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THE ORIGINS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S PRESENCE IN SYRIA DURING THE ARAB SPRING

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Summary

The Syrian civil war, undoubtedly the bloodiest phase of the Arab Spring, which started with the protests in 2010, continues to be a theatre where global balances have been reshaped and regional power struggles have been staged since 2011. One of the most important actors in this multi-dimensional chessboard is the Russian Federation. With its involvement in the Syrian civil war, the area called the Near Abroad expanded and extended to the Middle East. In this study, it is argued that such an expansion is the result of the historical sub-consciences inherited by the Russian Federation from the Cold War and the Russian Imperial past, and the origins of the Russian Federation's presence in Syria during the Arab Spring are analyzed with respect to the Near Abroad policy, the Cold War and the Russian Imperial Culture.

Key Words: Russian Federation, Syria, Cold War, Near Abroad, Russian Imperial Culture, historical subconscious.

Introduction

The Syrian crisis which has taken an important place in the agenda of the international community since March 2011 is an issue that is constantly mentioned in the Turkish public opinion due to various reasons. The Syrian problem is a multi-dimensional ball of the equation. Therefore, it is a crucial issue to be examined from many aspects. Also, it is a very important laboratory for figuring out the order of international relations which have changed after the Cold War.

The Russian Federation (RF) which is a continuation of the Union of Soviet Socialist

Republics (USSR), the leader of the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War, is also one of the most important parts of the Syrian problem. The approach of the RF is only figured out by properly understanding the origins of its presence. In this study the role of the RF in the Syrian problem during the Arab Spring will be addressed on an intellectual basis, considering the historical process.

For the intellectual dimension of the subject, the term Near Abroad will be primarily evaluated in the foreign policy strategy established by the RF after the Cold War. Then, the intellectual cornerstones of the USSR-Syria relation and the RF-Syria relation, and the RF-Syria relation during the Arab Spring will be discussed to figure out the stance of the RF during the Arab Spring. After evaluating the Near Abroad-Syria relation, the 'imperial culture' of the RF which exists in the historical subconscious as a state having imperial tradition and reflections of this culture on the Syrian problem will be discussed. Finally in the study, the Syrian policy of the RF will be evaluated based on the aforementioned intellectual layers.

The Term Near Abroad in the Post-Cold War Foreign Policy Strategy of the Russian Federation

The new era which started after the Cold War is a period when important political developments have occurred in international relations. In this era, the bipolar world order changed into unipolarity, the globalization phenomenon affected every corner of the world; and semantic shifts or changes occurred in valid political, economic, and socio-cultural definitions, the USSR began to dissolve and then the communist system collapsed.^[1] The dissolution of the USSR radically changed the international community order of nearly a half-century. In the face of this new situation, the members of the international community had to review their political evaluations and security policies.^[2] The RF^[3] which was in the status of 'continuing state' after the USSR that was at the center of developments had to establish appropriate policies for the new situation.

One of the policies established by the RF in the new era is the new security policy. For the RF, the principal factor in the security and threat perception established in the new era is fear of ending up like the USSR, in other words, the risk of dissolution. A socio-cultural structure that lends itself to instability is widely accepted as the most important element that feeds the 'fear of dissolution'. In this context, preservation of national integrity is a primary issue. Another dimension of the internal security policy is naturally the maintenance of borders. Since the RF has experienced problems with China and India throughout history and has a potential internal instability, this pushed the RF to seek a 'buffer zone' beyond internal frontiers. This quest led to the rise of the term *Near Abroad*^[4] to be discussed below.^[5]

The term Near Abroad appeared in the RF foreign policy as a reflection of the aforementioned approach. It was developed within the language of the RF foreign policy for the purpose of separating the former Soviet republics from other states and was indicated to be of privileged importance.^[6] This approach is based on the RF's maintenance of its effectiveness in the geography of the USSR and grounds on the strategy of sustaining relations with states in the region. In this context, the notion of 'good neighborhood relations' in the language of RF foreign policy particularly refers to the geography of the USSR within the Near Abroad.^[7]

The Near Abroad which refers to a collaboration-oriented approach in the geography of the USSR can be described as a cornerstone^[8] of the Russian security and foreign affairs policy in the first period of the RF and a vital area of interest.^[9] With this term, the RF also set out to reveal the differences between the West and itself in terms of approach and interest concerning this

geography.^[10] This is because the 'Near Abroad/Neighborhood Relation' which occupies/is expected to occupy an important place in the security understanding of every state gained a special meaning for the RF and became even more important. The RF which was aware that it would not have a global power after the Cold War specified the Eurasian geography^[11] as a primary goal and aimed to pursue efficient policies in the Near Abroad instead of far geographies such as Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East.^[12] The RF, which considered the effectiveness to be gained in the Eurasian geography as a 'stepping stone', designed to regain a strong status in international relations by displaying a rational/realistic stance.^[13] In brief, the 'Near Abroad Policy' of the RF is a foreign policy approach designed to create a ripple effect, similar to casting a stone into a pond.^[14]

Another dimension of the change in the RF foreign policy is the obligation for an approach based on 'national interests' rather than 'class interests' which was adopted in the Cold War era. In the new international community order which emerged after the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc, the sovereign states which were members of the former Eastern Bloc sought to establish policies prioritizing national interests. This condition naturally obliged the RF to adopt a more realistic approach in the foreign policy.^[15] Within the scope of the Near Abroad Policy, the RF intended to not only shorten the time of the 'longing for becoming a great power again', but also repair their national honor which was twisted in the wind upon the dissolution of the USSR based on a model intending an equal relation with the West. In this way, they aimed to legalize their presence in the region by reinforcing their 'first among equals' position in the Near Abroad and soothe possible reactions to come from the West. Therefore, the process of repairing the Russian national honor employing the term Near Abroad was also considered a tool for ensuring the international reputation of the RF.^[16]

Another relationship between focusing on national interests and the Near Abroad is the construction of the Russian national identity also outside the RF frontiers. The 'Russian diaspora' which emerged within this framework was intended to be used as a tool, which is also based on the Near Abroad geography. Since the Russians living in the geography of Near Abroad became a minority, the goal of protecting their rights was a tangible projection of this purpose.^[17] The RF aimed to keep the Russian national identity alive also outside the RF frontiers by establishing a bond between the global power they intended to regain and the Russian identity in this region so that it would reinforce the Russian identity also within the RF frontiers. In other words, the RF accepted the geography where the Russian minority existed as a 'private zone of influence'.^[18] In brief the existence of Russian ethnic in the Near Abroad was the 'Nearest Abroad' for the RF.

However, it would not be wise to expect the RF to 'suddenly break away from the USSR dream', because multi-dimensional bonds in this geography are not revocable although they include problems and dilemmas.^[19] The Near Abroad comprises territories that the Russians have been articulated since the 15th century and dominated by expanding in time until the dissolution of the USSR. It has an important place in Russian history.^[20] Also in terms of the Russians, this geography is an area with a sense of cultural belonging from many aspects other than its geographical proximity and historical bonds. In terms of the RF, an important element in the embodiment of cultural belonging is the existence of the abovementioned Russians who live in this region. The protection instinct of the RF inherited from the USSR became more apparent when the aforementioned Russians became a minority in the relevant states. Therefore, it is pretty normal for the Russians to accept the Near Abroad within the RF's sphere of influence because the Near Abroad geography, as in the example of Commonwealth and Francophonie, also presents a psychological property mixing up even in internal affairs due to physical, historical and cultural reasons.^[21] In other words, the Near Abroad is an 'internal imperial area' for the Russians and is more privileged than the geography of

the former Eastern Bloc which they considered an 'external imperial area' and rapidly fell under the influence of the West.^[22]

Deep historical customs are also important for the RF's approach to the geography of the Near Abroad. It should also be considered that the Russians, who accepted themselves as a 'super power' for centuries before the Cold War, have always been displaying such mood toward smaller and weaker states in their geography.^[23] In the historical process, there has been a continuous relationship between the geography dominated by the Russians and the Russian identity and Russian national goals. Therefore, the Near Abroad is accepted to be the frontiers of the RF in terms of the Russian elite.^[24] In the new order which emerged after the dissolution of the USSR, the RF foreign policy cannot be evaluated independently from the aforementioned historical perspective. A contrary approach will cloud the truth of the evaluations.^[25] The logic of Tsardom-USSR domestic and foreign policy which continued until the late 20th century was substantially excluded after the Cold War. However, as referred to by Trenin and Tellal, this did not mean that the aforementioned historical factors were completely forgotten by the Russian state in the foreign policy understanding designed in line with the realities of the new era. The aforementioned Near Abroad Policy is actually considered to be one of the aiseways of being a global power, which is also mentioned above.^[26] There is also such a bond between the historical subconscious and imperial culture and the Near Abroad, which will be discussed below.

During the first years of the RF, the Near Abroad Policy was intended to be put into practice via the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In other words, the CIS was considered a corporate tool legalizing the RF's dominance via the Near Abroad. Also, the Russian elite found the CIS useful for multipolarity developed against the USA and grounded on maintaining its integrity.^[27] In this context, the RF had a variety of efforts for strengthening the CIS; however, these attempts did not bring the expected success. This failure was caused by the hesitant approach of the member states against the RF's desire for a CIS under their own supervision. In contrast to the RF which regarded the CIS as a strategic priority, the member states did not display the same stance.^[28] The RF was not able to progress with the CIS adequately and lost its effectiveness in the geography of the Near Abroad until Putin's government and then it has begun to make multi-dimensional attempts in the region since 2000.^[29] To put it another way, the Policy of Near Abroad has survived in the RF foreign policy approach. The RF has chosen to obtain the desired effect through bilateral relations rather than the CIS.^[30] Putin's policies toward Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, which are thought to have inadequate collaboration within the CIS since his first period are an indicator of the CIS' inability to provide the desired collaboration. In addition, Putin has stressed that strengthening the relations with the CIS members is an essential priority of the Russian foreign policy and made the RF's power be felt by virtually shuttling back and forth in this geography.^[31] As a matter of fact, since Putin came to power, the RF has displayed a more active approach in contrast to the passive foreign policy. In this context, the power and effectiveness of the RF have come into prominence on the political, economic, military, and cultural basis in the geography of the Near Abroad.^[32] In other words, while the Near Abroad used to be mentioned and qualified as the focus of the foreign policy strategy in the first years, it began to be used less often in the language of Russian foreign policy in the forthcoming periods. However, it has continued its existence and influence as a term whose importance has never been lost. In this context, it has always preserved its priority and existence in the foreign policy route followed by Putin.^[33]

Stance of the RF in the Syrian Crisis

When considering the Syrian problem from the perspective of the RF, it is seen at the first glance that this geography remains outside the term 'Near Abroad'. In addition, when looking at the Cold War years, the problem is important for the RF because it is the most apparent example of the presence of the USSR in the Middle East, is a result of the 'continuity in state' principle and is 'the first trial outside the term Near Abroad'. Also, it is of indispensable quality due to the 'national interests' axis which is a basic foreign policymaker of the RF era. Additionally, the Arab Spring process is another phenomenon to be taken into consideration in terms of Russian foreign policy due to various reasons. Especially the inclusion of Syria in the process indicates that the RF cannot remain indifferent to the issue. Therefore, the Syrian problem is a vital issue for the RF due to its importance from a variety of aspects. The issue will be discussed based on these factors below.

Presence of the RF in the Middle East

One of the most important incidents of modern world history, the dissolution of the USSR, led to a sudden rise of geopolitical and social realities. The sudden collapse of the Russian power ended the bipolar Cold War and created a 'new Russian state'. This state cannot be described as a natural continuation of the Russian state tradition. However, it cannot be considered as an entity completely outside this historical line. The Russian influence in the Middle East is a typical projection of this situation. It is plausible to evaluate the RF, which is not a new subject in the region, as a new successor of inheritance with a long-standing background and rooted relations. Thus, among the USSR states, the RF is the only state still desiring to pursue an independent and active policy in the Middle East, which is not surprising.^[34]

The interest of the Russians in the Arab World was too limited before the USSR. The Middle East which was not accepted to be a basic area of interest in the Tsardom era did not attract much attention during the establishment of the USSR either. This approach of the USSR which believed that the Arab geography had no potential for revolution began to change toward the end of World War II and evolved in a different direction when the Cold War started.^[35] The Russian 'zero-sum game' approach during the Cold War also applied to the Middle East. The logic 'What is good for the West is bad for the Russians and what is good for the Russians is bad for the West' became a determinant in the Middle East policies of the USSR.^[36]

As is known, the world was divided into two great poles between 1945 and 1990 which were called the Cold War era and the USSR led one of these groups. Besides geographies shared between the blocs, regions were witnessing a conflict of influence. The USSR specified a policy toward the Middle East within the frame of the strategy of increasing their power in conflict areas near Moscow rather than Washington. From the Soviet perspective, the withdrawal of the British left a gap in the Middle East. Additionally, although the region was less important than Central and Eastern Europe, it had the lowest risk in terms of Soviet expansion. This is because the impact of the USA in the region was not as high as in Western Europe.^[37] The USSR perceived the expansion in the Middle East also in the intellectual plan and believed that the gap in the Middle East could be filled in this respect, considering that the conflict between the blocs was also an intersystem competition.^[38] The states in the region were affected by this ideological competition and they were positioned by

choosing between the superpowers.^[39]

Also, security concerns were effective on the Middle East approach of the USSR. Preventing or at least reducing a military or strategic threat to come from the south to the Soviet zone of influence was an important reason in the Middle East policy of the USSR. Therefore, the USSR adopted the strategy of preventing or minimizing the Western effect.^[40] In this context, it benefitted from the Arab-Israeli conflict in particular and also gave military support to the Arab states struggling against Israel which was the open ally of the USA in the region.^[41]

In the light of the aforementioned reasons, the USSR also had close contact with the Arab World in the Middle East, which was one of the zones of influence conflict, and developed close relations with certain states. These relations were based on the invitation of states such as Egypt, Syria, Algeria, and Yemen. This is because the USSR was an appealing ally for the inviters due to its geographical proximity, military capacity, and relative economic power. Also, the historical anti-Western tendency in the region played a key role in inviting the USSR. However, the communist ideology and communist parties in the region cannot be evaluated as a dominant factor in the USSR-Arab World convergence. Although the communist worldview became popular in this geography, these states did not adopt this ideology in general.^[42] Even though the USSR desired an ideological expansion there, their priority was to acquire influence by expanding their physical existence against the West.

Internal economic problems began in the 1970s and the recession in an economic and technological competition with the West began to affect the Middle East policies of the USSR. This stance of the USSR which decreased its support caused the states, with which it was in close contact, to dissatisfy. However, the real blow to the relations took place during the Gorbachev era. The *Glasnost and Perestroika* (openness and restructuring) policies developed by Gorbachev also affected the Soviet foreign policy and, in this context, the Middle East lost its primary importance. This is because the USSR lacked the tools to continue the relations; therefore, it had to retreat and even attempted to repair its diplomatic relations with Israel.^[43]

The sudden dissolution of the USSR immediately after the '*Glasnost and Perestroika*' policies necessitated reviewing the RF foreign policy rapidly in terms of foreign policymakers. Under the RF's goal of being an active foreign policy subject in the international community, the Middle East was regarded as an ideal region so that the RF could become an active power and be recognized as a 'world power' again in the region outside the Near Abroad. As is indicated above, the RF handled the former USSR geography as a basic priority after the dissolution of the USSR. Additionally, it sought to develop close relations with the Arab World and the Islamic geography, especially during Putin's era. This is because it was believed that geographical proximity and the Russians' traditional zone of influence in the region remained present as natural factors.^[44] Steps were taken by the RF-based on this approach aimed to enable the RF to have a voice again by diminishing the effect of the USA. Another goal of the RF was to gain the trust of the states in the region by this way and bring the region under its influence once again.^[45]

In addition to the aforementioned factors, some internal factors also make the RF inevitably become interested in the Middle East in order to maintain their presence in the region. The RF desires to develop good relations with the Islamic World as its population includes a considerable number of Muslim citizens. Additionally, it has to struggle against terrorism and separatist movements originating from the North Caucasus.^[46] Therefore, the RF has given particular importance to the Middle East within its foreign policy strategy in the light of specific motives that are delicate in its domestic and foreign policies.

The USSR-Syria and the RF-Syria Relations

Syria occupies a special place among the relations established by the USSR in the Middle East. This special relation began when the USSR established diplomatic relations with Syria in 1944 before the international community officially recognized Syria.^[47] Within the context of a secret treaty signed on 1 February 1946, the USSR promised to provide diplomatic and political support and military aid to Syria within the international community order.^[48]

The close relationship established between the Syrian Baath regime and the USSR as of 1966 played a more dominant role compared to other states and a more central role in terms of the USSR. In this special relation, the relative ideological closeness of the Baath regime to the USSR was remarkable.^[49] Within that framework/context, it's being a country whose relationship with the West is the most independent as one can get only further intensified USSR-Syria sympathy.^[50] Taking this quality of Syria into consideration, the USSR chose to disrupt the containment policy, pursued by the USA in the region, via Syria. On the other hand, the collaboration and convergence between the USSR and Syria got reinforced and improved within the conditions of incidents that happened in the nature of the Cold War.^[51]

Also, the Russian desire to gain access to the warm-water ports, which had been their historical goal since the Tsardom era, played a key role in the relations of the USSR with Syria. The USSR, which believed to strengthen its imperial power by gaining access to the Mediterranean, regarded the Eastern Mediterranean Sea as a point of departure and thus made an expansion on the basis of their collaboration with Syria. It is because the Black Sea is not accepted to be a convenient route for the USSR-RF to gain access to the warm waters since the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles which are described as Turkish straits in the international literature belong to Turkey, a member of NATO.^[52] Therefore another important reason behind why the USSR intended to establish permanent relations with Syria was the goal of being present in the Mediterranean. Within this framework, a naval base began to be constructed in Tartus in 1971 within the context of a treaty signed between the two states. This naval base allowed the USSR to establish a direct connection with the Mediterranean.^[53] Although the Tartus naval base was qualified to be a low-capacity base, it met all kinds of needs of Russian ships in the Middle East, Africa, and the Persian Gulf. Also, its strategic importance had a meaning beyond its military capacity.^[54] The importance of the base was better understood upon the emergence of the Syrian crisis, which will be mentioned below.

Within the scope of the developing relations, the USSR gained a bureaucratic power by accessing the Syrian state and played a key role in shaping the civil-military bureaucracy. Especially with the Hafiz Assad's government, the state apparatus in Syria were subjected to the Russian state discipline. Therefore, it is plausible to describe Syria as "the shadow of the USSR in the Middle East during the Cold War".^[55] In brief, the USSR-Syrian relations continued in a multi-dimensional and stable way until the dissolution of the USSR.^[56]

The progress in the relations which began to decline due to domestic affairs of the USSR in the first half of the 1980s continued to lose altitude until the dissolution of the USSR. Following the emergence of the RF as an international entity, its Middle East policies were also reviewed and began to regain power gradually, although not like before. The understanding of foreign policy which began especially in the Putin era and aimed to make the RF the focus of international relations again has naturally affected the Middle East. Although Syria is not one of the active or rich states of the region, it has regained importance and become prominent in Russian foreign policy. In this period when economic relations improved tangibly, Syria was also evaluated with a political and strategic approach for the RF. In this context, the geographical position of Syria which is convenient for

gaining access to the Mediterranean was also regarded as an important factor. This approach coincides with the USSR's strategy in the Cold War era. Additionally in the convergence between 2004 and 2008, the West made attempts conflicting with the RF's interests primarily such as the USA's intervention in Iraq in 2003 and NATO's expansion toward the geography of the former Eastern Bloc in 2004. In addition, the increasing effect of the USA in the Middle East pushed the RF to make a move.^[57] An important development related to the convergence in this period was that the Russian naval base in Tartus began to be modernized in 2008. The naval base where supply and maintenance services were provided aimed for a more active Russian presence in parallel with reinforcement of the relations.^[58]

The RF featured Syria in the Middle East again and increased the tangible collaboration, thus resulting in a compulsory reflection on the Syrian front. The fact that Moscow's stance took place in a period when Syria began to be oppressed in international relations enforced the improvement and further convergence of relations on the Baath regime as a necessity. An important turning point within this framework was the oppression imposed on Syria with resolution 1559 of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). An increase of the international pressure triggered the Damascus regime to direct toward the RF, which led to the rise of a ground desired by Putin.^[59] Therefore, the Syrian Baath regime evaluated the relations with the RF beyond an ordinary relation based on mutual interests and had to assess them as a 'matter of survival' from their perspective. As a matter of fact, the Assad regime within this framework exhibited a parallel stance with the Moscow government in domestic affairs and foreign policy of the RF and supported Moscow contrary to the general trend in the international community. For instance, they supported the North Caucasus policy of the RF and became the second state openly supporting the RF after Belarus during the Georgia intervention in 2008. This stance of Syria was associated with its relative independence from the USA and obligation to collaborate with the RF compared to the other states in the region. In this way, it probably expected diplomatic protection against threats from the USA and Israel. Another factor was that such a convergence was to provide an international reputation and self-confidence for both parties as in the Cold War era.^[60] This determination by Kreutz was remarkable because it was made before the civil war in Syria and gradually became a tangible reality in the advancing stages of the Syrian crisis. It is possible to assert that the RF and thus the Baath regime gained a relative reputation in the region especially against the latent and/or open dominance desire of the USA in the region.

The RF-Syria Relation During the Arab Spring

At the beginning of the Arab Spring, the RF displayed a balanced stance against the situation. Pointing out positive and negative aspects of developments in this geography, Putin stressed the Russians' interest in democratic demands. He showed a pragmatic approach to the issue and did not perceive the civil commotions breaking out in Tunisia and Egypt as an important threat against the interests of the RF. Indeed he had an effort to establish a close relation with Morsi who came to power in Egypt. This approach was also a result of closer relations of both states with the West as a tradition.^[61] In other words, the RF did not play a very active role and remained cautious in the first stage of the Arab Spring until the civil uprisings had started in Syria.^[62]

When the Arab Spring started in Libya, the perspective of the RF began to change. Putin stated that the Arab Spring was heading toward a mistake although he had different thoughts on this issue from Medvedev, the RF President of the period. Especially after the UNSC's resolution 1973 which was accepted as a result of the abstention of the RF and China, NATO's intervention in Libya

disturbed the RF. The military intervention serving as a model and its possibility for Syria pushed the RF toward a serious change of perspective.^[63] In the face of the events in Libya, Moscow began to use the term “external intervention” more often and made the language of foreign policy during the Arab Spring negative.^[64] Comparing its stance at the beginning of the Arab Spring, the RF made a sharp change of policy and began to pursue a more active policy and support considerably the Assad regime upon inclusion of Syria in the process.^[65]

The RF which had no more allies in the region except for Syria after the end of the Gaddafi era in Libya assumed a clear stance toward the Syrian issue. This is because Syria, compared to Libya was a more rooted state with which the RF had a closer alliance relationship and the RF had many reasons to protect the Assad power in Syria. Among these reasons were a variety of current interests as in the example of economic interests. However, long-term national interests were more important for the RF. The strategy of ‘being a global power again’, which is the main goal of the RF foreign policy, by maintaining their military existence in the Mediterranean was the prominent approach here.^[66] RF’s stance toward the Syrian problem indicated that they intended to be active in and around Syria by giving a diplomatic signal to the West.^[67]

The RF’s viewpoint of the aforementioned Syrian issue and the posture of Syria in the Arab Spring process makes it possible to figure out the steps taken by the RF via the Syrian policy. Therefore, the RF used their veto right three times in 2011, 2012, and 2014 primarily by playing their permanent membership card in order not to make an attempt like the UNSC’s resolution 1973 and diplomatically blocked a military intervention into Syria.^[68] Committer stressed that one of the motives behind these vetoes was the message that Putin intended to give to the domestic public opinion. Accordingly, a ‘Strong Russia’ perception was intended to be consolidated and Putin made a move against the opposition especially due to the uprisings which began in Russia in early 2012 and contained demands like in the Arab Spring.^[69]

When the Syrian crisis began to deepen, the Assad regime became fairly indispensable for the RF in terms of its importance. One of the most important indicators within this framework was the Russian troops settled in Syria with the invitation of the Assad regime. Due to the ground that he lost during the civil war, Assad officially invited the RF to his country in September 2015. Upon this invitation, the RF was officially involved in the Syrian civil war. An important step that occurred synchronously with the military operation was the Hmeimim airbase established in Latakia. Through this airbase, the RF intervened in Syria using all elements of their armed forces and all kinds of opportunities. On the other hand, this intervention also was the first intervention outside the geography of the former USSR.^[70] With the naval base expanded and the airbase established, the RF reinforced their permanence, dissuasiveness, and display of force policy in Syria.^[71] In brief, the RF gained an important military influence in the Eastern Mediterranean after many years with the moves they made upon the official invitation of Syria. With this move, Moscow gave a global message and showed that they would never allow intervention in Syria like the USA’s in the Middle East.^[72] The aforementioned military influence formed a basis for the RF to be more active concerning the Syrian problem in the advancing period.

Present Posture of the RF in the Syrian Crisis

In the Arab Spring, many outcomes appeared within the frame of the Syrian crisis. A part of these outcomes changed in time due to the dynamic aspect of the Syrian problem and headed toward an opposite direction. Besides surprising relations and unpredictable outcomes, there were issues with uncertainties. The same condition was also observed in the RF in terms of the Arab Spring and

the Syrian Crisis. The RF's approach since the beginning of the problem and its posture in this situation was affected by the aforementioned different conditions.

An unpredictable outcome of the Arab Spring was that the RF appeared as a more active entity in the Middle East. It had a relative weight during the USSR era but this condition which turned into the most serious conflict between the RF and the West since the Cold War due to the Arab Spring and especially the Syrian crisis was far beyond predictions. The RF which faced off against the West due to its stance toward the Syrian crisis took the risk of its relations with the West spoil seriously.^[73] This approach of the RF created a similar perception in the Arab World and the Syrian crisis was regarded as a matter of conflict between the RF and the USA rather than an intraregional issue.^[74]

When the Arab Spring uprisings also started in Libya and especially in Syria, the RF not only took part in a geopolitical struggle against the West but also took a stance against the approach of liberal democracy originating from the West. They claimed that the West used liberal democracy as a tool of military intervention and in this way grounded on strengthening their partners in the geography. However, the RF's thesis stressed the necessity of reminding the liability of not intervening in internal affairs based on the dominance of states. The RF had the same opinion with the West concerning the necessity of reforms and highlighted that these reforms were to be made with internal dynamics rather than external pressure.^[75]

With its stance toward Syria, the RF specified the Eastern Mediterranean as a center of adherence. Therefore, the Russian state intelligence allied with the Assad regime in Syria due to the advantages provided by the aforementioned factors. Also, it should be noted that the RF is a settled actor with the longest effectiveness in the region within the USSR-RF continuation. Thus, it will be plausible to accept the RF as 'a de facto intraregional actor' independent from the geographical criterion for today. In sum, the RF, owing to its permanent relation with Syria has not only adhered to the Mediterranean but also protected its physical bond with the Middle East. This demonstrated why the RF has pursued such a sensitive policy taking all risks in the Syrian issue.

The Syrian Crisis in Terms of the Near Abroad

Another dimension the RF focuses on the Syrian issue is psycho-strategic. Upon the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the USSR, the Russian state intelligence developed the following approach based on the aforementioned Near Abroad: The RF is no more a global power. It is an exhausted state which has lost their opportunities and abilities, struggles to survive and has a limited power. In such a case, it should not make an effort in regions such as Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Middle East where they were dominant/active or had a struggle of influence in the Cold War, until they regained their power. The RF should primarily focus on the Near Abroad and protect their effectiveness there without distributing their power to other regions. The Near Abroad is the former USSR territories. This policy, which is described as 'Backyard' or 'Close Stranger', was primarily put into practice by the CIS; however, this did not yield expected outcomes. Together with Putin's government, this geography has been taken into consideration via different methods and reflowered within the RF's foreign policy.

Considering the geography of the Near Abroad, Syria remains outside this area. In addition, Syria has a privileged place remaining from the Cold War. One of the most important indicators for this is that Syria is the only place where it maintains its physical existence outside the USSR's geography and the Eastern Bloc. Although the naval base in Tartus was accepted as a facility with a limited capacity until it had been strengthened within the frame of the Syrian crisis, it was not closed

and this matter was never officially brought to agenda. Therefore, Syria can be accepted within the Near Abroad within the frame of the historical subconscious and close relations, which would be discussed below. In other words, ‘Syria is outside the Near Abroad; however, it is inside the Near Abroad.’

Besides the aforementioned geopolitical facts, the Syrian crisis reinforces the message “the RF is going back to its old days” which is tried to be given to the Russian domestic public opinion. Within this framework, the Georgia^[76] (2008) and Crimea^[77] (2014) interventions of the RF which remained silent, hopeless and ineffective in the face of problems in various geographies during the 1990s can be regarded as “a bear coming out of hibernation”. These interventions were within the Near Abroad. Although Syria remains within this area virtually or mentally, it is geographically outside the Near Abroad and is the first trial outside the Near Abroad. Therefore, Putin’s government which increased social motivation in the Russian domestic public opinion via the Syrian crisis gave a message to the international community to prove the fact that ‘There will be no game in Syria despite the RF’. The RF has created a perception that they are the primary actor to be taken into consideration and this condition is of equivalent quality with the role of the USSR in the Cold War. Considering this point of view, the RF has followed a successful strategy. Also with the Syrian move, the RF has actually expanded the frontiers of the Near Abroad. In other words, ‘Syria has become the Near Abroad of the RF in the Middle East. In brief, the ‘goal of being a global power again’ which was always on the agenda of the Russian foreign policy after the dissolution of the USSR and yet barely came into existence with the maturation of conditions has become tangible with the Syrian issue.

The Russian Historical Subconscious and The Imperial Culture

Considering in general terms, it is known that there are many matters to be discussed in the Syrian policy of the RF. The factors forming the intellectual base, on which this study was grounded, were discussed above. Reasons such as the multi-dimensional Syrian issue, relation of the Russians with Syria since the USSR era, and interests of the RF specific to the region and the era are undeniable criteria in terms of the RF’s stance toward the Syrian issue. In addition, an important and different factor in terms of the RF is the Russian state tradition and the ‘imperial culture’ which has an important place in this tradition.

Foreign policymakers examine certain criteria except for the current situation when studying the subjects they are active in. It is because it will not be a correct approach to compare these people to ‘a blank slate (tabula rasa)’. Within this framework, the attitude of a nation with the help of beliefs, values, experiences, and emotions is also important data. In other words, the mind of a policymaker also reflects this diversity in society. Most factors such as culture, history, geography, economy, ideology, demography, and political institutions also shape the decision-making process of policymakers. The correlation between the national properties and foreign policy behaviors of a community in any geography is remarkable in terms of comparative foreign policy analyses.^[78]

The foreign policy and strategic goals of a country are shaped by not only the conditions of the international community but also the political, economic, socio-cultural, military, and geopolitical values of the relevant community. In this context, the establishment process of a state, important crises and fluctuations they face, social values, and matters like lifestyle which emerge in parallel with these values are important issues affecting the domestic and foreign policy. Values that dominate the decision mechanisms of a state are also closely related to the values system in the subconscious of that community. Therefore, the social subconscious is a phenomenon that is also

active in foreign policy.^[79]

Considering in terms of Russian history, it is seen that there have been authoritarian tendencies since the rise of the first Russian state. On the other hand, the Russian state tradition has followed an expansionist policy. During the Tsardom regime and communist-era which appeared after the Kievan Russia era, an occupation policy based on the military force was dominant. It has always adopted a suspicion and conflict model in its relations with its neighbors. Also, it had an *international savior* role with an ideological approach in the USSR era.^[80]

The Russian state which focused on obtaining “strong frontiers” in the first establishment period aimed to turn the balance of power in their own favor in the international power struggles during the Tsardom and the USSR era. The Russians which have always moved based on oppression and occupation within their millennial historical tradition have assumed a stance not trusting anyone and constantly being on guard.^[81] In other words, Russian history is a history of expansion and growth. In Russian political life, sequential and complementary basic thoughts aimed at expansion and growth have always been applied.^[82]

In his famous work translated into Turkish, Dugin suggests that it is not possible to imagine Russia without an empire. When examining Russian history; Dugin states that a mono-ethnic structure or a nation-state has never been realized and Russia has been an empire state since the beginning. He stresses that the “regional state/regional power status” imposed on the RF by the West is a suicide for the RF because this description corresponds to rhetoric preventing the Russians from becoming an empire.^[83]

Dugin indicates that one of the primary geopolitical needs of Russia is “the recovery of the empire”. Suggesting that the only way for geopolitical and strategic sovereignty is not dominating the Near Abroad, Dugin describes the recovery of the empire as an assurance and an essential condition of existing as an independent state. He claims that a contrary situation will lead to a disaster both for Russia and humanity.^[84]

One of the matters stressed by Dugin in the route drawn for Russia for the recovery of the empire is to head toward a far goal that may allow access to the warm waters. Suggesting that gaining access to the warm waters from the south and west will bring a geopolitical competence to Russia, Dugin defines the Afghanistan operation which is one of the reasons for the collapse of the USSR as a move in this direction. Dugin points out that Russia is obliged to try this way and believes that returning “as a reliable ally and a protective friend rather than a tyrant hangman” in the new era will be productive.^[85]

Eltchaninoff generally grounds the philosophy of Putin’s policy on two basic sources. They are, in parallel with the aforementioned matters, the idea of empire and dignification of war. The author who in his work mentions the interview that he conducted with Alexander Prokhanov remarks that Prokhanov also refers to the imperial tradition in Russian history and adds philosophical and ideological bases to Prokhanov’s approach who suggests that the fifth imperial period is back today for the Russians by discussing various possibilities.^[86]

It is possible to give many examples to this approach which has begun since the Kievan Russia era and is observed on the Tsardom-USSR-RF line and whose fundamentals were drawn above. Without going far back, it can be asserted that this historical subconscious was effective on the Georgia (2008) and Crimea (2014) interventions of the RF which has seriously recovered and regained power in the international community especially since Putin. These interventions are related to the conditions of the era and the official RF foreign policy and should be evaluated within the aforementioned ‘Near Abroad’ term and should be considered a reflection of the ‘imperial culture in the historical subconscious’ which forms the Russian state intelligence.

The stance of the RF toward the Syrian crisis has led to various interpretations. For example “an ongoing Cold War impact” is mentioned in the RF-Syrian relation.^[87] The same approach is generally mentioned for the RF’s Middle East policy.^[88] The point stressed here is an alliance relationship that developed on the basis of anti-Westernism and in which authoritarian regimes act shoulder to shoulder. Also just like in the Cold War era, there is an interest in problematic geographies and a tendency to at least get involved politically. Here the interest and particularly the intervention are in agreement with the foreign policy understanding of the RF and have been felt with the recovery of the RF. Syria in this sense has functioned as an important laboratory.

Tellal explains the presence of the RF in Syria with the ‘balance’ concept. The author stresses that there has always been a balance in important incidents in political history and an important curtain has been opened together during the Arab Spring. He highlights that with its military intervention in Syria, the RF intends to prevent the gendarme role of the USA and thus aims to establish a balance.^[89]

It is plausible to evaluate the stance of the RF toward the Syrian crisis within the frame of the aforementioned imperial culture. This is because the state tradition dating back to the USSR has also been effective on the RF’s interest in the Syrian issue from the intellectual aspect. Although the international legal order has forbidden using forces and deploying soldiers to the frontiers of another state, outside exceptions, it has slightly opened the door for ‘intervention with the invitation’ within the frame of the relevant state’s consent. In the Syrian crisis, such an invitation is considered a step taken for not only providing legitimacy and gaining interests for the RF, but also for the RF’s “longing for becoming a great power again” which is included in the official foreign policy language. However, it should be noted that this longing not only originates from the Cold War, but it is also closely related to the imperial culture in the historical subconscious. Within this framework, especially Dugin’s, Eltchaninoff’s and Prokhanov’s viewpoints coincide with the RF’s approach to the Arab Spring, based on the Syrian policy within the historical process.

Conclusion

The foreign policy strategy followed by the RF which was in the continuing state status after the dissolution of the USSR was shaped based on the post-Cold War realities. The Russian state apparatus which was aware of their limitations compared to the past never pushed aside an understanding based on the former USSR geography with a realistic approach. This new imperative situation which emerged after the glory of the USSR was not so desirable for the RF and was accepted as an “interim section period”. The recovery and a relative empowerment of the RF together with Putin primarily increased the RF’s effect on the Near Abroad. Then, the historical codes of the RF began to step in and turned into an ‘appearance in person during the Arab Spring and specific to Syria. In this context, it is necessary to accept the expansion of the Near Abroad understanding via Syria at the first opportunity. It is unthinkable that the ‘historical subconscious’ of nations which has been inherited from generation to generation is not reflected in international relations in any case.

In the Syrian issue which is a multi-dimensional and multi-lateral problem, the only way of understanding the RF’s stance is to figure out the historical background. The Russian presence which has developed and grown stronger in the Middle East since the Cold War has been reconceived during the Arab Spring specific to Syria. Historical and strong roots of the Assad regime’s relationship with the USSR and the RF are indispensable for both parties. In addition, the RF’s presence in Syria has deeper roots and within this framework, its *imperial culture* should not be

underestimated. Therefore, the RF's presence and insistent stance in Syria are actually not surprising at all. On the contrary, it will be surprised when it displays a different approach. In brief, the following argument by Trenin concerning Putin's policies actually sums up the issue: "Syria is always more than just Syria."^[90]

[1]Aleksandr Dugin, *Rus Jeopolitiği: Avrasyacı Yaklaşım*, İstanbul, Küre Yayınları, 2005, p. 21; Çağrı Erhan, "Türkiye ve Bölgesel Örgütler", Mustafa Aydın and Çağrı Erhan, eds, *Beş Deniz Havzasında Türkiye*, Ankara, Siyasal Kitabevi, 2006, p. 389-421; Alâeddin Yalçınkaya, *Kafkasya'da Siyasi Gelişmeler: Etnik Düğünden Küresel Kördüğüne*, Ankara, Lalezar Kitabevi, 2006, p. 253; Emel G. Oktay, "Türkiye'nin Avrasya'da Çok Taraflı Girişimlerine Bir Örnek: Karadeniz Ekonomik İşbirliği Örgütü", Mustafa Aydın, eds, *Türkiye'nin Avrasya Macerası 1989-2006 (Avrasya Üçlemesi II)*, Ankara, Nobel Yayın Dağıtım, 2007, p. 213-240.

[2]İdil Tuncer, "The Security Policies of the Russian Federation: The Near Abroad and Turkey", *Turkish Studies*, Cilt 1, No 2, 2000, p. 95-112; Dugin, *Rus Jeopolitiği: Avrasyacı Yaklaşım*, p. 21.

[3]Contrary to the common misconception, there is a 'continuing state' relationship between the USSR and the RF, not a succession. For the concept of 'continuing state' and the relationship between the USSR-RF. See: Selcen Nur Kışla, *Devletlerin Andlaşmalara Halefiyeti*, Ankara, Astana Yayınları, 2016, p. 25-31, 37-40.

[4]The term "Near Foreigner" is also used for the concept of "Near Abroad." For example, see: Helene Carrere D'Encausse, *İki Dünya Arasında Rusya*, çev. Reşat Uzmen, İstanbul, Ötüken Neşriyat, 2013, p 95-114; Jean-Robert Jouanny, *Putin Ne İstiyor?*, çev. Merve Öztürk, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2017, p. 95-113.

[5]Zeynep Dağı, "Rusya'nın Güvenlik Politikası ve Türkiye", Refet Yinanç and Hakan Taşdemir, eds, *Uluslararası Güvenlik Sorunları ve Türkiye*, Ankara, Seçkin Yayıncılık, 2002, p. 167-209.

[6]Tuncer, "The Security Policies of the Russian Federation: The Near Abroad and Turkey", p. 98; Mesut Hakkı Caşın and Giray Saynur Derman, *Rus Dış Politikasındaki Değişim ve Kremlin Penceresinden Yeni Ufuklar*, Ankara, SRT Yayınları, 2003, p. 149.

[7]Şener Aktürk, "Turkish-Russian Relations after the Cold War (1992-2002)". *Turkish Studies*, Cilt 7, No 3, 2006, p. 337-364; Asem Nauşabay Hekimoğlu, *Rusya'nın Dış Politikası I*, Ankara, Vadi Yayınları, 2007, p. 136; Osman Metin Öztürk, *Rusya Federasyonu Askerî Doktrini*, Ankara, Avrasya Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi Yayınları, 2001, p. 34.

[8]Tuncer, "The Security Policies of the Russian Federation: The Near Abroad and Turkey", p. 101-102.

[9]Caşın ve Derman, *Rus Dış Politikasındaki Değişim ve Kremlin Penceresinden Yeni Ufuklar*, p.

221.

[10]Volkan Tatar, “Russia’s Middle East Policy in the Context of Post-Cold War”, *The Journal of International Scientific Researches*, Vol. 3, No 2, p. 107-113.

[11]The term "Eurasia" is a geographical area that varies depending on the perspectives. In terms of RF's foreign policy and security perceptions, Eurasia should be understood primarily as the geography of the USSR and the former Eastern Bloc states adjacent to this geography.

[12]The term “Far Abroad” is used for these regions. See: Jouanny, *Putin Ne İstiyor?*, p.137-157.

[13]Dağı, “Rusya’nın Güvenlik Politikası ve Türkiye”, s. 192-195; Yalçınkaya, *Kafkasya’da Siyasi Gelişmeler: Etnik Düğümden Küresel Kördüğümüne*, p. 231.

[14]Bahadır Bumin Özarslan, *Yirmi Yıllık Bir Serüven: Karadeniz Ekonomik İşbirliği Örgütü (KEİÖ)-Kurum Yapısı, İç İşleyişi, Dış İlişkileri*, Ankara, Berikan Yayınevi, 2012, p. 356.

[15]Amin Saikal and William Maley, “From Soviet to Russian Foreign Policy”, Amin Saikal and William Maley, eds, *Russia in Search of its Future*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 102-122.

[16]Dağı, “Rusya’nın Güvenlik Politikası ve Türkiye”, p. 193-195.

[17]For detailed information on the Russians in the Near Abroad, see: İgor Alexandrovich Zevelev, *Russia and its New Diasporas*, Washington, The United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001; Sevinç Alkan Özcan, *Bir Sovyet Mirası: Rus Azınlıklar*, İstanbul, Küre Yayınları, 2005.

[18]Zeynep Dağı, *Kimlik, Milliyetçilik ve Dış Politika: Rusya’nın Dönüşümü*, Ankara, Boyut Kitapları, 2002, p.191-192.

[19]Erhan Büyükakıncı, “Türk-Rus İlişkilerinin Değerlendirilmesi: Güvenlik Sorunsalından Çok Boyutlu Derinliğe Geçiş”, Erhan Büyükakıncı and Eyüp Bacanlı, eds, *Sovyetler Birliği’nin Dağılmasından Yirmi Yıl Sonra Rusya Federasyonu: Türk Dilli Halklar-Türkiye ile İlişkiler*, Ankara, Atatürk Kültür Merkezi, 2012, p. 779-842.

[20]Mark Webber, “Russian Policy towards the Soviet Successor States”, Mike Bowker and Cameron Ross, eds, *Russia after the Cold War*, Essex, Pearson Education Limited, 2000, p. 239-257.

[21]Denis J. B. Shaw, *Russia in the Modern World: A New Geography*. Oxford and Massachusetts, Blackwell Publishers, 1999, p. 248, 255-256, 262.

[22]Leslie Holmes, “Russia’s Relations with the Former External Empire”, Amin Saikal and William Maley, eds, *Russia in Search of its Future*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 123-141; Aynı yönde bkz. D’Encausse, *İki Dünya Arasında Rusya*, p.197.

[23]Dmitri Trenin, “From Pragmatism to Strategic Choice: Is Russia’s Security Policy Finally Becoming Realistic?”, Andrew C. Kuchins, eds, *Russia after the Fall*, Washington D. C., Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002, p. 191.

[24]Fırat Purtaş, *Rusya Federasyonu Ekseninde Bağımsız Devletler Topluluğu*, Ankara, Platin, 2005, p. 130-131.

[25]Erel Tellal, “Zümrüdüanka: Rusya Federasyonu’nun Dış Politikası”, *Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, Cilt 65, No 3, 2010, p. 189-236.

[26]Özarslan, *Yirmi Yıllık Bir Serüven: Karadeniz Ekonomik İşbirliği Örgütü (KEİÖ)-Kurum Yapısı, İç İşleyişi, Dış İlişkileri*, p. 357.

[27]Rusya Federasyonu Ekseninde Bağımsız Devletler Topluluğu, p. 141, 146-150, 277.

[28]Kimlik, Milliyetçilik and Dış Politika: Rusya’nın Dönüşümü, p. 195-208; Caşın and Derman, *Rus Dış Politikasındaki Değişim and Kremlin Penceresinden Yeni Ufuklar*, p. 221-222.

[29]See: Merve İrem Yapıcı, *Rus Dış Politikasını Oluşturan İç Etkenler: Yeltsin and Putin Dönemleri*, Ankara, Uluslararası Stratejik Araştırmalar Kurumu Yayınları, 2010, p. 379-387; Tellal, “Zümrüdüanka: Rusya Federasyonu’nun Dış Politikası”, p. 225-227.

[30]See: Alexander Kozhemiakin and Roger E. Kanet , “Russia and its Western Neighbours in the Near Abroad”, Roger E. Kanet and Alexander Kozhemiakin, eds, *The Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*, London and New York, MacMillan Press Ltd and St. Martin’s Press Inc., 1997, p. 28-48; Webber, “Russian Policy towards the Soviet Successor States”, p. 245-251; John Berryman, “Russian Foreign Policy: An Overview”, Mike Bowker and Cameron Ross, eds, *Russia after the Cold War*, Essex, Pearson Education Limited, 2000, p. 336-358; Purtaş, *Rusya Federasyonu Ekseninde Bağımsız Devletler Topluluğu*, p. 180-187.

[31]Dale R Herspring and Peter Rutland, “Putin and Russian Foreign Policy”, Dale R. Herspring, eds, *Putin’s Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, USA, Rowman&Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2005, p. 259-292; Purtaş, *Rusya Federasyonu Ekseninde Bağımsız Devletler Topluluğu*, p. 178-180; Yapıcı, *Rus Dış Politikasını Oluşturan İç Etkenler: Yeltsin and Putin Dönemleri*, p. 424-434; Tellal, “Zümrüdüanka: Rusya Federasyonu’nun Dış Politikası”, p. 225.

[32]Volkan Tatar, “Russia’s Middle East Policy in the Context of Post-Cold War”, *The Journal of International Scientific Researches*, Cilt 3, No 2, p. 107-113.

[32]See: Jouanny, *Putin Ne İstiyor?*, p. 95-113.

[34]Andrej Kreutz, “The Geopolitics of Post-Soviet Russia and the Middle East”, *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No 1, 2002, p. 49-61.

[35]Alexey Malashenko, *Russia and the Arab Spring*, Moscow, Carnegie Moscow Center, 2013, p. 3-4; Dmitri Trenin, *Russia in the Middle East: Moscow’s Objectives, Priorities, and Policy Drivers*, New York, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016, p. 2.

[36]Inna Lazareva, *Bear Trap: Russia’s Self-Defeating Foreign Policy in the Middle East*, London, The Henry Jackson Society, 2012, p. 8.

[37]Walter Laqueur, “Russia Enters the Middle East”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 47, No 2, 1969, p.

296-308.

[38] Malashenko, *Russia and the Arab Spring*, p. 4.

[39] Camilla Committeri, *When Domestic Factors Prevail Upon Foreign Ambitions: Russia's Strategic Game in Syria*, Roma, Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2012, p. 4.

[40] Hilal Khasan, "Russia's Middle Eastern Policy", *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Cilt 59, No 1/4, 1998, p. 84-105.

[41] *Russia and the Arab Spring*, p. 4-5.

[42] Laqueur, "Russia Enters the Middle East", p. 296-297, 302.

[43] Malashenko, *Russia and the Arab Spring*, p. 5.

[44] Khasan, "Russia's Middle Eastern Policy", p. 91-92; Andrej Kreutz, *Syria: Russia's Best Asset in the Middle East*, Paris, IFRI Russia/NIS Center, 2010, p. 5.

[45] Marcin Kaczmarek, *Russia's Middle East Policy after the Arab Revolutions*, Warsaw, Centre for Eastern Studies, 2011, p. 2; İlyas Kemaloğlu, *Rusya'nın Ortadoğu Politikası*, Ankara, Ortadoğu Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi, 2012, p. 14; Trenin, *Russia in the Middle East: Moscow's Objectives, Priorities, and Policy Drivers*, s. 1.

[46] Kreutz, *Syria: Russia's Best Asset in the Middle East*, s. 5; Kaczmarek, *Russia's Middle East Policy after the Arab Revolutions*, s.1-3; Malashenko, *Russia and the Arab Spring*, s. 6-7; Trenin, *Russia in the Middle East: Moscow's Objectives, Priorities, and Policy Drivers*, s. 1.

[47] Rami Ginat, "The Soviet Union and the Syrian Ba'th Regime: From Hesitation to Rapprochement", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Cilt 36, No 2, 2000, s. 150-171; Kreutz, *Syria: Russia's Best Asset in the Middle East*, p. 7.

[48] Ginat, "The Soviet Union and the Syrian Ba'th Regime: From Hesitation to Rapprochement", p.156; Bilal Karabulut, "Karadeniz'den Ortadoğu'ya Uzanan Bir Dış Politika: Geçmişten Günümüze Suriye-Rusya İlişkileri", *Karadeniz Araştırmaları*, Cilt 4, No 15, 2007, p. 67-88.

[49] Laqueur, "Russia Enters the Middle East", p. 302-303.

[50] Kreutz, *Syria: Russia's Best Asset in the Middle East*, p. 5.

[51] Karabulut, "Karadeniz'den Ortadoğu'ya Uzanan Bir Dış Politika: Geçmişten Günümüze Suriye-Rusya İlişkileri", p. 70-72.

[52] Dugin, *Rus Jeopolitiği: Avrasyacı Yaklaşım*, p. 176.

[53] The phrase, "The historical goal of the Russians was to reach the warm seas -Mediterranean- yet, it was not successful," which is widely spoken in the Turkish public, needs criticism. Because it is known that this thesis, which has been told like a nursery rhyme at every stage of education life, has

actually collapsed for more than 40 years as Russians exist in the Mediterranean via Syria. For detailed information, see: Merve Suna Özel, "Rusya'nın Sıcak Denizlerdeki Son Kalesi: Suriye", Ümit Özdağ, eds, *Küçük Orta Doğu Suriye: İç Çatışmadan Orta Doğu İç Savaşına Giden Yolun İlk Durağı Mı?*, Ankara, Kripto Basım Yayım, 2012, p.123-150.

[54]Committeri, *When Domestic Factors Prevail Upon Foreign Ambitions: Russia's Strategic Game in Syria*, p. 3; Emre Erşen, "Rusya'nın Arap Baharı Politikası", Armağan Gözakman and Perihan Paksoy, eds, *Arap Baharı Üzerine Değerlendirmeler*, Ankara, Detay Yayıncılık, 2014, p. 115-135.

[55]See: Karabulut, "Karadeniz'den Ortadoğu'ya Uzanan Bir Dış Politika: Geçmişten Günümüze Suriye-Rusya İlişkileri", s. 76-78; Aynı yönde bkz. Lazareva, *Bear Trap: Russia's Self-Defeating Foreign Policy in the Middle East*, s. 15.

[56]Sami Kiraz, "Bağımsızlıktan 21. Yüzyıla Suriye-Rusya Siyasi İlişkileri", Mehmet Akif Okur and Nuri Salık, eds, *Bağımsızlıktan Arap Baharı'na Suriye: İç ve Dış Politika*, Ankara, Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, 2016, p. 291-312.

[57]Kreutz, *Syria: Russia's Best Asset in the Middle East*, p. 5, 7-9, 14-15; Kiraz, "Bağımsızlıktan 21. Yüzyıla Suriye-Rusya Siyasi İlişkileri", p. 121.

[58]Erşen, "Rusya'nın Arap Baharı Politikası", p. 121.

[59]Mark N. Katz, "Putin's Foreign Policy toward Syria", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 10, No 1, 2006, p. 53-62.

[60]Kreutz, *Syria: Russia's Best Asset in the Middle East*, p. 12-12, 15.

[61]Dmitri Trenin, "Russia's Middle-East Gambit", *Tablet Magazine*, 30 Mayıs 2013; Roland Dannreuther, "Russia and the Arab Spring: Supporting the Counter-Revolution", *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 37, No 1, 2015, s. 77-94.

[62]Mark N. Katz, "Putin's Foreign Policy toward Syria", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 10, No 1, 2006, s. 53-62; Erşen, "Rusya'nın Arap Baharı Politikası", p. 119, 123-125.

[63]Erşen, "Rusya'nın Arap Baharı Politikası", p. 119, 123-125; Dannreuther, "Russia and the Arab Spring: Supporting the Counter-Revolution", p. 82-84.

[64]Kaczmarek, *Russia's Middle East Policy after the Arab Revolutions*, p. 4.

[65]Katz, "Putin's Foreign Policy toward Syria", p. 38.

[66]Malashenko, *Russia and the Arab Spring*, s. 12; Erşen, "Rusya'nın Arap Baharı Politikası", p. 119, 121-122; Aynı yönde bkz. Trenin, "Russia's Middle-East Gambit", p. 2.

[67]Salih Yılmaz, *Rusya Neden Suriye'de?*, Ankara, Yazar Yayınları, 2016, p. 170.

[68]Dannreuther, "Russia and the Arab Spring: Supporting the Counter-Revolution", p. 82, 84.

[69]Committeri, *When Domestic Factors Prevail Upon Foreign Ambitions: Russia's Strategic Game in Syria*, p. 7-8.

[70]Anna Maria Dyner, *Three Months of Russian Intervention in Syria: The Military and Political Implications*, Poland, The Polish Institute of International Affairs, 2016, s. 1-2; Ahmet Sapmaz, *Rusya Federasyonu'nun Askerî Güvenlik Refleksindeki Dönüşüm: Askerî Doktrinler, Askerî Müdahaleler, Nedenler*, Ankara, Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, 2018, s. 205-206; Halit Gülşen, *Rusya'nın Askeri Yayılmacılığı: Gürcistan, Ukrayna ve Suriye Müdahaleleri*, Ankara, Ortadoğu Araştırmaları Merkezi, 2018, s. 14-15.

[71]Dyner, *Three Months of Russian Intervention in Syria: The Military and Political Implications*, s. 1-2; Mehmet Sait Dilek, "Rusya Federasyonu-Suriye İlişkilerinin Temelleri", *Kastamonu Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, Cilt 16, No 2, 2017, s. 58-82.

[72]Erşen, "Rusya'nın Arap Baharı Politikası", s. 74, 77-78.

[73]Dannreuther, "Russia and the Arab Spring: Supporting the Counter-Revolution", s. 77-78, 86.

[74]Malashenko, *Russia and the Arab Spring*, p. 14.

[75]Dannreuther, "Russia and the Arab Spring: Supporting the Counter-Revolution", p. 92-93.

[76]RF'nin Gürcistan müdahalesiyle ilgili örnek olarak bkz. Andrei Illarionov, "The Russian Leadership's Preparation for War, 1999-2008", Svante E. Cornell and Frederick Starr, eds, *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, 2009, s. 49-84; Şafak Oğuz, "Rusya-Gürcistan Savaşı ve Kafkasya'da Değişen Dengeler", Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, eds, *Türk Dış Politikasında Strateji Arayışları*, Ankara, Barış Kitabevi, 2011, p. 441-487.

[77]For the evaluation of the annexation of Crimea by the RF in terms of Ukrainian domestic law and international law, see: Bahadır Bumin Özarlan, "Soğuk Savaş Sonrasında Kırım'ın ve Kırım Tatar Türklerinin Statüsü", *Uluslararası Hukuk ve Politika*, Vol. 10, No 39, 2014, p. 97-135.

[78]Valerie M. Hudson and Christopher S. Vore, "Dış Politika Analizinin Dünü, Bugünü ve Yarını", Erol Göka and Işık Kuşçu, eds, *Uluslararası İlişkilerin Psikolojisi*, Ankara, Avrasya Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi Yayınları, 2002, p. 14, 16.

[79]Mesut Hakkı Caşın, *Rus İmparatorluk Stratejisi*, Ankara, Avrasya Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi Yayınları, 2002, s. 17.

[80]A.g.e., p. 18, 20-22; Osman Metin Öztürk, *Rusya Federasyonu Askerî Doktrini*, Ankara, Avrasya Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi Yayınları, 2001, s. 5-11.

[81]Caşın, *Rus İmparatorluk Stratejisi*, s. 23.

[82]Öztürk, *Rusya Federasyonu Askerî Doktrini*, s. 16-17.

[83]Dugin, *Rus Jeopolitiği: Avrasyacı Yaklaşım*, s. 31-38.

[84]A.g.e., p. 9-10.

[85]A.g.e., p.13-14.

[86]Michel Eltchaninoff, *Putin'in Aklında Ne Var?*, çev. Melike Işık Durmaz, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2017, p. 119, 140.

[87]For example, see: Kreutz, *Syria: Russia's Best Asset in the Middle East*, p. 9, 22; Theodor Tudoroiu, "The Arab Spring: Last Episode of the Cold War", *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 19, No 3, 2013, p. 304-320; Dmitri Trenin, "Russia is Defending its Own Interests with its Stance on Syria". *Financial Times*, 2 Ekim 2013, p. 1-2; Dmitri Trenin, "Putin's Syrian Game Plan", *World Today*, 7 Ekim 2013, p. 1-2.

[88]For example, see: Alain Gresh, "Russia's Return to the Middle East", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 28, No 1, 1998, p. 67-77; Khasan, "Russia's Middle Eastern Policy", s. 87, 91-92, 100-101; Kreutz, *Syria: Russia's Best Asset in the Middle East*, p. 8.

[89]Erel Tellal, "Kronik-Rusya Suriye'de Ne Arıyor?", *Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol. 70, No 4, 2015, p. 1047-1050.

[90]Dmitri Trenin, "Putin's Syrian Game Plan", *World Today*, p. 2.

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