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PUTIN'S WAR IN SYRIA: RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND THE PRICE OF AMERICA'S ABSENCE, By Richard Dietrich*, Published by I. B. Tauris, Year of Publishing: 2021. Subject Area: Russian Foreign Policy, Russia in the Middle East. Book Type: Political/Military Analysis. Total Number of Pages: 256. ISBN: 978-0755634637, hardback, \$27.00.

This book is a study of Russia's role in the Syrian civil war as well as an examination of the place of the Middle East in Russia's overall foreign policy. In the course of examining these issues, the book documents how Russian intervention changed the course of the Syrian civil war and the impact it has had in Syria in the absence of a strong American presence to counter Russia. In addition, it looks at how the Russian military has applied lessons learned in the Soviet war in Afghanistan in its operations in Syria, how Syria could be a guide to how Russia would conduct future wars, Syria as an arena for Russia's great power ambitions in competition with the West, and western misconceptions and misperceptions of Russia.

The book is divided into an introduction and two parts. Part One, "Russia and the Middle East", is comprised of the first five chapters. These chapters provide the historical background to the current Russian involvement in Syria in the broader context of Russian interest and involvement in the Middle East from Tsarist times to Vladimir Putin. Part Two, "Putin's Syria Intervention", is made up of chapters six through twelve. The chapters examine different aspects of the Russian involvement in Syria: the military campaign itself; the domestic campaign to garner public support for the operations in Syria; Russian diplomatic efforts and diplomacy combined with military operations; Russia's relationship with Israel in the context of Syria; Russia's relations with regional Sunni powers (Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Jordan), Iran and Assad; Russian and Syrian resources. The conclusion summarizes the major points of the book and provides suggestions for western policies to counter Russian moves not only in Syria itself, but in the Middle East as a whole.

Putin's War in Syria provides an excellent, concise summary of Russia's long interest in the Middle East as a part of its broader concern with its southern border, which puts the current Russian involvement in Syria in a clearer context. The second part of the book provides a clear picture of Russia's moves and motivations, and how the west has generally failed to properly understand

Russia's goals in Syria. The author also presents her views on Russia's possible future moves in Syria and the Middle East.

It should be kept in mind that this book was written shortly before the ongoing war in Ukraine began, and it is clear that this conflict is currently occupying much more of the Kremlin's attention than Syria. In addition, if reports of Russian military losses in Ukraine are accurate, Putin has fewer men and less military hardware available for operations in Syria. As a result, some of the author's ideas on the trajectory of Russian involvement in Syria may now be in need of revision. Nonetheless, however Russia's involvement in Syria develops, this book is an excellent record of Russian military operations in Syria and the Russian position there just prior to the start of the war in Ukraine. As a result, future researchers investigating Russian involvement in Syria post-Ukraine, or making comparisons of Russian military and political moves in Syria and Ukraine have a very accurate snapshot of the Russian involvement in Syria into 2021.

On a final note, the only minor flaw with this otherwise fine work is the somewhat glaring error on page 19 where 1979 is given as the year of Stalin's death. While this is clearly a typographical error, it is distracting in a scholarly work.

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