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THE RE-EVALUATION OF RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC PRESENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on Moscow's activity in the Middle East. The main aim is to study that after the re-emergence of Russia it has sent a message that it is a power to be recognized in the region. It also studies on the growing competition the west will face from Russia other than China in that area politically and economically. It concludes on the Russia confidence of its success in the Middle Eastern strategy based on the principle of balancing between the different regional players.

Keywords: Russia, Syria, United States, Middle East Politics, the New Troika

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Moscow has increased its activities in the Middle East as a shock to many, especially with its decision in Syria to strike. Kremlin has used its air and missile operations as the main strategy carried out with sophisticated weaponry. This strategy demonstrated that Russia is a modern military superpower with a global reach when it decided to launch a large-scale operation outside Russia's backyard. Despite of its inflexibility in this decision, Kremlin also forecasted and feared that this decision can bring further political crises in Yemen, Lebanon, Libya, and Iraq. The increase in the tension in the Saudi-Iran relations also makes Kremlin's fear much more realizable. However, Kremlin will continue to promote this grand vision in the Middle East to make this region coherently secured, as it will generate a model for Russia to cope with the challenges from Central Asia and the Caucasus. Promoting this vision with the current conflict patterns is much harder alone. Russian operation in Syria is much related to its struggle to impact shaping the world order, beyond its regional goals (Suchkov, 2016). This paper examines the elements of Russian strategy.

Russian strategy in the Middle East has involved several elements especially after the downfall of Gaddafi in Libya. While blocking all decisions of Western and Arab powers against Assad regime at the UN Security Council, Putin has indicated that Russia would be an important player in the region that must be taken into consideration. For example, Russia continuously rejected to establish a no-fly zone against Assad regime in Syria, and by this way, it prevented a similar case to happen to the downfall of Gaddafi after imposition of the no-fly zone in Libya. Despite this kind of confrontations with the Western powers and their regional allies, Russia has also sought ways to be perceived in a cooperation with them. For instance, Kremlin has been cooperating with the US and European authorities to prevent weapons of mass destruction and chemical weapons in Iran. Therefore, Russia followed a very careful strategy between playing as an important player and keeping in the game as a player.

Beyond this careful strategy at the global level, it has also a very smart strategy for regional powers in the Middle East. The main aim of Russia has been to break the relations between Western powers and their regional allies. Attempting to isolate Saudi Arabia and its Gulf and other Arab allies from the West has been Moscow's regional strategy in particular by trying to raise Western fears that they actually support Wahabi militant forces (M. Katz, 2015). Additionally, Russia also has implied a strategy to make the regional powers ineffective



in the regional politics. For example, Russia has supplied heavy arms to the regime in Damascus to save it from a complete collapse. Besides this strategy to support Assad regime, it has also collaborated with other regional actors opposing the possible downfall of Assad regime. These actors has been fearing a replacement of Assad regime by a regional actor like the Shia-dominated government in Iraq.

Indeed, Russia has tried to return to the Middle East since the disintegration of the Soviet Union (SCCB). The unfinished quest of Russian identity consisting of Slavic, Muslim, Asian and European nations has guided its foreign policy; and therefore, there has been no change in Russian foreign policy. The interaction between the two spaces and the ideological ambitions is the heritage of Russia from the Tsarist, Soviet and post-Soviet periods. To fully understand the weight of the heritage of Soviet orientalism today, researchers need to seek the reflections of Russian political elites on Russian foreign policy through the prism of Muslim civilization.

Russia has tried to build bridges with the Muslim world due to its intention to play a defining role in the Middle East. However, especially the militant threat of Chechnya and Dagestan on the Russian territorial integrity. In addition, the memory of the war against mujahideen in Afghanistan in 1988s has increased the concerns on improving relations with the Muslim world in the Middle East. Similar to its discourse of 'fighting against terrorism' in Central Asia, Russia has also perceived and declared any destabilizer event in the Middle East as terrorism. This 'terrorist' declaration becomes a rapprochement in discourse between Western powers and Russia although they declared the opposite actors to each other as terrorist. On the other hand, the rapprochement in discourse may be an alternative diplomatic vision to those of the western diplomatic circles.

Beyond these strategies of Russia, the Middle East has experienced many significant events in the last decade. For instance, the US has left its hidden guarantor role in the Middle East political order. Russia has militarily invaded into the Syrian war and this invasion was a dramatic demonstration of how the strategic game in the Middle East has been different from pre-Arab Spring period. While considering the retreatment strategy of the US and the aggressive strategy of Russia together, return to the hegemonic position in the Middle East will be very difficult for any US government in the near future. Even though the US has voluntarily withdrawn from the Middle East (Sputnik, 2016), the Russian increasing influence makes Russia for Middle Eastern



countries a potentially ally with which easier to align. Therefore, the US and NATO are confronting a danger that regional countries can ignore an alliance with them because alliance with Russia is, too, benefittable. As a result, the strategic presence of Russia to support status quo in the Middle East and the appropriateness of regional politics to invasions of foreign powers makes the relationship with Russia more transactional for Middle East countries.

ENERGY GAMES

The Middle East has been the center of a rivalry between great world powers since World War I which ended with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. These powers aim to develop relations with regional states after the discovery of substantial energy reserves, particularly in oil. The region emerged as an important source of energy globally since the 1930s and the key to the stability of the world's economy. According to BP's Energy Outlook for 2035, the Middle East remains the world's largest oil-producing region; with 810 billion barrels in proven reserves - almost 50 percent of the world's total. Its share of global supply is expected to fall from 32 to 28 percent over the next few years, but return to 32 percent by 2035.

Although the Western media persists in warning of apocalyptic consequences of probable nuclear conflict between Iran and Israel, a probable conflict with Russia about its long-term plans on Israeli-Cypriot gas and oil reserves in the East-Mediterranean can have very similar results. The support of the public in its traditional partners in the Middle East can represent a tectonic plates in the regional politics. This public support also seems like strengthening Russian support to its regional partners for both Iran and Syria.

In the Middle East, Putin's strategy involving a multitude of planning and already competing for pipelines is too complex. Gazprom and Rosneft which are the Russian gas and oil giants respectively, are the main actors of the Russian expansionary strategy in the Middle East. Syria and Turkey has much more significance for Gazprom's and Rosneft's activities in the energy sector because they are on the transportation ways from the Middle East to Europe and from the Caucasus to the Middle East.

While Russian economy is ailing, the economic alliance especially with this two important actors can help Russia boost its economy. Additionally, low oil prices and the sanctions of the Western countries to Russian goods and services makes these alliances with Turkey and Syria much more significant. If Russia continues to resist to invading Crimea and to support the militants in



Eastern Ukraine, it needs to maintain the economic stability despite the increasing sanctions from the West. Therefore, the support of Turkey and Syria are very important for Russia. On the other hand, the Russian increasing military presence in the Middle East doesn't have only a political dimension to make Western powers accepting itself as a global power. Economically, the military presence promotes the Russian effort for maintaining its economic stability because the Russian military presence made the world oil market more secured and caused a small rally in oil prices based on the speculation of shortages in different regions of the world.

Russia's presence in the Middle East makes sense even from customer perspective. For customers, Russia is the competitor to Middle Eastern oil suppliers, especially Saudi Arabia. A war in the Middle East in which Saudi Arabia is one of the parties makes Saudi oil supplies less reliable and more risky. Additionally, by its new airbase in Syria, Russia can coordinate with Iran to disrupt the shipments from the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea terminals. Consequentially, through its military presence strategy, Russia can make its own supplies more reliable, as well as it can speculate the oil supplies of its competitors, especially Saudi Arabia. Therefore, for economic stability of Russia, the Middle East seems like protecting its significance in the Russian foreign policy.

Gazprom and the Russian state generally expand their ties with countries of the region for Russia's benefits and with this in mind; they want a presence in the Mediterranean for its strategic and geopolitical importance. If Gazprom was successful in obtaining a stake in the Leviathan Field, Russia would not only have been a part of the Mediterranean energy game but its influence would also have expanded in the Middle East. Russia's support for the Assad regime in Syria and its military intervention with Daesh are also part of the Kremlin's strategic policy in their projections for the future of the Middle East and the Mediterranean region.

Russia holds the world's largest proven reserves of natural gas, most of which wait to be explored and continuously is the alternative to Saudi Arabia to be the top oil producer (Goodrich & Lanthemann, 2013). Russia supplies a third of the total oil and gas demand of Europe and also starts to export much more the East Asian markets. The domination of oil and gas sector in the Russian economy makes the energy resources more than an object of commercial policy. Nearly, half of the Russian government's budget consists of energy revenues and the maintenance of this capital flow from energy resources is very



instrumental for new investments in military industry. Despite the possible vulnerability because of the increasing dependence of Russian economy on energy revenues, energy resources and energy economy are on the core of Russia's national security, of regime stabilization, and also of turning to the world politics as a great power (Goodrich & Lanthemann, 2013).

To enter into and shape the Middle East politics, Russia uses its energy card to obtain the advantages of energy exporting cooperation and aims to have closer contacts with major oil-producing countries with further penetration into the Middle East. In the Arab-Israeli conflict, Russia had actively made contacts with Hamas and greatly enhanced its political influence in the Middle East, in contrast to the classical pro-Israeli policy of the United States.

SOVIET POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

In the mid-1970s, Soviet foreign policy suffered several setbacks towards the Middle East. The Arab-Israeli wars and conflictual situations were the main reason of those setbacks. For instance, President Anwar Sadat expelled most Soviet military advisers from Egypt in 1972 and abrogated his treaty of friendship and cooperation with Moscow in 1976. The Arabs widely blamed insufficient Soviet support as a hurdle for the Egyptian army's further movement towards Tel Aviv after Egypt's complete victory against Israel in the October 1973, war.

The conclusion is that Moscow didn't have any influence on Israel's policies and that no countries than the US couldn't steer Israel to follow a counter-policy to its existing policies. Therefore, many Arab governments including Syria cooperated with the US to seek a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. In 1970s, Moscow was on the diplomatic sidelines because of the domination of the US. Additionally, the Shah of Iran has got closer alliance with the US and this was a big advantage for the US. Additionally to Iran, all conservative Arab monarchies Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates except for Kuwait were also firmly linked with the West; they all refused even to exchange embassies with Moscow. The only allies of Soviet Union were Iraq and South Yemen. However, considering the ineffectiveness of South Yemen in the regional politics and of Iraqi Communist Party in Iraqi domestic politics, Soviet Union didn't find effective rooms of manoeuvre in the regional politics against its competitor at the global level, the US (Yodfat & Yodfat, 1983).

This story seemed like broken in 1978-79 when Soviet Union appeared to gain



influence in the Gulf and the Middle East in consequence of the Camp David Accord between Egypt and Israel. This Accord alienated almost all Arab governments since it didn't make any provision for the recognition of an independent Palestinian state in the international arena. However, Israel gained many room of manevour against those Arab governments. The Camp David Accords caused many Arab governments to break their ties with Egypt and to criticize the sponsorship of the US for their development because they felt Israel's domination over the Palestinian issue. Additionally, this domination meant the absolute defeat of those Arab governments even on the table, after the Six-Day Wars. The Camp David Accords dramatically started the rapprochement process between many Arab governments including anti-Communist Saudi Arabia and the Soviet Union. While adding the Iranian revolution leaded by rising Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1979 with the anti-American discourse, the story in the Middle East seemed to reverse in terms of the balances between the US and Soviet Union in regional politics of the Middle East. As a result, Moscow hoped to ally with Tehran and all other Arab governments on the basis of a common anti-American foreign policy (M. N. Katz, 1986).

This reverse in the regional politics steered the Soviet Union to switch its position in the Arab-Israeli conflict. At first, in 1950s, it tried to maintain a friendship policy with Israel. For instance, it abstained from and allowed the passage of Security Council Resolution 95 in 1951. That Resolution chastised Nasser's Egypt because of its prevention Israeli ships from using Suez Canal. Soviet Union was the first state presenting its credentials to the incumbent President of Israel in Jerusalem in December 1953. In that credential, Soviets declared their goodwill for Israel's intention to use Jerusalem as its capital. This move was followed by other communist states and Israel gained a room of manevour in international politics in those days, too. Arab states strongly protested the Soviets pro-Israeli move in 1950s (Khoury, 1986).

However, in response to the Israeli preference for the alliance of the US rather than the Soviets, the government of the Soviet Union has extremely reversed its position in the Arab-Israeli conflict. For instance in January 1954, Soviet Union vetoed another Security Council resolution relating to the Syrian-Israeli water dispute in favor of Israeli arguments, in contrast to the friendship policy at first. Also many other resolutions recognizing Israeli rights could not pass because of the Soviet veto policy as complained by Israeli governments. Moreover, the Israeli demand for direct negotiations with the Arab states didn't receive support from the Soviets, to which Arab states also opposed. In addition, Soviet Union followed and encouraged its satellite states to follow the



discourse that Zionism was a tool used by the Jews and Americans for racist imperialism. Moreover, the meaning of the term Zionism was defined by the ruling Communist Party of the Soviet Union. That definition was that modern Zionism were the militant chauvinism, racism, anti-communism, and anti-Sovietism (Prokhorov, 1973). In accordance to this policy, a major support from the Soviet Union to the Arab states was also the deal between the Armies of Czech Republic and Egypt in August 1955. By this agreement, the Soviet Union supported Arab regimes over Israel after the mid-1950s and during the Cold War.

Like in the Israeli case, requirements of the superpower competition with the US principally influenced the Soviet policies towards the Middle East until the end of the Brezhnev government. The relations with Syria, South Yemen, Sadat's Egypt and Khomeini's Iran has many similar-dramatic changes in the alliance with Soviet Union (Golan, 1991). However, the USSR's local goals, strategies, tactics and ideological dictates used to achieve a greater regional involvement were frequently reviewed. These revisions unavoidably resulted in the reduction of Soviet and Communist influence over the Middle East (Becker & Horelick, 1970). Another important reason of the reduction in Soviet's influence was the low interest and involvement of the Communist movement resourced by the weakness of the Communist movement in its projections for development and expansion. Additionally, the directions of its foreign policy course to the Middle East generated the weaknesses of the Communist movement. The prominent aspect of Soviet foreign policy was the dualism of advocating a worldwide revolution and assuring its own national security. On the other hand, the justification for Soviet involvement in the Middle East was based on the notion of the proximity of this area to the Soviet homeland. However after the Second World War, the Middle East was primarily Western and increasingly an American sphere of influence when the Soviet Union decided to tackle the Middle East.

In conclusion, the main resource of the Soviet power in the Middle East was its military support to Syria and Nasser's Egypt even though this close relationship between Soviets and Arab regimes wasn't comparable to the alliance between the US and Israel. In his memoirs, Nixon underlined that the Soviets were seeking achieve its long-desired classical aim to access land, oil, power, and the warm waters of the Mediterranean rather than ideological conversions. Therefore, Soviets were perceived as aiming to increase and to expand their presence in the Middle East, rather than for expanding and promoting communism.



PUTIN AND THE MIDDLE EAST

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the significance of the Middle East didn't decrease in the Russian foreign policy. Russia's interests naturally steered itself to stand its superpower position in a region despite its given limitations resourced by the Soviet collapse. The Middle East has usually very appropriate characteristics to maintain superpower position after the collapse of Ottoman Empire (Berman, 2001). In the late Yeltsin era in which the Russian identity and its new role had its roots but Putin has subtly deflated the balloon of US. The main power of Putin in the region has been its cleverly manipulations to the developments in the region including Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Lebanon, Iraq, Syrian conflict and other regional issues. Three decades ago, Russia was a very different place, and the Middle East was not a top priority. However, the turning point in the Russian Middle East policy was the Putin's turn to full control in 2005 and 2006. After Putin obtained the full control over Russian state mechanism, Putin has many achievements in its Middle East relation. Nevertheless, the extent of the success of Putin government for long-term economic and strategic interests in the Middle East can only be seen by the time (Nizameddin, 2013).

As an example for those manipulations, Russia's support to Kurds in terms of western perceptions aims to divide Europe and NATO. As Turkey downed a Russian jet in 2015, Russia retaliated by amassing its forces on the Turkish border to secure a base in the Syrian Kurdish region. The armed forces of Turkey and Russia were engaged in fighting just a few kilometers away from each other. As a result, the clash could either unwillingly drag into a war or result in a complete lost of Putin's all credibility for establishing a common defense pact. As a response to a possible Turkish-US alliance against Asad regime, Moscow has led the autonomous Kurdish regional governance in Syria to launch the first overseas representative. The Russian support to the Kurdish campaign has also meant its support to the Kurdish claim to be never a part of the Turkish, Iranian or Syrian administration.

The emergence of the Russia–Iran–Iraq–Syria alliance is of deeper concern that may challenge every component of U.S. policy in the region. Such an alignment could have destabilizing impacts far beyond the borders of Syria and may have far more important consequences than simply bringing more actors into the war against DAESH. The intelligence sharing between Russia, Iran and Iraq seems to have reached to the extent to which US policymakers dismay much more. Moreover, the Iraqi government has welcomed the Russian



support and some Iraqi politicians are calling more Russian military support which will undercut the importance of US military support. Therefore, the US diplomats and military leaders in Baghdad now must compete not only with Tehran in dealing with the Iraqi government, but also with Moscow, as well. Through the military and diplomatic offensive strategies, Russia is launching its major long-term power broker as a rival to the US' long-standing role in the Middle East. The substitution is resourced by the zero-sum game in the Middle East power balances.

Putin's consistency in his approach to the Syrian conflict and Moscow's unexpected success in holding its own against Washington led to the perception in Moscow of growing respect from leaderships in the Arab World. Moscow needs to deal with the leaders in the countries with counter-Russian reflexes in their foreign policy attitudes. Some countries in the Middle East has started to consult with Russia about regional issues, to lobby for Russian support, and to return to the Russian military market. Fortunately, for Putin, he has also benefited from the West's mistakes and intervention fatigue.

THE TURKEY-RUSSIA-IRAN TROIKA AND THE KREMLIN'S INTEREST

Tehran has been expanding its areas of influence in the Middle East, including the geography from Baghdad to Beirut. The problem within the Sunni population in the Middle East can be the main course of this expansion in the Iranian areas of influence despite its sectarian policies and discourses. For instance any sort of political solution to the problems within the Sunni majority in Syria would officially end the rule of the minor dominant Shiite communities. On the other hand, Russia is focusing far beyond the stability of Assad's government. Russia's main focus is to reduce the influence of European as well as NATO forces in the region in order to gain the full control on the ground.

Turkey is the non-Arab party in this strategic game and it unavoidably is dragged into this conflict. The Russian support to YPG and PYD in the North Syria against DAESH can be called the starting point of Turkish involvement in the Syrian civil war. By this support in addition to the US and Europeans', YGP and PYD have success against DAESH in the North Syria although Turkey often referred them as the extension of Kurdistan Workers Party, PKK, which has been also internationally recognized as a terrorist organization. Turkey's response to the Western and Russian support can be thought of as insufficient



because the first priority of all powers in the region is to fight against DAESH for the protection of regional stability. Therefore, Turkey seemed to be torn between its national security and launching a humanitarian environment in Syria. On the other hand, the Moscow declaration has been in association with the Turkey's efforts to shape the Syrian issue appropriate to the harmony of Turkey's national security concerns and humanitarian aid to refugees.

The reason may be that any start to negotiate for a peace process between Assad regime and its opposition might mean declaring the end of the Assad regime, and indirectly any harm to the Russian strategic presence in the Middle East. The Astana talks hoped to lead further peace negotiations between Assad's regime and military opposition forces, but the current talks will definitely pursue a long-awaited resolution of the conflict. Beyond the requirement of including regional players in the Astana dialogue, it would be really hard that the Troika halts the bloodshed in another part of Syria in the current status of the conflict without the assistance of international players (Shahbazov, 2017).

In the Russian Black Sea resort of Sochi, these three countries agreed to shift their focus to a political settlement as DAESH is expelled from Syria by Damascus troops supported by Russian army. The leaders of Russia, Iran, and Turkey have tried to establish an intra-Syrian dialogue environment among all segments of Syrian society by calling representatives of the Syrian government and the opposition to participate in the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi. The agreements between Russia, Turkey, and Iran are proof of the fact that they have taken the initiative to solve Syria's crisis and will not give it up. The situation is still sensitive as everything depends on the political will of not only Russia, Iran, and Turkey but also other countries that have an impact. However, the participation of Iran and Turkey in the peace process has largely deprived the United States of maneuvering space in Syria (Jiavao, 2017).

The UN and the international community, unfortunately, did not succeed to end the Syrian war and stopping the refugee crisis. After Sochi agreements, new hope for cooperation has raised. However, the international community and the United Nations, too, assumed effective responsibility in the struggle against terrorism and the crisis management. On the other hand, Russia with its political and military power seems to avoid the risk of arrogant behavior, which can endanger the peace process success (Caşın, 2017). The violent conflict seems to move towards a possible stalemate over the future of the country especially after Washington has lost its ground to Moscow. Although Assad has a strong support from Putin, many analysts believe that this support is



not unconditioned. The most important concern for Russia is the control and security of its bases in the Mediterranean rather than the sustainability of Assad regime. The naval facility in Tartus is the example of Russia's important bases. In that sense, Moscow may only have been interested in using its intervention in Syria as a way to try to position itself as a great power.

Indeed, the relative smaller importance of the Middle East for Russian economy proves that Russia's interests are not economically-driven. For instance, the Gulf States have the financial strength unlike Moscow's traditional partners, Egypt and Syria to make the high-cost investments that Russia's domestic economy craves. Russia's sovereign wealth fund, the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), has entered into co-investment deals with the sovereign wealth funds of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE to make equity investments in the Russian economy. These investments stretch across a variety of commercial enterprises, agriculture, and infrastructure (RDIF, 2013). On the other hand, the economic activities of Russia in the Middle East isn't only related to monetary gain. The economic opportunity provided to Russia in regional relations generates the financial support to political activities of Russia.

CONCLUSION

Moscow has been surprised by the resurgence of its influence in the Middle East as much as any other capital. Russia is now in a stronger position with national leaderships across the Middle East than it was in 2011. Even the Ukrainian crisis and its diminish in the Wahabi Arab public opinion couldn't end Russian resurgence in the Middle East. Therefore, the US has to take Russia's interests into account in its relations in the Middle East. On the other hand, Russia has much to do in relation to its domestic politics while achieving its areas of influence in the region. The recent engagement between Moscow and Riyadh about Hamas and Hezbollah, for instance, aims to convince regional actors to refrain from expressing solidarity with Chechen rebellion. As being the only major power independent from the Middle Eastern oil and gas, it has very important advantage to establish economic relations and political alliances beyond the energy sector. For this purpose, Russia must focus on those countries confronting Western economic sanctions like Turkey because of its competitive advantage in its exports compared to Western countries. Last to the economic relations, Russia is interested in the Middle Eastern energy sector due to very different reasons from China, the US, or the EU. As a major player in the international energy market, Russia has an interest in keeping



the prices high while deterring key energy-producing countries from jeopardizing its market share in Europe.

The Soviet Union became strongly involved in the Middle East region after the ending of the Second World War. Before the Mid-1950s, the Arab world was never a high-priority region for the Soviet Union's foreign policy and the actual penetration to the Middle East region dates from the period of Khrushchev. Noted by Trenin that the strategic borders along the southern perimeter during the Soviet era were not precise. Indeed, most Soviet leaders, including Brezhnev and Kosygin, showed no or small interest in that region, and only a minority favored the extension of the socialist community toward the Middle East.

Russia's deployment of forces to Syria marked a new chapter in Moscow's involvement in the Middle East and raised profound concerns about Russian strategy which can be called repercussions for broader regional security. It is exactly about Kremlin's Middle East policy under Vladimir Putin and that it resulted in the dispatch of Russian military power to Syria. On the other hand, Russian presence in the Middle East has different meanings and results for the US and its allies in the region. The ultimate goal of Russia is to return to the Middle East as a super-power. As explained, Russia had to do much more like intelligence-sharing deal with Syria, Iran and Iraq against DAESH. Despite its lack of assets for intelligence-sharing in the region, the symbolism of Russia's partnership with Iraq is very noteworthy while Iraq has been under US invasion.

Moscow emphasizes the short-term nature of its intervention, yet Russia should remember that going in is the easy part. In a costly foreign adventure that Moscow could risk at a time when the Russian economy looks increasingly vulnerable. The missing point is the fallibility about the results of the Syrian strategy to engage the US in a dialogue on equality base; and by this way Russia can make US admitted its interlocutor position for global security. The USA-led coalition collapsed because of the prevention by the troika of Russia-Turkey-Iran. This new balance of power potentially makes the historical partnership between Russia and the Middle Eastern countries stronger.

The Syrian society has the self-determination rights to shape the future of their country. However, the humanitarian aid, reconstructing the country, normalization process in the domestic politics are the concerns connected to the applicability of the self-determination rights. After the peace talks and the



dislodgement of DAESH from the country, some experts say that the power dynamics are being solidified and that the war proxies are taking potential steps to resolve the civil war. It is worth noting that three of these deals were announced after Western sanctions on Russia were enacted in 2014. Although these sovereign wealth funds did not violate sanctions as secondary sanctions have not been implemented with Kuwait increasing its pre-existing investment with RDIF in 2015. The Gulf states like many Middle Eastern countries have not been happy with constraints by Western sanctions against Russia. Its investments in the Middle East are the part of its economic policy in the Moscow's efforts to build a sanction-proof economy, besides regional trade activity.

In Sochi, the troika gained the victory in the Syrian crisis thanks to the military and political stability. The statements by Trump and Putin were also an important step to end the war and to pass to the political solution. The Sochi Summit has been a precedent international platform to target the consolidation for a common purpose in the Middle East and Eurasia. There is no consensus about the best approach for the West with regard to Russia in the Middle East. The interrelation between Russian diplomacy in the region and its West confrontation leaves no illusions for the dynamics of Russia in the Middle East. In response to any anti-Russian policies of the West anywhere in the world, Russia will not hesitate to take its advantages in any situation, elsewhere in the world.

In conclusion, the Western policymakers must keep in mind that currently, Russia is confident of its success in the Middle Eastern strategy based on the principle of balancing between the different regional players. Rapprochement with Iran, success in Syria, the strengthening of ties with Egypt, and the development of dialogue with Israel and the GCC further cement its self-assurance. The influence of Russia's approaches towards the Middle East consequently will be challenging.

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