The Syrian War of Attrition:
How World Superpowers are Fighting Each Other

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Research Question
Should the United States get more involved in the Syrian conflict to protect its interests even if it means potentially starting another war or major conflict?

Introduction
Despite Syria’s weak military and mediocre economy, Syria remains completely relevant in the geopolitics of the Middle East. Syria is home to a civil war that is rising in severity and a humanitarian crisis that has implications globally. As more countries get involved and pick sides, the conflict continues to escalate and although the conflict is currently contained in Syria, the United States and Russia are struggling in a proxy war that could intensify; combined with dozens of smaller groups that have their own agenda but need the backing of superpowers. Every country involved is there for two main reasons: to combat ISIS and to side with or against the Assad regime. The two major sides:
- Russia backing the Syrian regime
- United States backing the Syrian rebels attempting to overthrow the government.

Background
- Tensions rose during the start of the Arab Spring
- Children writing graffiti on a wall were arrested and tortured
- This caused protests, Assad brutally retaliated
- Assad sent in tanks to stop a funeral procession, developed into a significant armed rebellion

Considerations
- The real problem is from sectarianism and misrepresentation in government
- Syria is 75% Sunni, 12% Shiite
- Assad is from the Alawite sect, making up 8% of the country

Methods
Utilization of the Structured Analytical Techniques to determine the main factors involved in the conflict which resulted in:
- Funding to the different groups involved
- Cessfrees and other international agreements
- Attempts at diplomacy by UN, NATO
- How far both superpowers will likely go to accomplish their policy
  - This includes airstrikes, boots on the ground
  - Funding increases in the future
- Analysis of smaller conflicts over the retaken land
- Sunni-Shia conflicts that have been around for thousands of years
- The evolution of ISIS and other Islamic terror groups
- Propaganda and mis-information

Information was collected from reliable, un-biased sources including emphasis on think tanks, government websites, UN reports, and scientific journals

Analysis
- The difference in this conflict from others in recent years is the heavy reliance and influence of foreign support that all have their own agenda
- The rest of the world (EU, UN) wants to help intervene but don’t want to get between the US and Russia

- Deciding factors:
  - ISIS will or will not continue to hold land
  - The Assad regime will or will not stay in power
  - The US and Russia will or will not come closer to war

Two scenarios resulting from my analysis:
- ISIS will be defeated, the Assad regime will be overthrown, the US and Russia will come closer to war
- ISIS will continue to hold territory and remain a capable fighting force, the Assad regime will stay in power, and the US and Russia will begin to cooperate and ease tensions

Future Predictions
- There are so many moving parts (Syria’s internal struggles, superpowers’ geopolitics and policy, the proxy war) that have to be dealt with more deliberately for any chance of a solution
  - A ceasefire is the first thing that needs to happen
  - This would allow for the forces to defeat ISIS and then focus on diplomacy to solve the issues surrounding Syria

- A detailed plan needs to be set in place after the US withdraws from Syria
  - Past conflicts involving the US have resulted in collapses of the country (Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia) due to having no detailed plan in place to rebuild the country

- Russia will do nearly anything to keep Syria, their last major ally in the Middle East*, from falling
  - Similar to the US trying to keep Israel

- ISIS will likely flee back to Western Syria after Mosul, the capital of their caliphate, is liberated

- President Trump is expected to have a better relationship with Assad than former President Obama
  - Plans to establish safe zones within Syria for displaced people

Conclusions
- This whole conflict centers around whether or not Assad stays in power
  - A ceasefire is the first step in solving the crisis

- The US and Russia will likely come closer to war but not engage each other directly
  - More money will continually be funding opposition groups

- Dozens of different skirmishes have already broken out over reclaimed land from ISIS
  - A democratically-elected leader will likely need to be put in place before these issues can be solved

- After ISIS is forced out of Mosul, there will be a humanitarian disaster left over
  - The US and EU will likely fund the relief organizations

- The US is good at fighting wars, not following through afterwards
  - The most important step is that a detailed plan must be set up prior to any major changes in the Syrian government or country as a whole
  - Land and power control plans, as well as long-term solutions for sectarian conflicts need to start at the tribal level