

Background

What is Russia's role in Syria?

Ali Sarikaya

Russia has been giving military and financial support for al-Assad regime since al-Assad family has seized power. Syria has been still taking very important place in Russian Middle East policy. Russian and Syrian common interested relations extended back a long time. The al-Assad regime has importance not only for Russia in Middle East but also it has very importance for Iran. That mutual politics interested made Russia, Iran and al-Assad regime ally with each other in Middle East against the USA's Middle East policy. Since the protests against al-Assad break out, particularly Russia and Iran explicitly stood up with Bashar al-Assad against protesters. Russia does have extensive economic interests in the Middle East, and especially in Syria. The most important spheres are sales of military equipment and energy. The Middle East is the second largest market for Russian arms exports, exceeded only by South and Southeast Asia. Prior to the Arab Spring, Algeria, Syria, and Libya regularly featured in lists of top five customers for Russian military equipment, while Yemen, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Morocco have also signed contracts for Russian arms in recent years. The total value of unfulfilled arms contracts with Syria is estimated at \$4 billion. (Gorenburg, 2012, p.2)

Russia is one of the most oil and gas producer countries in the world. Recently Russia started using the oil and gas as a trump card against EU. Ukraine has very importance geographically between Russia and EU. In addition that Ukrainian government began to establish closer diplomatic relations with EU. Ukrainian government political stance to EU made very angry

Russia. Prime Minister Yatsenyuk maintained that Ukraine's main goal was to adopt European standards, with the ultimate objective of EU membership for Ukraine. He consistently reiterated that a key focus of his government would be to fight corruption, including by reducing government regulation and the size of the bureaucracy along with minimising the influence of certain elements of Ukraine's society. He stated that the government would cut the number of taxes it collects and devolve more budgetary power to local authorities. (Morelli, 2016, p.3)

Especially Russia sells oil and gas through Ukraine for EU and Western countries. Besides that Ukraine is Oil and Gas producer country as well even if not much Russia. Although the Ukrainian-Russian contract ending the January gas war puts energy relations between those two countries on a stronger basis than in the past, the contract still contains vulnerabilities that could lead to a breakdown. Ukraine already is in technical default as it has failed to buy the minimum amounts of gas that it had contracted to buy. (Pifer, 2009, p.7) Despite fact that Russia continues to dominate politically and economically on Ukraine, Russia incurred loss of economic and political relations with EU. Because of wrong and aggressive Ukrainian policy, Russia diplomatically relations with EU went from bad to worse. After the collapse of Russian Ukraine policy, Russia had to protect and maintain its Middle East interests. At this point Russia went towards to protect its own interest on Syria.

The Middle East is the only area where Russia can try to prove that it is not just a regional post-Soviet power with a revisionist agenda, but a global actor able to make a difference in managing crucial conflicts. A key reference point for President Vladimir Putin in this regard is the success of his September 2013 initiative to dismantle the Syrian chemical arsenal and prevent US missile strikes against government targets. Syria has also become a central battleground in the ideological struggle against the threat of revolutions, which Putin elucidated in his address to the UN General Assembly on September 28th 2015. (Baev, 2015, p.1) In this respect Syria became much more significant for Russia. At the beginning of Syrian civil riot against the al-Assad regime, Russia upheld the al-Assad regime. Because Russia has maritime power in Latakia port. Even if Syria is very important country for Russia, Russia would not interfere economically and politically in Syria. Opponents against al-Assad gained quote strength, especially they were supported by Turkey. On the other hand, Sunni Muslims and other Islamic groups were fighting against al-Assad as well. Progressively Syrian Government started to lose it power against Opponents. Additionally Turkey was

carrying out completely different and anti-Russian policy in Russia. In other words Russian policy in Syria was about to collapse.

Political vacuum expanded increasingly in Syria. Political vacuum environment for the new political and military power in Syria. By January 2014, open fighting had broken out between the forces of Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN), al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, and those of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), al-Qaeda's former affiliate in Iraq. ISIL is also called the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), or Daesh (its acronym in Arabic, in which Syria is referred to as "al-Sham" – simply, "the North"). This group, which had already demonstrated that it was clearly a rising star in the jihadist firmament and a growing power on the field in Syria, defied al-Qaeda's leadership; brutally killed Sunnis who refused to bow to its interpretation of Islam, innocent Shias whom it viewed as apostate, and any non-Muslims who rejected its version of Sharia law; and carried out indiscriminate bombings in Iraq that resulted in thousands of deaths. As its acronym indicates, ISIL intended to dominate the region and impose its self-proclaimed caliphate over the territories of Iraq and throughout the Levant. (Jenkins, 2015, p.4) ISIS made good use of being political vacuum in Syria and Iraq. In a little while ISIS seized control of most of Syrian territories and Mosul in Iraq. ISIS existence in Syria was against Russian interest.

After ISIS took over wide region in Syria, they became the main topic in the World. After a while they were announced Islamic terrorist organisation because of their weird and relentless understanding of Islam religion. ISIS became common enemy in less than no time. In other saying, ISIS united EU, US and Russia. On the other hand IS provided great opportunity for Russia to interfere in Syria internal policy. Russia has also established a Joint Operations Centre (JOC) in Baghdad for the exchange of intelligence and targeting information on ISIS with participation from Iran, Iraq and Syria as well as representatives of Hezbollah. According to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, the United States was invited to participate in the JOC but responded "unconstructively." The United States has heavily criticised the Russian intervention, saying it will only exacerbate the level of violence in the region, weaken the various Sunni groups (including some groups affiliated with al-Qaeda) in their combat operations against ISIS, and increase the number of refugees fleeing Syria and making their way to Europe. In October, the Russians set up a separate intelligence information exchange centre in Jordan to coordinate military operations with Russia in Syria. (Dannenberg, Cilluffo and Cardash, 2015, p.2) Now Russia stepped into Syria policy.

After Russia strikes ISIS by jets, confusing and puzzling questions began to come to our mind about Russia. Is really Russia fighting against terrorism or trying to find another way of selling oil to the world? Russian economy has been having difficult times, because of embargoes.

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Sarikaya, A., 2016. What is Russia's role in Syria? *Cultural Relations Quarterly Review*, Vol. 3. Issue 2. (Spring 2016) pp.73–76.

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