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MIDDLE EAST POLICY OF RUSSIA

RUSYA'NIN ORTADOĞU POLİTİKASI

ПОЛИТИКА РОССИИ НА БЛИЖНЕМ ВОСТОКЕ

سياسة روسيا في الشرق الأوسط

CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES
ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ

THE BLACK SEA INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND DIALOGUE



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STRATEGIC INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND INDEPENDENT THOUGHT PRODUCTION

CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES

History

In Turkey, the shortage of research on the Middle East grew more conspicuous than ever during the early 90's. Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM) was established in January 1, 2009 in order to provide relevant information to the general public and to the foreign policy community. The institute underwent an intensive structuring process, beginning to concentrate exclusively on Middle affairs.

Outlook on the Middle Eastern World

It is certain that the Middle East harbors a variety of interconnected problems. However, neither the Middle East nor its people ought to be stigmatized by images with negative connotations. Given the strength of their populations, Middle Eastern states possess the potential to activate their inner dynamics in order to begin peaceful mobilizations for development. Respect for people's willingness to live together, respect for the sovereign right of states and respect for basic human rights and individual freedoms are the prerequisites for assuring peace and tranquility, both domestically and internationally. In this context, Turkey must continue to make constructive contributions to the establishment of regional stability and prosperity in its vicinity.

ORSAM's Think-Tank Research

ORSAM, provides the general public and decision-making organizations with enlightening information about international politics in order to promote a healthier understanding of international policy issues and to help them to adopt appropriate positions. In order to present effective solutions, ORSAM supports high quality research by intellectuals and researchers that are competent in a variety of disciplines. ORSAM's strong publishing capacity transmits meticulous analyses of regional developments and trends to the interested parties. With its web site, its books, reports, and periodicals, ORSAM supports the development of Middle Eastern literature on a national and international scale. ORSAM supports the development of Middle Eastern literature on a national and international scale. ORSAM facilitates the sharing of knowledge and ideas with the Turkish and international communities by inviting statesmen, bureaucrats, academics, strategists, businessmen, journalists, and NGO representatives to Turkey.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. İlyas Kemalođlu (Kamalov)

He was born in USSR in 1978. He received his undergraduate degree in History at Marmara University in 2001; his master's degree with thesis titled "Altın Orda - İlhanlı Münasebetleri" (Golden Horde – İlkanid Relations) in 2003; and completed his PhD thesis, titled "Altın Orda ve Rusya: Rusya Üzerindeki Türk-Tatar Etkisi" (Golden Horde and Russia: Turkish-Tatar Influence On Russia" in 2008. He became associate professor in 2012. Tatar national Kamalov, who has a good command of Russian, Turkish, English and knows Persian at an intermediate level, worked in ASAM (Center for Eurasian Strategic Studies) between 2004 and 2008 at the department of Russian-Ukrainian Studies. Since 2009, he has been working as specialist in Turkish Historical Society (TTK) and as advisor in ORSAM (Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies). Some of his books are: *Mođolların Kafkasya Politikası* (Kaknüs Yayınları, 2003), *Putin'in Rusya'sı: KGB'den Devlet Başkanlığı'na* (Kaknüs Yayınları, 2004), *Avrasya Fatihî Tatarlar* (Kaknüs Yayınları, 2007), *Moskova'nın Rövanşı: Putin Dönemi Rus Dış Politikası* (Yeditepe Yayınları, 2008), *Altın Orda ve Rusya: Rusya Üzerindeki Türk-Tatar Etkisi* (Ötüken Yayınları, 2009), *Dictionary of Eurasian Turcologists. I. Volume - I. Book: Russian Turcologists* (with A. Kolesnikov, TTK Yayınları, 2011).

PRESENTATION

As the events in Syria have become more intense, regional and global powers have also accelerated their diplomatic efforts to solve the problem. The Western public opinion attributes the solution of the problem in Syria, which is the end point of the “Arab Spring” (for now), to the fact that Russia stopped supporting Bashar Assad and to Assad regime’s going away. One of the most important factors enabling Bashar Assad to still stay in power is the support provided by Russia indeed. In this report, ORSAM Eurasia Advisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. İlyas Kemaloğlu (Kamaloğlu) questions the aforesaid support provided by Russia to Syria within the scope of the Middle Eastern politics and puts forward the reasons of this support.

In the first section, the report deals with post-USSR Russia’s Middle Eastern policy and Russia’s cooperation with the countries in the region. The author outlines the most important goals of Russia’s regional policy as; to increase its own influence while breaking the influence of the U.S. in the region, to generate an income from the military technology Russia sold to the countries in the region, to dominate the world energy markets, and to show that Russia has a say in the world again; and he also argues that Russia reached this goal before the “Arab Spring” began. Nevertheless, the “Arab Spring” also gave damage to Russia’s position in the Middle East. Russia’s insistence on Bashar Assad may be explained by the fact that Russia does not want to lose one of its most important fortresses in the region. In the second section of the report; Russia’s relations with Syria, Moscow’s approach towards the “Arab Spring” and more importantly, the reason and potential results of Russia’s support to Bashar Assad are emphasized.

Vladimir Putin, who was reelected as the Head of State in 2012, had already solved considerable part of the problems in domestic politics thanks to the incomes mostly generated by energy resources during his first terms of office as the President; and he had a say in the solution of international problems by reinforcing its position in the international arena. The solution process of the problems in Syria and in the Middle East is not an exception in this context. The problems in the region are also one of the most important current issues in the Turkish foreign policy. Therefore, we hope that this report will receive a great deal of attention and contribute to current studies in this field.

Doç. Dr. Hasan Ali Karasar
Black Sea International Coordinator

Hasan Kanbolat
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By: Doç. Dr. İlyas Kemaloğlu (Kamalov)

MIDDLE EAST POLICY OF RUSSIA

Introduction

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, its successor Russian Federation found itself in a completely different environment. Lots of new states, six of which were Muslim, emerged in the southern borders of Russia. The Islam, which had been suppressed by the Communists in the region, started to revive. Moscow, which was afraid of flooding of radical Islamists from the Middle East and particularly from Iran towards this region, gave priority to Iran in the Middle Eastern policy. Certain factors such as the trade relations, Chechen issue, civil war in Tajikistan, role of Iran in the fight between Russia and the U.S. for energy resources in Caspian Basin made Iran valuable for Moscow.

Another important issue, in which Russia was closely interested in the Middle East in the post-USSR period was the Arab-Israel problem. Today the most important trade partner of Moscow, which supported the creation of an anti-Israel Arab League in the USSR period and which kept its relations limited with the aforesaid country, in the region is Israel. Russian speaking Jews, who had not been allowed to migrate in the USSR period, immigrated to Israel after the dissolution of USSR. The fact that Israel supported Russia during

the Chechen War also positively affected the Russian-Israeli relations. Nevertheless, the fact that Russia developed cooperation with Iran and Syria in nuclear and military fields leads to certain problems in Russian-Israeli relations from time to time. On the other hand, the fact that Moscow is in touch with all countries including Israel makes it possible for Russia to assume mediating role in the solution of problems in the region.

In the Soviet period, the Middle East was one of the conflict areas, which the Soviets and the U.S fought for. We can see that this fight has still been continuing in the post-USSR dissolution. In fact, it seems like Moscow has been using the Middle East as a means of retaliation against the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) policy of the U.S. As a matter of fact, all the steps such as; Russia's selling arms to Syria, its welcoming HAMAS leaders in Moscow, and its supporting Iran in the international arena, worry the U.S. The most important goals of Russia's regional policy might be outlined as; to increase its own influence while breaking the influence of the U.S. in the region, to generate an income from the military technology Russia sold to the countries in the region, to dominate the world energy markets, and to show that Russia has a say in the world again.

Russia-Iran Relations

Moscow, which initially supported Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), took a stand in favor of Iran with a sudden decision in 1987, and both parties reached an agreement on Russia's selling its military technology to Iran such as MIG-29 and Su-24 in 1989. During the years 1990 and 1991, Iran's dependence on Russian military technology increased.¹

In addition to the military technology, Russia also started to sell nuclear reactor to Iran. On the other hand, in 1997 Gazprom launched projects on exploring gas reservoirs in Iran and Persian Gulf, despite the opposition of the U.S. In late 20th century, the relations between Iran and Russia looked out the interests of both parties. As Russia supported Iran on its military and nuclear technologies, Iran did not criticize much the Chechen policy of Russia. During the wars in Tajikistan and Afghanistan, Russia acted in unison with Iran; both countries wanted the end of civil war in Tajikistan and they strived to prevent Taliban from seizing the control in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, both countries found the strengthening of Azerbaijan and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline project unfavorable, as they wanted to monopolize the control of energy lines in the region.

Despite all these, certain problems took place between Russia and Iran even during Boris Yeltsin period. Iran could not remunerate for the military technology and nuclear reactors in time sold by Russia due to the economic situation of Iran.² On the other hand, the fact that Russia, Iran and other riparian countries to Khazar could not reach an agreement on the status of Khazar and the utilization of underground treasures in Khazar slowed down the development of relations between Russia and Iran.

Despite the fact that the First Chechen War did not affect the relations between Russia and Iran, the Second Chechen War started by Vladimir Putin during his office as Prime Minister reflected badly on the aforesaid relations. The fact that Iran took the chair of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) during that period was also effective in this situation. While Iran attached importance to its relations with Russia, who built nuclear power plants and also met the military technological needs of Iran; as the chairman of OIC which is the most important organization of the Islamic world could not keep quiet about Russia's Chechen policy. As a matter of fact, Iran criticized Russia due to its Chechen policy, but also proportioned its criticism correctly. On the other hand, Moscow did not keep Iran waiting for its appreciation and announced that she was ready to build the second nuclear power plant in Iran.³ Nevertheless, only the nuclear power plant in Bushehr has been completed so far. Despite the pressure of the West, Russian officials have not taken a step back on the construction of nuclear power plant in Bushehr by looking out their own political and economic interests in Iran, and they announced they could undertake the construction of the second nuclear power plant in case the universal norms are followed.

On the other hand, despite the fact that Russians build the nuclear power plant in Iran, Russia does not want Iran's nuclear armament, just like the West. However, unlike the West, Russian authorities believe that Iran, as well as any other country, has the right to develop a nuclear programme with peaceful purposes. In addition to this, Russia underlines that the problem of Iranian nuclear programme could only be solved through diplomatic means. Therefore Russia continues to support Iran in the international arena by keeping its own in-

terests in mind, and opposes to any intervention in Iran. Russian diplomats believe that laying embargoes on Iran would not solve the problem, but worsen the situation.

In current situation, Russia has almost become a mediator between Iran and the West, and offered various solutions to solve the problem through peaceful means. One of the aforesaid solutions suggested Iran's carrying out the uranium enrichment operation in Russian territories. However, this plan of Russia did not work.⁴

Russia maintains such efforts within the frame of the 5+1 group (UN permanent member States + Germany). The 5+1 group held its last meeting in Moscow, on 18-19 June. As a matter of fact, it was expected that major results would be concluded at the end of this summit. Because before the summit, the host country Russia individually talked to each parties and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov paid a visit to Iran for this purpose. Nevertheless, it was not concluded as expected. On the other hand, despite the fact that the parties could not reach a deal during the talks, it is possible to suggest that the pre-summit efforts of Russia gave results. While the possible embargoes to be laid constituted the agenda of former summits (Baghdad and İstanbul), the parties discussed what they could do for the solution in this summit.⁵

As is known, Western countries want Iran to stop its uranium enrichment. The Iranian authorities, on the other hand, state they would pledge not to enrich uranium at a rate of more than 20 per cent in case the West lowered the economic embargoes and met the fuel required by the nuclear reactor in Tehran; even though they continue to argue for their opinions. Also Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad made a similar statement.

The attitudes of Iranian authorities are considered as an "achievement" in terms of the talks. Because the parties relaunched the talks 15 months later, and they even started to mutually talk on the step-backs. We can suggest that the aforesaid talks have mostly been in favor of Russia. Moscow showed that Russia played a major role in the solution of international problems including the Middle East.

We can say that in the forthcoming process, Russia will continue to support Iran and protect her from various embargoes. We can explain this support by the measures Russia has been trying to take against the international balances and the expansion policy of the U.S., as well as by Russia's goal and policy on the region. The government change in Iran and especially the fact that pro-U.S. politicians come to power is not in favor Russia. As there is no major problem between Russia and Iran, the Moscow-Tehran alliance increases the power of Russia against the U.S. expansionism in the Middle East and against the Azerbaijan-Turkey-Georgia alliance in Southern Caucasus. The military intervention in Iran will come to mean that the region is completely under the influence of the U.S., will give damage to Russia's position not only in the Middle East but also in Caucasus, and it will also come to mean that Russia will be surrounded from all quarters.⁶

Russia-Iraq Relations

The fact that Iraq, one of the most important allies of the Soviet Union, invaded Iran and that this war lasted for eight years made it difficult for USSR to implement its Middle East policy; and certain problems took place between Russia and Iraq in that period. The fact that USSR started to support Iran and that Iraq invaded Kuwait further aggravated the relations between the two countries. Nevertheless, the last head of state of the USSR

Mikhail Gorbachev tried to prevent the U.S. intervention in Iraq, but no result could be obtained. As the U.S. established dominance over the region, the entity of USSR became weaker in the Middle East.

During the first years of Boris Yeltsin's office as President, there were no promotion in the relations between Russia and Iraq. However, "liberal" circles in Russia, and particularly Vladimir Jirinovskiy who was in a close relationship with Saddam Hussein put forward that Yeltsin should give up on this policy and even that the sanctions imposed on Iraq should be removed after the Gulf War I. As a matter of fact, the Middle East Specialist Yevgeniy Primakov appointment to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicated that Yeltsin gave importance to the criticisms coming from the parliament. Besides, Russia believed that the removal of sanctions imposed on Iraq were quite profitable in economic terms. Because Iraq could pay back its loans of 7 billion dollars to Russia, Russian energy companies would continue their operations and new reservoirs would start to be operated only through the removal of sanctions. Therefore, it was the Russian oil company Lukoil, which strived most on removal of sanctions imposed on Iraq and which made an initial settlement with Iraq in order to operate the oil reservoirs in Western Kurna.⁷

The fact that UN allowed Iraq to export oil in 1997 was mostly in favor of Russia. However, the Second Iraq War once more ruined Russia's plans on Iraq. Although Moscow was one of those who opposed to the U.S. intervention in Iraq, it couldn't took the risk of ruining the "romantic relations" with the U.S. in the post-9/11, and also it was not powerful enough to prevent this intervention. The second intervention of the U.S. in Iraq and toppling the Saddam Hussein regime completely ended the presence of Moscow in Iraq. Russia suf-

fered great losses also in economic terms. As a matter of fact, Moscow wrote off 40 billion dollar part of debts of Iraq only between 1997 and 2006.⁸ Despite the fact that the aforesaid debt was written off, that Russia constantly issued a call for peace to all parties in Iraq, and that Russia suggested it was ready to be mediator for the stability of the country; the Iraqi President Jalal Talabani accused Russia of implementing unfriendly policies to its country for a long time. Talabani, who is known with its strong statements against Russia before becoming the Head of State, indicated that Russia made a big mistake by supporting the Saddam Hussein regime and that currently Russia has been looking at its relations with Iraq through the glasses used in its relations with the U.S.⁹

However, the relations between Russia and Iraq improved in time. The Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's visit to Russia on April 2009 considerably contributed to this process. Russia attained its most important goal in its relations with Iraq in the post-Saddam period. The Russian oil company Lukoil gained the right to operate the Western Kurna-2 of approximately 12,9 billion barrel of oil. Another energy giant Gazprom, on the other hand, won tender in the Bedra oil field which is located in 160 kilometers southwest of Baghdad along with the Turkish oil company TPAO, South Korean oil company Korea Gas and Malaysia Petronas. 109 million barrels of oil reservoir was detected to be found in this area. The consortium to produce 80 thousand barrels of oil per day will get 5,5 dollar for each barrel. The fact that the companies that won the tender from the aforesaid oil reservoir (compared to Western Kurna-2) made more profit stems from the fact that the conditions here are harder and it is an insecure area. As a matter of fact, the interest shown by the foreigners in the Bedra oil field was lower compared to other fields.

Other than this, the Iraqi authorities stated they were ready to buy arms from Russia. Thus Iraq seeks for alternative technologies to the U.S. arms. The cooperation, wanted to be developed between Russia and Iraq on energy, military and trade fields, constituted the agenda of the talk held between the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov and his Iraqi counterpart Hoshiar Zibari on 19 June 2012. Following the complete withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Iraq, the U.S. factor “overshadowing” the relations between the parties will be less effective. Undoubtedly that this situation will contribute to faster development of the cooperation between Russia and Iraq.

Russia-Israel Relations

Although Moscow has been pursuing a policy based on Arab countries in the Middle East since the USSR period, it is observed that today Russia and Israel need each other in many areas. Above all, Israel is the biggest trade partner of Russia in the region. On the other hand, the biggest Russian-speaking population other than the former-USSR republics live in Israel. More than one million former-USSR population living in Israel enable the development of cultural relations between the two countries, as well as tourism. Russia also declared she wanted to carry out joint projects with Israel on military technologies, after the former Soviet citizens of Jewish origin, especially scientists and engineers, immigrated to Israel.

Israel is also in favor of developing relations with Moscow. Especially Israel wants the immigrations of Russian citizens of Jewish origin to Israel to continue. On the other hand, Israel has been developing its relations with Russia and trying to prevent Moscow’s arms sale to Arab countries, and wants Russia to at least follow a neutral policy within the frame

of development in the Middle East. Developing trade relations with Russia is also extremely important for Israel.

On the other hand, the relations between Russia and Israel have been following an undulant course for the last decade. The diplomatic relations that broke off in 1967 between Russia and Israel could be reestablished only in 1991.¹⁰ After the election of Benjamin Netanyahu on May 1996, the relations between Russia and Israel started improve. Israel opened a credit of 50 million dollars to Russia, which went through economic crisis those days, and started to show interest to Russian gas. Nevertheless, the relations between the two countries were destroyed again as Russia sold missiles to Iran. In addition to this, upon the fact that Yevgeniy Primakov, in favor of developing good relations with the Arab countries, took office as Foreign Minister, Moscow started to criticize Israel’s Palestine policy. The economic crisis that took place in Russia in 1998 negatively affected the trade relations with Israel as well.¹¹

The undulant course of the relations between Russia and Israel also continues in the period of Vladimir Putin. The fact that Vladimir Putin showed an interest in Chechen issue during the first years of his office as the Head of State, positively affected the relations between Russia and Israel indeed. An anonymous Russian diplomat made a statement to the press that Israel played an important role in elimination of “wrong opinions” regarding Russia’s Chechen policy in the West.¹² And Russia paid its “debt” to Israel on this issue before long. Unlike Yeltsin, Putin accused not only Israel but also Palestinian authorities in Israel-Palestine wars, and called the parties to solve the problem and start talks.¹³

Within the scope of his Middle East visits between 26-29 April 2005, Vladimir Putin also

paid a visit to Israel. The then-Israeli President Moshe Katsav and then-Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon described Putin's visit as an "historical event". Because neither the Soviet leaders nor Russian tsars visited the "holy lands". Even though Israeli authorities mention their worries about Moscow's arms sale to Arab countries and increasing anti-semitism in Russia, the aforesaid visit of Putin did not reduce these worries; and besides the fact that Putin refused to wear kippa during his visit to "Wailing Wall" brought the parties to the verge of diplomatic crisis. An important consequence of the visit for both countries is the fact that the trade agreements were signed. It is possible to say the same thing for Vladimir Putin's visit to Israel on 25 June 2012 as well.

The developments in the Middle East and the relations between the two countries constituted the agenda of this visit. The policies such as Russia's supporting the current regimes in Syria, its selling arms to those countries, and building nuclear power plant in Iran disturbs Israel as well as the Western world. During the visit of Putin, the Israeli authorities once more asked the Russian leaders to stop supporting the aforesaid countries and not to sell arms to those countries. Vladimir Putin, on the other hand, once more brought up Russia's official attitude to the agenda and highlighted the necessity to peacefully solve the problems. Consequently, it is not possible to suggest that the parties reached an agreement on the problems in the Middle East. The most important result of the visit was certainly the fact that the parties declared their determinations on developing bilateral military and trade relations. The trade volume between the two countries reached the level of 4 billion dollars in 2011 (increased at the rate of 37 per cent compared to 2010). After the implementation of the visa-free regime that started in

2008, there has been an increase in the number of Russian tourists visiting Israel, and it reached 500 thousand per year. The fact that parties reached a deal on Israel's constructing a pharmaceutical plant in Russia; Russia's willingness to produce pilotless helicopters in cooperation with Israel; and the fact that the parties talked on the construction of Russian space station in Israel points out that the multi-dimensional cooperation between Russia and Israel will continue to develop in the forthcoming period.

Even though the relations between Russia and Israel have started to further develop in recent years, it is a fact that these relations are not at a level Russian Jews desire to reach. The anti-Israeli circles in Russia are quite effective in slow development of these relations. The officials within the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs who are in favor of developing relations with the Arab States, anti-semitic Communist and nationalist groups, the officials of the Russian company "Rosoboronekспорт" which sells arms to Arab countries, certain part of Russian Muslim societies representing 20 million Muslims, etc. do not want Moscow's approaching to Israel.

Another important development negatively affecting the Russia-Israel relations is Moscow's attitude towards Hamas. Vladimir Putin stated in 2006 that he would not cut his relations with HAMAS, which won the elections in Palestine, and afterwards invited leaders of the organization to Moscow.¹⁴ HAMAS, which is included in the terrorist list of the U.S. and Israel, is not on the black list of Russia. Immediately after the elections held in Palestine, only Iran, Syria and Egypt declared they would continue their relations with Palestine. The statement made by Putin, on the other hand, showed that Russia was also included in this group.

Even though the Western media evaluated the relations of Moscow with HAMAS only as Russia's "challenge" to West, it is possible to also say that Putin aims at solving the Israel-Palestine problem by establishing relations with HAMAS. This attitude of Kremlin increases the prestige of Russia in the Arab World by all means. Furthermore, Russia is one of the unique forces in contact with all powers in the region with the aforesaid attitude. And this factor gives Russia the chance of mediation, and increases its influence in the region. Consequently, while the relations with HAMAS reflect badly on the relations with Israel, it also broadens the movement area of Russia in the Middle East.

Russia-Saudi Arabia Relations

Although USSR was the first country recognizing the independence of Saudi Arabia, the relations between the two countries started to improve only during the Presidency of Vladimir Putin. It was in 2003 that a Saudi Arabian King paid a visit to Moscow for the first time in history. During the aforesaid visit of King Abdullah, both parties signed an agreement on developing cooperation in the field of energy. Today in the relations between these two countries having the largest oil and gas reservoirs in the world, the energy issue comes to the forefront. Putin, who became the first Russian leader paying a visit to Saudi Arabia and thus setting foot on this country on 11 February 2007, stated that "even though Russia and Saudi Arabia seem to be rivals in the energy field, we are not rivals but partners."¹⁵ As a matter of fact, the Russian oil company Lukoil signed a cooperation agreement with Saudi Arabia in the field of energy that will last 40 years. Lukoil has been preparing to make an investment of 2 billion dollars for the new oil reservoirs. On the other hand, Russia and Saudi Arabia hold talks on the export of especially Russian tanks, helicopters and Russian military technology to Saudi Arabia.¹⁶

Considering that Saudi Arabia has been providing the majority of its needs on military technology from the U.S. so far, it is possible to say that Saudi Arabia's cooperating with Russia will add a new dimension to relations between the two countries. Putin, who strongly criticized Saudi Arabia due to its Chechen policy in the past years, is currently planning to bring its relations with Saudi Arabia to a higher level. As a matter of fact, Russia aims at developing cooperation with Saudi Arabia, which is one of the most important countries of the Middle East, not only in the fields of energy and trade but also in the fields of fight against international terrorism and military technology.

Russia-Syria Relations Before the Arab Spring

Another country, with whom Russia has developed a multi-dimensional cooperation in the region, is Syria. Moscow has saved Syria from the sanctions of the UN for several times. In the United Nations Security Council meeting that was held on 31 October 2005, it was again Russia who saved Syria from economic sanctions due to the assassination of Rafik Hariri. Since then, Russia has become the defender of Syria both within UN and also in the international field. One of the major reasons is the cooperation that Russia developed with Syria.

In the recent period, the trade relations between the two countries have rapidly been developing. Between the years 2005 and 2010, Moscow exported 2,5-3 billion dollar-worth of arms to Syria. In addition to this, Syria started to pay its debt of about 1,5 billion dollar by installments to Russia as of 2005. The trade volume between Russia and Syria has increased in the recent years and attained the level of approximately 2 billion dollars in 2010. The fact that Russia reduced

the customs duty of textile products imported from Syria at the rate of 25 per cent, has been effective in the increase of trade volume. In addition to military technologies, the parties have been taking steps in developing cooperation also in the field of energy. In 2005, Russia and Syria reached an agreement regarding that Russians would construct the Syrian extension of the natural gas pipeline to connect Jordan, Egypt and Syria to one another in the field of energy. It is known that other Russian energy companies also joined in petroleum exploration works in Syria.

The Tartous port in Syria and the Russian military presence in the area also play an important role in Russian-Syrian relations. The Tartous port in Syria was used as supply and maintenance base by Russians during the Cold War. Although this base does not currently belong to Russians, many Russian military officers serve under the title of advisor to Syrian army.

As of 2010, Russia accelerated the works of restoring and equipping Tartous port with modern technologies in the region. Russians have been improving the Tartous port to meet the needs of Russian Black Sea Military Fleet. The underlying reason behind Russia's restructuring this port is not only meeting the needs of ships by all means. Russians also want to increase their influence in the region by waving their own flags here, and to compensate it in Mediterranean in case they lose their base in Crimea. Consequently, the multi-dimensional cooperation with developed with Syria turned this country into the most important support of Russia in the region.

The Evaluation of Russia's Middle East Policy Before the Arab Spring

Moscow's interest and influence in the region increased as Russia recollected itself during

the first presidential term of Vladimir Putin. In this process, the most important goals of Russia's regional policy might be outlined as; to increase its own influence while breaking the influence of the U.S. in the region, to generate an income from the military technology Russia sold to the countries in the region, to dominate the world energy markets, and to show that Russia has a say in the world again. It is possible to say that Russia was successful in putting these goals into effect until recently.

The policy followed in face of the developments in the Middle East and its attitude related to the problems in the region have been effective in this achievement of Russia. And Russia's approach towards the problems in the region are as follows:

- 1- Russian authorities ask for the solution of all problems, especially the nuclear programme of Iran and the developments in Syria, through diplomatic means;
- 2- Russia objects to the foreign interventions in the region, and tries to prevent the interventions as much as possible;
- 3- Russia wants the solution of problems under the roof of UN;
- 4- Russian authorities believe that the sanctions imposed and desired to be imposed do not help solving the problems;
- 5- Russia may not prevent attacks and military operations, but it won't allow this kind of interventions to happen under the roof of UN.
- 6- Russia makes an attempt to be mediator almost in all the problems in the region.

Moscow has won the trust of Middle Eastern countries in a short period of time, and in-

creased its influence in the region. As in USSR period, Russia once again became an important power in the region in early 21st century by supporting the regimes in the region, by selling arms to Middle Eastern countries, by writing off the debts of certain countries from the USSR period, and by putting the important economy projects, especially in the field of energy, into practice. However, “Arab Spring” directly affected Russia’s Middle East policy and left Russia in a difficult situation.

Arab Spring and Russia

The recent events breaking put in the Middle East was expected not to harm the presence of Moscow in the region, and even it was estimated that the short-term instability in the region would be in favor of Russia. Because further destabilization in the Middle East and concordantly the rise in the prices of energy resources were favorable developments for Russia in the short term. Moreover, this issue also led to questioning the “credibility” of Middle Eastern countries which are indicated to be an alternative for Russia. However, the fact that the Arab Spring has increasingly expanded and extended gave damage to Russia’s Middle Eastern policy

Above all, it is a fact that Russia was caught unprepared by the developments in the Middle East. One of the indicators is the “wait and see policy” since Russia remained silent about the incidents in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. Moscow has two important reasons to follow this policy: The first one, as above-mentioned, is that it was caught unprepared by the developments spreading quickly and accordingly, the senior Russian officials did not have a mutual perspective about the policy that Russia was supposed to follow. The collision of the ideas about Libya between the President Medvedev and the Prime Minister Vladimir Putin is the most significant indicator of this situation.

The Russian officials sometimes took the role of conciliator in some countries and tried to assemble the parties in Moscow. In this period, the Russian officials attach the greatest importance to resolve the problems in a peaceful way and block the foreign intervention as much as they can. Therefore, Russia tries both to prevent the USA settling into the region and increase its power through arbitrating. However, it is possible to say that this policy has never worked out so far, and even that it has given certain damages to Moscow. And the most important reason is that Moscow continued to strongly support the current regimes while pursuing such a policy. Russia has already been the losing party for several times in such events. One of the examples is Iraq. The Russian oil company Lukoil could regain its right to explore and drill oil in Western Kurna only six years later than Saddam Hussein’s death as a result of great efforts.

A similar situation also applies to Gaddafi event. It is a fact that Russia was in a close relationship with Gaddafi. However, the fact that Gaddafi’s perspectives on staying in power were weak and that his regime would be toppled eventually had already been understood in spring. In this case, what should not have certainly been done was to avoid keeping in contact with the National Transitional Council in Libya. During that period, when everything came to an end for Gaddafi, Russia recognized the National Transitional Council; but the new Libyan administrators did not forget the former attitude of Russia. The representatives of AGOCO Oil Company, under the control of the National Transitional Council, explicitly stated that the oil and gas companies in Russia and China would go through problems about making new contracts in Libya due to the fact that the afore-said countries supported the Gaddafi regime. It is possible that Russia could go through similar problems also on Syria, after Iraq and Libya.

No doubt that after Libya, Russia does not want to lose its position in Syria and to once more lose billion dollar-worth new projects in the region. Furthermore, the importance of Syria for Russia is much bigger as mentioned above. Syria is Russia's window opening to the Middle East. Besides its relations with Syria regarding energy, military and trade; Russia uses Tartous city of Syria as maintenance and supply base.

The change of regime in Syria poses a threat against the whole existence of Russia in this country and generally in the region. It is possible to explain the underlying reason behind Russia's supporting Bashar Assad in the international arena with these factors. On the other hand, there is a risk that the "spring" could spread to other countries following Syria such as Iran in the first place, and even similar scenarios could be implemented in Caucasus, which is also known as "Russia's backyard" and also in the Central Asia. Therefore, Russia will continue to support the Bashar Assad regime. One of the indicators of this support is the fact that Russia sent its ships to Tartous port.

In this context, the statements of Russian authorities regarding they would not sell arms and military technologies to Syria unless the conflicts in the country ends are not contradictory. Russia is serious and decisive in the aforesaid intention (on stopping arms sale). Nevertheless, this step does not come to mean that Russia withdrew its support for the Assad regime. Today, Russia doesn't need to sell arms to Syria and Syria doesn't need them either. Because the arms required by Syria had already been delivered by Russia to a large extent.

As mentioned above, only between 2005 and 2010, Moscow exported 2,5-3 billion dollar-worth of arms to Syria. The last agreement

envisaging the export of Russian arms between Russia and Syria was signed in 2007 between the parties. It was stated that the agreement valued 300 million dollar at least. It is estimated that Russia has delivered 72 missiles called "Yakhont" so far. Those missiles are found within the mobile coastal missile system, and there are also various radars and other technologies in it. These missiles are expected to protect Syrian coasts against potential attacks from the sea.

Besides the aforesaid missiles, the same also applies to the sale of other military technologies and to maintenance of current technologies. Thus, the military cooperation that has been developed between Russia and Syria so far will make it possible for Syria to meet its needs in this field in the forthcoming period. Therefore, it would be truer to consider the statements of Russian authorities on stopping arms sale as a "smart game" of the Russian diplomacy, rather than as stepping back. With this policy, Russia has been both continuing its support for Assad and also trying to reduce pressure of the West through its recent statements. Although it has a power to resist against this pressure, Russian authorities are certainly not content with Russia's being described as a responsible of the conflict in Syria. The recent decision of Russia, on the other hand, has been welcomed by the West and has already reduced the pressure on Russia.

Undoubtedly that the events taking place in Syria and across the whole Middle East have been negatively affecting Russia's relations with the U.S. and with Western countries in general, and reminds us the Cold War period. It seems likely that the events in Syria will also affect the relations between the aforesaid two countries due to the fact that Russia and Turkey are in different "fronts". The Turkey-Russia relations, which started with "shuttle trade" following the collapse of USSR,

reached peak in 2011. The trade volume of more than 40 billion, the fact that more than 3 million Russian tourists visit Turkey per year, abolishment of visa requirement, the fact that both parties reached an agreement on Russia's establishing a nuclear power plant in Turkey, and the projects developed in the field of energy caused the relations between the two countries to be called as "strategic partnership". However, the fact that Turkish authorities strongly criticized and even accused Russia about Syria, and the missile radar system, which was desired to be installed in Turkey and perceived as a "step towards itself" in the long-term by Russia would reflect badly on the Turkish-Russian relations.

Strong statements and accusations of the U.S. and Russian statesmen to each others are usual and this kind of attitudes do not affect or damage the general situation of the relations. Even while having problems with each others, the U.S. and Russia can come to the table, make concessions and take joint decisions. The fact that Russia did not object to the U.S. intervention in Iraq and that it's being on the side of the U.S. after the Septem-

ber 11 attacks; that the U.S. gave a green light to Russia's membership to the World Trade Organization (WTO); that Russian authorities let NATO use Ulyanovsk, which is the hometown of Lenin, as a transit base; that the both parties continuously talk on issues such as disarmament etc. set an example for our above-mentioned argument. It should also be kept in mind that all these developments took place during a period when the relations between Russia and the U.S. were tense. Nevertheless, it is not possible to say the same for the Russian-Turkish relations. Throughout history, these relations have been better or worse. In a period when the problem of perception going on since the Cold War period has not been completely solved, the fact that the parties act more deliberately on each other's points of view is important for the course of these relations by all means. Russia's attitude has already been criticized by the whole world. Turkey's facing the opposition of Russia on an issue which is not on the agenda of Turkish-Russian relations, and its strong accusations brings no good other than negatively affecting these relations.

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