally I will suggest avenues for further research given my findings.

### 5.1. Conclusions of the Research and Contribution to Extant Literature.

This thesis finds that there is a strong correlation with foreign policy and national identity constructions. The approach of attempting to realise how identity shaped interests as opposed to traditional material rationale prevented reliance on pre-theorisation. In turn, this thesis found that foreign policy towards the Middle East largely reaffirmed the identities themes found in the literature whilst providing more clarity and perhaps settling some long-standing debates. The dominant Russian social constructions as informed through foreign policy analysis in the Middle East demonstrate characteristics of a great power, an alternative to Western values, but do not provide grounds for understanding Russia as the hub of a Eurasian civilisation-state. Likewise, the dominant Chinese characteristics as discerned through foreign policy analysis towards the Middle East indicates that whilst China may see itself as a great power, there is little socially constructed legitimacy for influential action within the Middle East, especially when compared to Russia's assertive stance. Consistent with this, China offers itself as a viable alternate to Western values, without asserting authority nor leadership. China displays a social construction of civilisation-state, to a much greater degree than Russia.

This study challenged and advanced various aspects of the literature consensus on both countries in the following ways. Russian identity in the literature was largely

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<sup>343</sup> "Full text: Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative" *State Council The People's Republic of China*. Last modified Mar. 30, 2015. [http://english.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content\\_281475080249035.htm](http://english.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content_281475080249035.htm)

constructed vis-à-vis Europe and its Soviet past. Understanding of the modern Russian states' identity and interests from this perspective skews potential understanding of Russia and limits the concept of identity from being considered multi-layered. Seeking to relate Russia to a limited range of Others will lead to a seemingly unpredictable state, where theory is satisfied by assertions that Russia has a malleable or flexible identity. This thesis through seeking to understand Russian identity by exploring how it engaged with three cases in the Middle East demonstrated that Russia's construction of the Middle Eastern Other provided valuable grounds for understanding the multi-layered nature of Russian identity.

An existing argument as shown in the literature review is regarding the extent to which Russia not only relates to the Soviet Union, but should be treated as the 'Soviet Union 2.0.' The findings of this thesis are in agreement with Hopf and others who assert that the relationship between contemporary Russia and the Soviet Union is a nuanced one, where some features are prized (cultural strength, education) and others are denounced (lack of religion, Stalinist terrors). The findings of this thesis demonstrate that Russia is not interested in proletariat liberation movements as may have been supported, as Russia is on the status quo side of the Syrian Civil War, i.e. seeks to maintain the Assad regime. Likewise, Russian foreign policy agents in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations are not compelled by ideology to make a firm stance, instead preferring to keep both channels open. However, it is also true that Russia has taken a principled stance to protect select nations from needing to cohere with Western demands and norms. This has been seen with all three cases. When compared to China, Russia's willingness to take practical steps to demonstrate its principled positions, whereby Russia can be seen as displaying a construction as fundamentally alternate to the West. This is indicative that perhaps Russia sees itself as inheritor of the Soviet responsibility to provide an alternate path of development, and to reassure alternative practices and norms.

A theme identified in the literature which this thesis extended upon was the assertion that the Russian prevailing identity and political philosophy was that of Statism. Statism, as previously defined, relates to the primacy of the state in international politics. The extent that Russia holds this construction is true given the findings; Russia values sovereignty of each of the Middle Eastern cases, as demonstrated by emphasis on Russia coming to help at the request of the relevant

administrations, as well as Russia's willingness to (allegedly) break international military conduct and target non-combatants in order to ensure the survival of the state. Yet Statism fails to provide an adequate assessment of the constituent features of Russian identity. Russia's maintenance of state primacy is a useful means through which other foreign policy measures can be taken. As demonstrated, Statism and its values of state primacy and territorial integrity gave Russia a strong cause to engage each of these cases that constituted Russia's alternative to the west agenda.

By rejecting the common practice of comparing Russia to Europe this thesis aided literature by seeking to understand Russian foreign policy in relation to a nation of greater ideological comparability. Given this comparative approach, Russia can be seen as a great deal more proactive in its desire to assert its identity and interests than China. Where China seeks to facilitate an international environment where state primacy initiatives can be peacefully offered and economically incentivised, Russia is prepared to engage in military intervention to ensure the realisation of its values in the Middle East. Russia's apparent construction of the Middle East as prime grounds with which to demonstrate its own values, even if that means military engagement, also shows that Russia holds itself as a great power uniquely responsible for preventing Western interests from dominating the region -whatever the cost may be. Whereas China comes across as only willing to work within peaceful frameworks and with economic returns.

Regarding China as understood in the literature, China's identity as a great economic power has been found to be in agreement with the findings of this thesis. Where Russia's identity can be misunderstood as having great flexibility, China's identity appears comparably more transparent. Still dependent on the 'victimhood' narrative, China is limited in its ability to project its power. Whilst the literature identified a martial trend in Chinese fiction including nationalising Asian martial figures such as the Mongols, as well as showing movies that depict China's struggles in the wars, China has not had the capability to engage in military excursions in the Middle East as Russia has. Indeed, China has proved seldom able to project even economic power to the aid of cases with which it sympathises in the Middle East. Where China had identified once with the Third World in a role of leadership vis-à-vis relations with Middle Eastern states, China has not demonstrated that construction in the findings of this thesis. In fact, China's humanitarian aid was significantly lower than other great powers. This reluctance to engage assertively in the Middle East especially when

compared to Russia is indicative of China's patience indicated by a lack of need to assert its values, a feature of its civilisational construction. This thesis finds that China's civilisational construction is apparent in every aspect of China's foreign policy. This may also explain China's sense of superiority and lack of urgency to other nations despite paradoxically holding a construction of victimhood. China's civilisational construction allows China to act with patience in international affairs, the civilisational construction holds that China has endured hardships in the past and does not need to act with the aggression that Russia can be seen as acting with.

This thesis further contributed to extant literature by not comparing China to Japan, but to Russia instead. Compared to Japan, China has been called a bully over its aggressive stance on regional island disputes. This could lead to an incomplete or inaccurate understanding of China. However, compared to Russia, China is notably a more passive international great power. This has been noted in the literature under accusations that China 'free rides' the United States' international military security guarantees. Yet, I argue this misses the identity and intention of China. China has consistently acted against any foreign nations intentions that could be construed as imperial or aggressive, consistently preferring to respect state sovereignty and the primacy of self-determination. Given the cases examined in this work China has consistently engaged in foreign policy that promotes peaceful coexistence, the right to develop as wished by the ruling regimes of the cases, and upheld the sanctity of territorial integrity.

## 5.2. Strengths and Weaknesses of the Research

The research questions of this study were exploratory in nature and sought to identify the dominant social construction in China and Russia through their foreign policy to the Middle East. To that extent this study successfully showed that foreign policy is a strong means of discerning socially held constructions due to the centralised nature of these authoritarian cases and need to internationally justify actions under scrutiny of international peers. The nature of constructivism meant that foreign policy rational was not taken as a given but instead was explored and led to more nuanced understanding of foreign policy agenda.

One of the strengths of this study was the movement away from regional comparisons between states, i.e. Russia to France, or the EU more generally, likewise,

China to Japan, and towards comparable nations from different regions. The strength of this is in avoiding a regional comparison which implies that there are grounds for comparison based on geographical proximity, and ignoring that Japan and China have much less in common than their geography might suggest. Instead, and finding comparable nations in different geographic locations may provide more similar conditions with which interesting differences could be noted. In other words, China's civilisation-state construction when compared to Japan risks misidentifying that China's early civilisational history predates Japan, and in fact influences the formation of the Japanese nation.<sup>344</sup> In light of this strength, further study may seek to compare alike countries from different regions with a similar view to ascertaining identity through foreign policy; e.g. Japan and the United Kingdom.

A further strength of this study was the use of identity themes in extant literature as a basis for analysis. This was a necessary condition to challenge any theorisation regarding the dominant social constructions in the foreign policy. The themes gleaned from the literature were purposely broad. An obvious approach may have been to test the extent to which the contemporary Russian state is the Soviet Union 2.0., or the extent to which China seeks to displace US unipolarity. Not only are these research avenues already represented in extant literature, but to test these theories of this specificity would be to limit the potential findings of the existing and dominant social constructions that constitute these nations. Instead challenging broad themes provided grounds for challenging specific ideas within broad themes, but also provided a basis for allowing new constituent identity features to emerge.

Concerning the potential limitations of this study, the cases used may have skewed the identity constructions as, if China through the lens of a civilisation-state construction sees the states of the Middle East as outside of its realm then the conclusions of this study may be limited in that aspect. Further study may benefit from a comparison to how Russia treats alleged regional subalterns and how China treats her own regional subalterns. This would provide a greater degree of comparability. However, the Middle East is to a degree, no individual great power's sole responsibility,

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<sup>344</sup> See. Taika Reform in which early Japanese envoys were sent to China to learn Confucian ideas and philosophies, as well as, the Chinese writing system, literature, religion, and architecture. For more information on this see. Asakawa, Kan'ichi. *The Early Institutional Life of Japan; a Study in the Reform of 645 A.D.* 2d ed. New York: Paragon Book Reprint, 1963.

and moreover, every great power has a vested interest in the future of the Middle East, therefore understanding each state's approach to the Middle East reveals, through foreign policy, their identity.

A further limitation of this study is the temporal scope of which this study limits itself to. The nature of identity and social constructions as well as the changing shape of international relations mean that there are inherent risks in the evaluation of social constructions over time. Constructions are subject to change and evolve as the populations which hold these constructions evolve. Though, by and large, this study limited itself to what trends were consistent since the formation of the Russian Federation, and, concerning the Syrian Civil Conflict, since 2011, when it began. This was therefore mitigated by allowing the dominant trends following both states great social changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to present themselves.

An apparent shortcoming to this study is the language limitations, as a researcher I (unfortunately) do not have the competencies to research original language documents in neither Chinese nor Russian, depending instead on translations predominantly by the original sources.

### 5.1. Avenues for Further Research

An avenue for further research presents itself in the need to compare Russia and China's foreign policy to a place of greater neutrality than the Middle East. Due to proximity and a greater history of involvement, the Middle East for Russia could be considered of greater importance to Russia. Middle Eastern stability and the urgency with which Russia should act or not, as well as US presence in the region makes finding the causality of Russian action harder to definitively attain. A comparative study of Russia and China's foreign policy towards the Central Asian states where there is a form of competition between Russia and China would provide a great deal of information regarding their respective identity constructs. Likewise, comparing Russian foreign policy towards the CIS states in East Europe, and China's foreign policy towards the ASEAN countries may be more suitable for ascertaining the extent to which the civilisation-state social constructions are evident due to the more comparable geographic and cultural nature of these states.



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