



Russia's Presence in the Syrian Crisis

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Received 17-02-2022	Abstract: Russia is the largest country in the world, on the two continents of Europe and Asia. Russia, despite great extent, from time immemorial has always been concerned about access to the seas warm the world, and Even "Ivan IV" as the founder of the country was forced to command a series of a failed expeditions to the Crimea. After that, "Peter the Great" Between 1700 and 1721 lunched bloody wars with Sweden over the Baltic Sea and After the victory, he was so concerned about access to open waters that he had to move the capital, St. Petersburg, and move Russia's political heart from Moscow to the Baltic coast. After Peter and the end of the Romanov dynasty, the Russians always considered access to hot water important, so that Russia's existence was linked to it. Perhaps this is why, during the Soviet era, Kremlin officials went beyond the development of the Crimean port region in southern Ukraine to consider building maritime terminals in Libya and Syria. Russia in the middle of the first decade of the new century after the internal crisis turned its attention to international issues. In the meantime, the Middle East, which is geographically located between Europe and East Asia, has once again come to Russia's attention. But with the recent developments in the Middle East, Moscow's military contracts and economic cooperation have shifted back to its traditional allies (such as Syria) in the region. In the new era, restored its relations with Syria. In this article, we intend to examine the geopolitical situation in Russia and answer the question: what factors have led to the Russian military presence in Syria? Factors directly related to the country's geopolitical characteristics, such as attention to Russian identity, Russia's inefficiency in resolving the Central Asian crisis, and Russia's turn to the Middle East, play an important role	Keywords: Identity, Middle East, Syria, Geopolitics, Russia, Eurasia, Terrorism
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INTRODUCTION

Each country has a special geographical location; if a country can manage its geographical location from a good political point of view and turn its power into authority, can be said that this geographical unit has a unique geopolitical position. Geopolitics interacts with power. We have entered the field of geopolitics when we intend to take advantage of the geographical location and geographical shape of the territory in interaction with other countries. Therefore, the use of geopolitical position goes back to the exercise of sovereignty and authority in the international arena and the type of acting in this space. Political decision-makers, knowing the geographical location of the country, should measure the potentials and define their relations with their neighbors based on them, so that they can take advantage of their geographical location as a geopolitical opportunity. Before entering into the discussion, it is necessary to look at the geopolitical context in which Russia has entered. What happened in the arrangement of powers that Russia entered Syria in this special historical situation? There is a historical trajectory for each country, the study of which can show the foreign policy trend of each country. This trajectory means that the cultural characteristics of a country, its geographical location, and the prevailing views of its political regime throughout history give it a kind of strategic culture. This strategic culture is

one of the most decisive elements in the way that country views global issues (Diako, 2015).

Syria is a platform for Moscow to be able to restore its geopolitical position in the world and force the West to consider Russia's considerations on various global issues. Achieving this position requires caution that the Russians never enter Syria by land; because terrestrial intervention in Syria is an important geopolitical point that can change the balance and in general, defeat the West and its allies, such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and strengthen the foundations of Bashar al-Assad's government by defeating ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra. For this reason, special attention should be paid to the sharp reaction of the United States and its allies (for example, the revival of ISIL). The purpose of Russia's military presence in Syria is to weaken ISIL and maintain the status quo; that means preventing the advance of ISIL. While the West, due to its reluctance to Syria, has created a kind of vacuum there, and this, in turn, has given Moscow the main opportunity for Russia to play an important role in this competition. It is worth mentioning that Putin had announced that over 7000 citizens of Central Asian countries had joined ISIL (Diako, 2015).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was the issue of fundamentalism in Central Asia, and before ISIL, there were extremist groups

with similar views in the region that Al-Qaeda and the Taliban are examples of. In any case, although ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra were defeated in the battle in Syria, the threat of the fundamentalist currents remains strong and they can be a serious threat to Central Asia, Afghanistan, or Chechnya. Therefore, Russia's military presence in Syria is justified; because the strategy of fighting terrorism in Syria and beyond the geographical border of Russia is in the interest of this country. On the other hand, it should be noted that Russia is adjacent to the Islamic world, i.e. in the eastern parts of the Mediterranean and Africa, and even in the south, i.e. South and Central Asia is under siege of the Islamic world. For this reason, the Russian elite paid more attention to their relationship with the Islamic world. Overall, with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union into fifteen independent republics, Russia, as the largest heir to the ancient Russian Empire, faced several serious challenges in adapting its strategy: First, the consequences of the new thinking that has emerged since 1985 as a fundamental shift in the principles of Marxism-Leninism. Second, the existence of differences and the weakness of the consensus on Russia's national interests stemmed from the gap between the mindset of political leaders and the realism of military leaders. Third, the sweeping changes in the geopolitical space of the past created new demands. Fourth, internal crises, both political and economic, that to some extent diminished the range of national interests.

Thus, the Middle East is important to Moscow for many reasons, one of the most important of which is its geographical proximity. The distance between Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, and the city of Mosul in northern Iraq is estimated at 965 thousand, doubling the importance of the Middle East issue to the Russians. The second issue is the growing Muslim population in Russia; after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there is no wall to separate them from Muslims in Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and other Arab countries in the Middle East. Therefore, as mentioned before, relations with Islamic countries are more important for Moscow than before. The third issue that justifies Russia's presence in the Middle East is the growing number of religious developments and extremist activities.

Moscow is concerned about what is happening in northern Iraq and even Afghanistan, as these developments could have profound implications for Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, Russia, and even the Central Asian republics. The fourth issue that leads to Russia's role in the Middle East is energy. Russia sees itself as an energy superpower in the Middle East; that is why it is interested in taking advantage of its opportunities on the southern borders. Finally, the fifth issue that leads the Russians to look at this rich and disputed region is the presence of the Americans in the region and their military and security presence in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf (Dimitri, 2009). Given the above, in this article, we intend to examine the geopolitical situation in Russia and answer the question: what factors have led to the Russian military presence in Syria? Factors directly related to the country's geopolitical characteristics, such as attention to Russian identity, Russia's inefficiency in resolving the Central Asian crisis, and Russia's turn to the Middle East, play an important role.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK (A THEORY OF BALANCE OF POWER)

Realism is considered the dominant theoretical school of international relations in the post-World War II period. This approach, while responding to many criticisms, continues to be one of the leading theories of international relations. Criticisms of realists have led international relations theorists to try to reproduce themselves in the face of criticisms, especially from constructivist theory; because the lack of attention to non-material issues in international relations was an objection expressed by opponents of realist and neo-realist views. Moreover, in creating this attitude, the realists cannot ignore the role of the end of the Cold War and the importance of immaterial issues along with material issues in international relations, as well as the events of 9/11. In this regard, realists in international relations have tried to theorize a process called "creating a soft balance", which is mainly opposed to the old view of the balance of power, which is called "creating a difficult balance" (Rezaei, 2008). To better explain the problem, the following table shows the typology of the balance of power strategy.

Table 1: Typology of the Balance of Power Strategy

Civilian	Military	Definition
Hard balance of civilian - Transfer of strategic technologies to allies - Strategic economic assistance to allies	Hard balance of military - Internal military balance: arms race with military mobilization - Foreign Military Balance: Shaping to alliances	Hard balance (Increasing the power of a state against rival states)
Soft balance of civilian - Economic sanctions - Lack of strategic cooperation	Soft balance of military - Sell weapons to the enemy of an enemy - Attempt to control weapons and establish related regimes to control the enemy	Soft balance (Reduce the relative strength of competitors to increase their security)

Source: *Sohrabi (2014), p. 104*

Stephen Walt defines balance as follows: "Intelligent coordination of the actor's diplomatic activities to limit and shape the results contrary to rival preferences" (Little, 2010: 42). Most of these thinkers emphasize external balance through various means such as limited military cooperation, diplomatic activities, the use of international organizations and institutions. Thus, Russia's policy in the Middle East before and after the Arab Spring (Islamic Awakening) and its military presence in Syria can be analyzed in the form of a theory of balance of power. In this sense, Russia's presence in the Middle East is seen as a means of balancing against the United States. Before the Arab world (2011), Russia sought to challenge US interests and policies in the Middle East by actively participating in and resolving its crises and to divert the attention of that country (USA) from Central Asia and the Caucasus, the Baltics, and Eastern Europe, and especially Ukraine to other parts of the world. It should be noted that these areas became the focus of American attention after 9/11 due to the issue of terrorism. In any case, the Syrian crisis (2011) was seen as a continuation of the wave of developments in the Middle East and North Africa region, but the passage of time proved that its nature is different from other countries in the revolution and in fact, it is a kind of civil war. The arrival of trans-regional actors was one of the factors that differentiated Syria from other revolutions. Many powers entered the field and took a position based on their goals and interests. Russia sided with actors such as Iran and China, who all believed in keeping Assad and finding a political solution to end the crisis. Therefore, Moscow seeks to strengthen its relations with governments such as Iran and Syria and put the United States in a negotiable position by moving

closer to America's traditional allies in the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates and restrict its influence in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. Russia's Middle East policy has witnessed changes at every stage of its history, influenced by a specific historical period. Another important point to emphasize in this regard is the confrontation between the US and Russian foreign policy doctrines in the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. In other words, US tactical goals in the region, including control of Afghanistan and by pressure on Pakistan to undermine the growing influence of China and Russia; Control and dominate the energy transmission routes from Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan (with the help and participation of Israel and Europe) to the outside; Encouraging Turkmenistan to join the anti-Russian and anti-Iranian coalition; Creating instability in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan and creating tension zones in Kazakhstan that their realization strengthens the US position in the region through the establishment of military bases and full control over the security institutions and armies in the region and expelling Russia from the region and eventually preparing the ground for a broad anti-Iranian and Russian operations. The same is true of the Middle East: The crisis in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen (axis of resistance) has been done to weaken the position and influence of Iran and Russia and the implementation of large-scale anti-Iranian and anti-Russian operations.

However, the goals of Russia's foreign policy doctrine in the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Caucasus are not only inconsistent with US plans; In some cases, it is the opposite. From the point of view of Russia's political elite, a stable and developing Central Asia that achieves a

peaceful resolution of domestic and regional issues, limiting the intervention of non-regional powers in regional affairs and resolving the problems and crisis in Syria is in line with the consensus of neighboring countries with Russia's foreign policy and the short-term and long-term interests of the Russians. Achieving these vital goals, however, requires close Russian cooperation and strategic partnership with allies such as Iran and Syria. Therefore, since maintaining stability and security in Eurasia and the Middle East is one of Russia's most important concerns, the Syrian crisis and the escalation of these conflicts within the country have jeopardized Russia's interests in these areas. Because the removal of Assad from the presidency of the Syrian government could have created a good opportunity for the Salafi-Wahhabi currents and mainly terrorist groups and While taking the helm in this country, has expanded its influence in the region, and given that Central Asia and the Caucasus have a relatively large Muslim population, it creates a favorable environment for the influence of Salafi-Wahhabi groups. This would certainly lead to Saudi Arabia's presence in the region as the leader of the Salafi-Wahhabi currents and further increased US indirect influence in the Russian-controlled region. In this sense, the Syrian military presence in Syria is inevitable.

Syria, on the other hand, is the only Russian base in the Mediterranean due to the port of Tartus, and Russia would lose the region in the event of any disruption to the Syrian administration and the withdrawal of the Assad government and the arena was opening up for NATO to be present in the Mediterranean. In this way, Russia, with its military presence in Syria, seeks to maximize its interests while at the same time gaining at the lowest cost. If the Western-Arab front advanced in Syria and subsequently in the region, it would put Russia's interests in crisis. But taking Russia's initiative in resolving disputes in the region also paved the way for the country to return to similarly influential conditions as before the collapse of the Soviet Union and in this way, it limited the scope of US activities in the region. For this reason, Russia tried to restore the balance of power in the region by using the least stressful methods. For this reason, Russia tried to restore the balance of power in the region by using the least controversial methods. Overall, in terms of security, Russia sought to separate its policy in the region from that of the United States by establishing balanced and stable relations with all Middle Eastern governments and actors.

According to Russian officials, the only way to secure its southern borders, as well as the Central Asian region and the Caucasus, are a military presence in Syria and the Middle East, fight against terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and use of various mechanisms and tools near countries in the region.

History of Russia's presence in the Middle East

Russia and the nations of the Middle East have long had various economic, cultural, and spiritual ties. These long-standing ties have made Russia one of the key actors in the Middle East, especially in resolving the region's conflicts and challenges. On the other hand, Middle Eastern countries have always had great confidence in Russia and its foreign policy. Russia's mediating position, which seeks to resolve all Middle East issues by the principles of international law, has attracted the attention of political elites in the region. After the Arab Spring in some Arab countries, Russia's foreign policy towards the Middle East also changed. However, the Middle East is important to the Russians for several reasons:

1. **Geographical proximity:** Russia is practically a neighbor of the Middle East through Iran and Turkey. Therefore, geographical proximity and neighborhood are some of the most important reasons that make the Middle East region important for the Russians.
2. **The Common Factor of Muslims:** With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the wall that had been built between Russian Muslims and other Muslims practically collapsed. About one-seventh of Russia's population is now Muslim which is also growing.
3. **Resilient Jews:** About 20 percent of Israel's population is made up of Jews who previously lived in the Soviet Union. Almost all of them can now speak Russian.
4. **Political and security instability in the Islamic world:** The influx of Salafi-Takfirist ideas from the Middle East into the North Caucasus, especially the republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, has always been a concern for the Russians.
5. **Rich energy resources:** Russia sees itself as an energy power and is looking for opportunities on its southern borders.
6. **US military presence:** The Russians have always closely followed US military moves and policies in the region (Middle East). In particular, the US military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan has drawn more Russian

attention to the US military presence in the Middle East.

Given the issues raised, Russia appears to be pursuing the following five principles of diplomacy in the Middle East:

1. Effective presence and a strong focus on bilateral relations with countries in the region;
2. Efforts to diversify and develop relations with rival countries;
3. Establish active relations with opposition forces and currents in addition to maintaining relations with officials;
4. Role-playing as a mediator in conflicts and crises in the region within the framework of UN law and without the exclusive support of one party or the opposition of the other parties involved;
5. Efforts to refrain from confrontational statements and action against countries that oppose Russia on specific global and regional issues.

The above points outline the foundations of Russia's foreign policy in the Middle East and show an understanding of the Russian approach to developments in the region. Accordingly, it seems that Russia will pursue at least three geopolitical, security, and economic approaches simultaneously in the new Middle East. In its geopolitical approach, Russia is trying to form a power bloc in the Middle East. Given that the Russians are pursuing a multipolar world order, it considers Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Egypt important in the Middle East. Accordingly, confronting US unilateralism and achieving an international role as a world power are among the most important geopolitical goals in Russia's foreign policy toward the Middle East. In this regard, on the one hand, the policy of increasing foreign relations with US opposition countries in the region will be pursued and on the other hand, establishing close ties with countries that have always been major US partners is on the agenda.

Russia's interests in the Middle East

Given its geographical location, Moscow is taking steps to build a strong political bloc in the Middle East so that it can play a greater role in the situation of foreign actors in the North Caucasus and Central Asia. Russia's strategy is to establish a multipolar world. For this reason, it has established new relations with the main players in the Middle East, including Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. After the First Middle East War and the US military presence in the two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Russia expressed concern about the US

military presence in those two countries. Thus, they tried to take advantage of the NATO and US military presence in Afghanistan, but still oppose the US military presence in Central Asia. Because they know it as entering their Near Abroad. Indeed, Russia's security interests are linked to its contact with foreign forces that provide extremist groups in the North Caucasus with ideological support and financial support. Thus, relations with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey have been important to the Kremlin from this point of view. Russia's military presence in Syria is also being assessed in this regard.

Historical Background of Russian-Syrian Relations

The history of relations between the Russian Federation and the Syrian Arab Republic dates back to the Soviet era in 1944. In other words, the establishment of diplomatic and bilateral relations began when the League of Nations formally recognized the Syrian Arab Republic as an independent state. (But this was achieved with a slight delay in April 1946 due to the internal problems of Syria, such as several coups). In 1963, the Ba'ath party took control of Syria. After multiple military coups in 1970 in Syria ideological system based on the three principles of socialism, secularism and Arab nationalism led by Hafez al-Assad took power. Hafez al-Assad's rule in Syria coincided with that of Anwar Sadat, who severed Egypt's ties with the Soviet Union and increased its ties with the West. Given the rivalry between the West and East blocs during the Cold War, Hafez al-Assad pursued a multilateral and balanced policy in its relations with the superpowers. After the failure of the unification process of Syria and Egypt (1958) as two important powers in the Arab world, the deployment of troops on Syrian soil became vital for the Soviet Union. As a result, Moscow announced its support for Hafez al-Assad's government at various levels and expanded its military cooperation with the country. The Soviet Union established a naval base at the port of Tartus in 1971 under a military agreement between the two countries. Thus, the port of Tartus became the logistics base of the Soviet navy. Moscow's goal was to become an effective power in the Mediterranean. Therefore, the establishment of a Soviet-Russian military base in Tartus, Syria, is very important and is the only Russian military base in the Mediterranean. In the 1980s, Hafez al-Assad sought to strengthen his position and become a regional power by signing military agreements with the Soviet Union.

From the late 1950s to the 1980s, Syria was Moscow's most important ally (especially in the field of strategic issues) in the Middle East. So that at this time, the Syrian army was always armed with the most modern Russian weapons. That is why Syria is known as Russia's "strategic market" in the Middle East. Because the most modern Russian military weapons are sold in this country. The strategic port of Tartus was also handed over to the Russian military, which confirms the importance of Russia's presence and influence in the country. For this reason, in the years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has based its good relations with Syria on a desire to resolve regional and global issues peacefully. Therefore, the most important axes of this orientation of Russia's foreign policy towards Syria are the following:

1. Moscow participated in the process of normalizing Syrian-Israeli relations, as well as in the process of normalizing Lebanese-Israeli relations.
2. Russia has taken on the role of controller of Syria's military programs.
3. In the context of good relations with Damascus, Moscow played a role in the fight against terrorism (especially after the events of the early years of independence in Chechnya and Dagestan, as well as after the events of September 11, 2001) and tried to resolve any issues related to Chechnya through his military presence in Syria. It must be acknowledged that the security dimension of the relations between the two countries goes back to a distance of about 1600 km from Damascus to Makhachkala in the Republic of Dagestan. Since Russia's security in the Middle East will be affected, the geographical distance has increased Syria's security importance to Russia.

The above-mentioned cases, led to the development of bilateral relations between Russia and Syria, both in the Soviet era was the era of the Russian Federation, So that the political elites and experts on strategic issues of the two sides always talk about good relations with each other. During the Soviet era, Moscow played an important role in regional developments by supporting its allies in the Middle East. Although relations between the Soviet Union and Syria were good and close, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation's relations with Syria deteriorated to a very low level in the early 1990s and basically, the Middle East region has lost its traditional position

and strategic status with the Russians and between 1989 and 1992, about 94 percent of Russia's military deals with Middle Eastern countries, including Iraq, Syria, and Libya, were reduced. Of course, the end of the Cold War was also influential in this process. Despite all these developments, Syria remained the focus of Russian Middle East policy.

Therefore, it is not surprising that these relations continue at the beginning of the Syrian crisis (2011), despite good relations between the two countries, bilateral relations have had their ups and downs due to political, military, and economic factors (including Resolution 1559 on the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon). However, the Syrian crisis has taken relations between the two countries to a new stage. At this time, Russian-Syrian relations entered a new phase, which can be considered a turning point in the history of relations between the two countries. During the Syrian crisis, Moscow sided with the ruling Syrian political system in a position opposed to the West, Turkey, and some Saudi-centric Arab countries and provided all kinds of political, economic, and military support (sending military equipment and providing military advice) to the government of Bashar al-Assad. Accordingly, what constitutes the current axis of Russian-Syrian relations are:

1. Syria's bilateral relations have been assessed in Russia's security strategy as an important strategic partner in the geopolitical and political spheres, which cannot be ignored. For this reason, Moscow, especially since 2004, has increased its security and military cooperation with Syria by Forgiveness of Syrian debts with arms debts from the Soviet era, and has provided important military and security information to Damascus; that can be said, perhaps the most important because it moves the Turkish military on the borders of Syria. In addition to the political dimension, Syria is the largest buyer of Russian weapons in the Arab Middle East and The Syrian Arab army is equipped with the latest Russian missiles and radars (radar forest in this country). Therefore, Russia has strongly opposed imposing a sanction on arms exports to Syria. Because Russian officials believe that the West is handing over weapons to the Syrian opposition and for this reason, their proposal to ban the delivery of any weapons to Syria is by no means sincere from the point of view of the Russian elite.

2. Russia has a military base in Syria (in Tartus) and wants to maintain it. The interests of this country demand that this base be maintained in Syria. The Russian military base at the port of Tartus in northwestern Syria is used as a technical service center for Russian naval vessels based on the Black Sea. The base has been under Soviet control since the 1970s. Although none of the Russian ships were there before the Syrian crisis, Moscow and Damascus once again stressed the strategic importance of the port after the US Navy task force and George W. Bush's nuclear navigator was stationed off the coast of Syria. However, the Russian military has stated that the deployment of a Northern Navy ship to the port of Tartus was planned in 2010 and it has nothing to do with the unrest in Syria or the US military presence near the waters of Damascus. But the fact is that by itself, the presence of Russian naval vessels off the coast of Syria has some form of deterrence. It should not be overlooked that the port of Tartus is the only Russian base in the Mediterranean. Therefore, maintaining this naval base is very important for Moscow. The Tartus base can be described as the most important factor in Russia's military presence in the Syrian crisis.
3. The economic factor, arms sales, and energy security (building of peace or friendship pipeline) are also very important in Russia-Syria bilateral relations. Over several decades of Soviet-Russian relations with Syria, this country (Syria) has become a strategic market for the sale and shipment of Russian weapons, and one of the objectives of Russia in the Middle East is finding strategic markets for arms sales, has achieved.
4. There is an analysis among some Russian elites that Moscow has acted in a compromising manner by abstaining from voting on a resolution passed by the anti-Libyan West in the UN Security Council. Because such a thing was considered by the West as a license to intervene militarily in Libya, and thus Russia lost one of its allies, which was also important for Russia in terms of investment. Even though the resolution only provided for the establishment of a no-fly zone over the territory of this country (Libya) to protect the civilian population, nevertheless, the resolution became a pretext for launching a NATO war in North Africa. Thus, the events in Libya showed that resolutions could be abused. That is why Russia wants to prevent any similar action against Syria.

On this basis, it can be said that Russia is not only defending an Arab country but also supporting its main ally in the Middle East to secure its interests. In other words, it can be said that the Russian officials, through their positions in Syria, pursued goals at the level of the international system, including the increasing presence in West Asia and the confrontation with US unilateralism in the region.

Reasons for Russia's Military Presence in Syria from a Geopolitical Perspective

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the debate over Russia's national interests, methods, and means of securing it came from a range of perspectives: on one side were the Westernists, many of whom believed that Russia's future undoubtedly depended on cooperation with the United States and Western Europe and Russia's foreign policy should take especially with these countries strategic partnerships. On the other hand, was the Eurasianists, that given Russia's geopolitical characteristics, emphasized the need to pay more attention to its special interests, and thus considered a link with Russia's periphery and former members of the Eastern Bloc. The geographical proximity between the Middle East region and the borders of Russia has led the country to consider its security depends on the security of this region. This means that any disruption to peace and stability in the region could jeopardize Russia's security and plunge it into devastating conflicts, regardless of economic losses (Cohen, 2007). Also, in terms of security, Russia is concerned about the sources of fundamentalism in the Middle East, some of that is also fueled by Russia's internal extremists in the North Caucasus. Russia's concerns about extremist Islamists go back to the Soviets' struggle against the Afghan Mujahideen in 1979-1989, in which the Soviet Union engaged in a full-blown war in Afghanistan. The Mujahideen were financially supported by Washington, Riyadh, and Islamabad. The Afghan Mujahideen were equipped with a variety of American weapons in these conflicts (Joe, 2012). Therefore, the crisis and insecurity in some countries in the Middle East and its environs have always had a significant impact on the situation in the North Caucasus countries that are somehow under Russian influence. Thus, Russia is trying to prevent the escalation of crisis and insecurity in Middle Eastern countries, including Syria; because its first effect on Russia is to create insecurity in the North Caucasus countries, followed by problems for Moscow. In such a

situation, some analysts believe that Russia's concern over the deterioration of the situation in Syria is geostrategic.

Looking at the Middle East in Russian Foreign Policy

The Russians see their country as a great power. Dissatisfaction with their country's position forced Moscow to seek the role of great power to convince the West that it could play an equal role in the international arena (Kolaei, 1996). The Russians believe that their interests have not been served in the past; thus, presence in different regions was on the agenda, and after nearly a decade of forgetting the Middle East and North Africa, it sought to regain its past credibility as a vital force in the region (Lo, 2002). Russia's return to the Middle East happened in the very early years after the collapse. More precisely, when Primakov was introduced as Yeltsin's foreign minister in the 1990s, Russia's return to the Middle East began. Because the global facts show that the very optimistic view of Westernists in Russia does not work very well; because these ideas did not get a good enough response. In particular, domestic issues also strengthened the attitude of the Eurasianists in this country. Issues based on attention to Russian identity, Russia's geopolitics, and its specific characteristics that separate Russia's interests from the West. So the Russians returned to the Middle East very quickly. The Russians are looking for various interests in the Middle East that are directly related to the geopolitical features of this country (Kolaei, 2015). The coming to power of Yevgeny Primakov, who specializes in Arab countries; at the head of the diplomatic apparatus of this country, it shows the importance of these regions for Russia (Kolaei, 1996). The highlight of Russia's foreign policy toward the Middle East and, consequently, Syria's return to the beginning of the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa. In the wake of all the ups and downs in Russia's relations with the West, the Russians have acknowledged that they must use their geopolitical capacity to restrain the United States to their advantage. Therefore, we see the continuation of Russia's policy in the Middle East. Based on this, the Russians concluded that their foreign policy should focus on the surrounding geographical area. In this regard, the port of Tartus in Syria, in particular, is very important for the Russian navy. Tartus is the only Russian base in the Mediterranean that has access to international waters and this end, it has significant importance for Russia. Therefore, the Russians concluded that they should emphasize

the military presence in Syria. Therefore, the Russians concluded that they should emphasize the military presence in Syria. In particular, part of the power of the military industry, which is very important to focus on in Russia's foreign policy towards Syria, and the Russians have worked hard to maintain it. Russia's Middle East policy should be evaluated in light of its foreign policy developments. In this regard, it seems we are witnessing a new form of Cold War in the Middle East. It is clear that Middle Eastern politicians, like Russian politicians, still view the Cold War as a US-Russian relationship. Syria has a special place in this, and Russia's return to the Middle East policy is interpreted in the same way.

CONCLUSION

Russia turned its attention to international affairs after the end of its internal crises. In the meantime, the Middle East and, consequently, Syria, which is geographically located between Europe and East Asia, came to Russia's attention again. Meanwhile, with the idea of a multipolar world, the Red Army withdrew from the region before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. But with the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow's military contracts and economic cooperation in the Middle East returned to the attention of Russia's political elite and in the new era, he rebuilt his relations with Syria. In this article, we intend to examine the geopolitics of Russia and answer the question: what factors have led to the Russian military presence in Syria? Factors directly related to the country's geopolitical characteristics, such as attention to Russian identity, Russia's inefficiency in resolving the Central Asian crisis, and Russia's turn to the Middle East, play an important role. The expansion of economic relations with the Middle East countries, especially in the field of energy and arms exports, plays an important role in Russia's economic approach to the Middle East. In this regard, Russia intends to use the reduction of US influence among the countries of the world and increase its economic power and play a key role in the sensitive sectors of the Middle East economy. Crisis and insecurity in some countries in the Middle East and its environs have always had a significant impact on the situation in the Russian-influenced countries of the North Caucasus. Thus, Russia is trying to prevent the rise of insecurity in Middle Eastern countries, including Syria; because its first effect on Russia is to create insecurity in the North Caucasus countries, followed by problems for Moscow. On this basis, it can be said that Russia is not only defending an Arab country

but also supporting its main ally in the Middle East to secure its interests. In other words, it can be said that the Russian officials, through their positions in Syria, pursued goals at the level of the international system, including the increasing presence in West Asia and the confrontation with US unilateralism in the region and Syria has a special place in this, and Syria has a special place in this, and Russia's military presence in the Syrian crisis is interpreted in the same way.

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