

Determinants of the Military Intervention of the Russian Federation in Syria

Uwarunkowania interwencji militarnej Federacji Rosyjskiej w Syrii

Summary:

The USSR's understanding of the Middle East through the prism of “the cold war” ideological competition with the United States of America was replaced by pragmatism. The aspiration for the protection of national interests in conditions of implemented by the Russian Federation multipole world policy may be assumed as the cause of the military intervention in the Syrian Arab Republic. The following determinants influenced the military engagement in Syria: historical-cultural – resulting from the relations which connected both countries during the “cold war” and the vision of the role of the Orthodox church; political – reconstruction of the position on the international arena, competition with the USA, protection of domestic security; military – enabling the projection of power; economic – protection and development of economy.

Keywords:

Russian Federation, Syria, USSR, military conflict, United States of America, military intervention

Streszczenie:

Pojmowanie przez Związek Socjalistycznych Republik Radzieckich Bliskiego Wschodu przez pryzmat „zimno wojennej” ideologicznej rywalizacji ze Stanami Zjednoczonymi Ameryki ustąpiło miejsca pragmatyzmowi. Dążenie do zabezpieczenia interesów narodowych w warunkach realizowanej przez Federację Rosyjską polityki świata wielobiegunowego można przyjąć jako przyczynę interwencji militarnej w Syryjskiej Republice Arabskiej. Na zaangażowania militarne w Syrii wpłynęły uwarunkowania: historyczno-kulturowe – wynikające ze stosunków łączących oba państwa w czasie „zimnej wojny” i wizji roli prawosławia, polityczne – odbudowa pozycji na arenie międzynarodowej, rywalizacja ze Stanami Zjednoczonymi, zapewnienie bezpieczeństwa wewnętrznego; militarne – umożliwiające projekcję siły; ekonomiczne – zabezpieczenie i rozwój gospodarczy.

Słowa kluczowe:

Federacja Rosyjska, Syria, ZSRR, konflikt militarny, Stany Zjednoczone Ameryki, interwencja militarna

1. Introductory remarks

At the beginning of the 1990s the Russian Federation (henceforward: the Federation, Russia) did not even try to define its national interests in the Middle East¹. The importance of the region² grew after Yevgeny Primakov took a position of the minister of Foreign Affairs, who as a minister and later as the Prime Minister set the foundations of the present policy of Russia towards the Middle East. Y. Primakov formed an opinion that the world moved towards the multipolar system and the Russian foreign policy could not be the policy of a secondary state. According to Y. Primakov, Russia implementing the policy of a great state had to compete with the USA, therefore the Middle East was one of the directions of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation³.

During the "cold war" the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (henceforward: the Soviet Union, USSR) kept intensive relations with Syria. The collapse of the USSR caused the degradation of relations between both countries and the importance of the relations was reintroduced only in 21st century. According to Andrej Kreutz, Russian-Syria relations survived especially due to four factors:

- 1) the armed forces of Syria were equipped with the weapon produced in the USSR and they needed the constant delivery of spare parts from the Federation and repairs rendered by the Russian experts;
- 2) the debt of Syria reaching USD 7-11 billion was a constant subject of Russia-Syria negotiations;
- 3) the Federation maintaining diplomatic relations with Syria was going to play an important role in Arab-Israel peace process;

¹ Strategic meaning of the Middle East see more: N. Abi-Aad, M. Grenon, *Instability and Conflict in the Middle East: People, Petroleum and Security Threats*, London 1997; R. Fiedler, *Od przywództwa do hegemonii. Stany Zjednoczone wobec bliskowschodniego obszaru niestabilności w latach 1991-2009*, Poznań 2010; R. Arslan, *Znaczenie Bliskiego Wschodu ze względu na jego cechy geopolityczne, geoeconomiczne i geokulturowe*, „Zeszyty Naukowe Uczelni Vistula” 2014, no. 34, pp. 91-125; R. Arslan, *Walka Turcji i Iranu na Bliskim Wschodzie o dominację polityczną i energetyczną*, „Zeszyty Naukowe Uczelni Vistula” 2015, no. 41(3), pp. 45-57; A. Dziśiów-Szuszczykiewicz, *Bliskowschodnia „zimna wojna” czyli saudyjsko-irańska rywalizacja w regionie w obliczu „Arabskiej Wiosny”*, „Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe” 2014, no. 30, pp. 181-206.

² Russia treats the Middle East as a very important region, mainly due to its strategic location, Energy natural resources, and great potential arms market, I. Topolski, *Sila militarna w polityce zagranicznej Federacji Rosyjskiej*, Lublin 2004, p. 262.

³ S. Blank, *The Foundations of Russian Policy in the Middle East*, [in:] (ed.) T. W. Karasik, S. Blank, *Russia in the Middle East*. Washington DC 2018, pp. 29-30.

- 4) between the leaders of the Federation and Syria were friendly relations⁴.

2. Historical-Cultural Determinants

The policy of the Russian Federation to Syria is a consequence of relations of both countries from the “cold war” times. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics established its diplomatic relations with Syria in 1944, even before it was formally acknowledged on 17 April 1946 as an independent state. The key importance of Syria for the Soviet Union in the Middle East region resulted from two reasons – its geopolitical location⁵ which enabled Russia to flank Turkey and Iraq and from the important role of the Syrian Communist Party and its allies in the domestic policy of the state. However, the relations of the Soviet Union with Syria in the 1950s were not very good. A new chapter in bilateral relations was opened after the death of Stalin⁶. In 1954 USSR granted Syria (without any conditions) a credit to buy weapon as opposed to the West which expected that Syria would join the Baghdad Pact⁷. In January 1956, the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union acknowledged the progressive role of the Third World and the Middle East became the subject of an intensive attention of the Soviet Union⁸. In the 1960s and 1970s, USSR provided a large military help for Syria which was translated into a wider cooperation which also comprised trade exchange, infrastructure development, education and science⁹. During this period, the Soviet Union granted Syria a political, military, and economic support. In 1970, as a result of coup d'état, Hafez al-Assad¹⁰ took power in Syria and brought his ethnic-religion group – Alawites – to power¹¹. The relations between Syria and USSR were formalized in 1980 in Moscow by signing the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the two countries¹².

⁴ A. Kreutz, *Russia in the Middle East: Friend or Foe?* London 2007, pp. 19-20.

⁵ Vide: Geopolityczne położenie Federacji; J. Potulski, *Współczesne kierunki rosyjskiej myśli geopolitycznej. Między nauką, ideologicznym dyskursem a praktyką*. Gdańsk 2010, p. 24.

⁶ A. Kreutz, p. 13.

⁷ J. Zdanowski, *Stosunki międzynarodowe na Bliskim Wschodzie w XX wieku*, Kraków 2012, pp. 278-282.

⁸ A. Kreutz, p. 13.

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁰ P. Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*, California 1990, p. 21.

¹¹ Ł. Fyderek, *Pretorianie i technokraci w reżimie politycznym Syrii*, Kraków 2011, pp. 54-55, 60-61, 208.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 209-210.

After Mikhail Gorbachev took power in the Soviet Union, the policy towards Syria became less friendly. It was the result of a few issues. The first one was connected with the aspiration of Syria to a military parity with Israel. The second issue resulted from unsatisfactory quality and quantity of arms delivery from USSR. The third one was due to the improvement of relations of the Soviet Union with Israel. Not without significance was the mass migration of Jews from the then USSR to Israel which weakened the relations of the superpower with Syria¹³. The situation after the collapse of the USSR still did not favor the mutual relations. It was caused by the dispute concerning the pay by Syria old credits whose creditor (after the inheritance) was the Russian Federation and the problem with the continuity of arms deliveries to Syria¹⁴.

In Russia geopolitical thought it is stressed that Orthodox religion gives Russia more chances to form a consensus with Muslim type of spirituality than the state with the culture of the West. It is assumed that the Russian culture whose sources are in Orthodox – Byzantine culture is of ethico-centric character similar to an Islamic culture. According to Aleksandr Panarin, Russia may mediate in the “dialogue of civilizations” which would lead to the construction of a more balanced and fair world¹⁵. Due to centuries-old contacts with the world of Islam it is also considered that the Federation possesses an exceptional knowledge on Islam and is particularly entitled to mediate in the dialogue between the Muslim countries and the countries of the Western civilization¹⁶. According to Artur Ustian, the Orthodox religion is the religion permanently present in the culture of the countries of the Middle East and this spiritual community is a good foundation for cooperation¹⁷. The Middle East region has been important for Russian rulers for centuries. The Eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea was important for Kievan Rus’ which the Federation regards as its ancestor just as it regards itself as a heir to Constantinople, “the Third Rome” with a divine mission of the Eastern Orthodox. On account of the religions, Russia is a natural ally for all Orthodox communities in Muslim

¹³ A. Kreutz, p. 17.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

¹⁵ A. S. Panarin, *Położenie geopolityczne Rosji: alternatywne scenariusze u progu XXI wieku*, [in]: *Historia i geopolityka. Rosja na progu XXI stulecia*, (ed.) S. Filipowicz, Warszawa 2000, pp. 43-74.

¹⁶ J. Potulski, *Współczesne kierunki rosyjskiej myśli geopolitycznej. Między nauką, ideologicznym dyskursem a praktyką*, Gdańsk 2010, p. 191.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 177-178.

countries. It is a great geopolitical and demographic potential which the Federation may make use of¹⁸.

3. Political Determinants

The first decade of the 20th century is connected with constant efforts of the Federation to regain its previous regional position. Russia had to offer, apart from a normal diplomatic support, the Middle East countries also trade profits, energy contracts, arms sale, and other possibilities. Vladimir Putin and Sergey Lavrov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, willing to oppose the interests of the USA were developing diplomatic relations of the Federation with the Arab countries. The change of policy towards Middle East countries also resulted in the improvement of the relations with Syria¹⁹. Ustian considers that the goal of the Federation should be the aspiration to restore in the modern world the balance of powers breached as a result of the collapse of the USSR and strengthening of the position of the Federation in the Middle East²⁰. According to Ustian the concept of Byzantism should play an important role in the strategy for the Federation²¹. According to Roland Dannreuther, the engagement of the Federation in the Middle East and in the Muslim world should not be a continuation of the "cold war" perception of the world through the prism of ideological confrontation²². R. Dannreuther thinks that the engagement of the Federation in this region is due to four reasons:

- 1) the aspiration to strengthen the legitimization of the domestic political order through the demonstration of the military potential;
- 2) the intention of stabilization of the region of Norther Caucasus against ideologies and actions of Islamic terrorism;
- 3) the conviction of the Federation that in the Middle East it has key economic interests to regain its international position which will lead to the improvement of relations with allies from Soviet times and also with moderate pro-west countries, e.g. Turkey;

¹⁸ J. Potulski, *Współczesne kierunki rosyjskiej myśli geopolitycznej. Między nauką, ideologicznym dyskursem a praktyką*, Gdańsk 2010, p. 178.

¹⁹ S. Blank, pp. 34-35.

²⁰ J. Potulski, p. 173.

²¹ *Neobizantyńska" geopolityczna strategia Rosji w XXI*, [in] J. Potulski, *Współczesne kierunki rosyjskiej myśli geopolitycznej. Między nauką, ideologicznym dyskursem a praktyką*. Gdańsk 2010, p. 181.

²² R. Dannreuther, *Russia and the Middle East: a Cold War Paradigm?* „Europe-Asia Studies”, 2012 (May), Vol. 64, No. 3, pp. 543-560.

- 4) the desire for strengthening the position in the Middle East at the expense of the USA by using its allies in this region²³.

Russia military intervention in Syria is held in a determined and obvious context. The Russian Federation by its actions in Syria is going to secure its national interests taking into consideration political-military, economic, and social issues. Russia as its main priority of the foreign policy and security regards the preservation of multi-polar world without unilateral domination of the USA²⁴. The foreign policy of the Federation assumes that one of the ways to oppose the USA is the reconstruction of ties especially with countries like Syria or Iran which oppose the policy of the USA²⁵. The USA must now compete with Russia in the Middle East in such degree that it did not have to for decades. This situation causes that the Middle East is the arena of competitions, conflicts, and military interventions from the part of world powers, especially the Federation and the USA²⁶. Thus, it is connected with a special position of Syria in undertaken by it actions. From the perspective of Russia the goal of the competition about Syria is the geopolitical leadership in this region and the change of the existing international order²⁷. The presence of Russia in Syria serves Russia to demonstrate its world power status through military power and as a bargaining card in relations with the United States. It is also an element of outer energy policy and the policy towards Islam world. In consequence, the actions undertaken in Syria are to lead to the reconstruction of the world power status of the Federation²⁸.

The personality of the president – Vladimir Putin was a main factor which determined the transformation of the policy of Russia in the Middle East. According to Putin, the Federation should diversify its political and economic diplomacy which since 1991 was too much concentrated on the West. Putin's vision is in contrast to the vision of previous presidents – Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999) and Dmitry Medvedev (2008-2012) who thought that the region was of a secondary importance. In 2012 Russia realized that its political and economic

²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 557-558.

²⁴ *Strategija Nacyonalnoj Biezopasnosti Rossijskoj Fiedieracyi do 2020 goda*, <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/424> [access: 04.07.2018]; The Foreign Policy Concept Of The Russian Federation, <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/4116> [access: 17.08.2018].

²⁵ J. Potulski, p. 191.

²⁶ A. Dziśiów-Szuszczkiewicz, *Regionalna rywalizacja o Syrię*, „Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe” 2012, no. 22, pp. 91-92.

²⁷ M. Kaczmarek, *Polityka Rosji wobec Bliskiego Wschodu*, [w:] J. Danecki, S. Sulowski (ed.), *Bliski Wschód coraz bliżej*, Warszawa 2011, p. 110.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 110.

presence in the Middle East was threatened due to the Arab Spring and also due to the treatment of the region as a secondary area for geostrategic aims²⁹. According to Vladimir Putin, the Arab Spring largely limited the position of the Federation and negatively influenced economic and political relations with Middle East countries³⁰. Russia-Arab relations with almost each Middle East country worsened. The Arab Spring sealed the end of relations started in the era of USSR. Syria was the one of a few countries in which the Federation could regain influence³¹.

At first, the Federation supported its ally by political means through UN Security Council and within military aid through arms deliveries – indirect use of power³². Due to its skill to talk with all engaged parties it changed the political scenery around the conflict. China, which since the beginning of the civil war vetoed, together with Russia, the resolutions of the UN Security Council, also expressed its political support for the camp of Bashar al-Assad. The resolutions concerned the sanctions towards the regime and summoned the president of Syria to resign or to allow the possibility for a military intervention³³. Russia and China abstained from voting on the resolution no. 1973 of the UN Security Council which led to the military intervention in Libya and resulted in the overthrow the regime of the colonel Kaddafi - however they were not prone to do the same in Syria giving as a pretext “the obligation of protection” of the civilians³⁴. As the situation in Libya developed, in Russia grew skepticism towards this way of solving the conflict. According to the decision-makers of the Federation, the military interventions of the West in this type of sovereign regimes are the elements of its system of ruling the world³⁵. Hence the growing fear that such a tactic may be used in the future against Russia³⁶. The conflict in Syria became for the diplomacy of the Russian Federation an opportunity

²⁹ N. Kozhanov, *Russian Policy Across the Middle East. Motivations and Methods*, „Chatham House. The Royal Institute of International Affairs” 2018 (Februar), pp. 9-11.

³⁰ See. A. Malashenko, *Russia and The Arab Spring*, „Carnegie Moscow Center” 2013 (October), pp. 8-9.

³¹ A. Malashenko, *Russia and The Arab Spring*, „Carnegie Moscow Center” 2013 (October), pp. 10-13.

³² *Three Years Later: The Evolution of Russia's Military Intervention in Syria*, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/three-years-later-the-evolution-of-russia-s-military-intervention-in-syria> ,[access: 10.09.2018].

³³ *Chiny wobec konfliktu w Syrii*, <https://www.teologiapolityczna.pl/patrycja-pendrakowska-chiny-wobec-konfliktu-w-syrii-tpct-36-> ,[access: 30.09.2018].

³⁴ See. Resolution 1973 (2011) Adopted by the Security Council at its 6498th meeting, on 17 March 2011 [https://undocs.org/S/RES/1973\(2011\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/1973(2011)) ,[access: 10.10.2018].

³⁵ *Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego Federacji Rosyjskiej*, https://poland.mid.ru/web/polska_pl ,[access: 24.11.2018].

³⁶ M. Kaczmarek, *Rosja wobec interwencji wojskowej w Libii*, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2011-03-23/rosja-wobec-interwencji-wojskowej-w-libii> ,[access: 04.08.2018].

to return to the world diplomatic game. For example, an agreement negotiated between Russia and the USA on 14 September 2013 on the security of chemical arsenal under the UN supervision³⁷.

Russia uses its engagement in Syria as a factor which strengthens its international position (undermined by the war in Ukraine) and as a factor which consolidates the Russian society. The support of Russian Orthodox Church for the presence of Military Forces of the Federation in Syria was not insignificant. According to Cyryl I – Moscow Patriarch – the Federation made the proper decision to use power to protect Syria nation against terrorism³⁸. Terrorism was defined as the main threat for the security of the Federation since the beginning of the “antiterrorist campaign” against Chechnya in 1999. In the perception of the decision-makers in Russia, the dismantling of political and military structures in Syria would lead to deepening the chaos in the Middle East and cause the strengthening of international terrorism. Due to the fact that thousands of jihadists who fought in Syria came from terrains of the Commonwealth of Independent States³⁹ it was feared that they would bring jihad to Russia⁴⁰. It will multiply the probability of the terrorist attack on the territory of the Federation, including the use of the weapons of mass destruction. The stability of al-Assad’s regime is important from the point of view of the internal security of the Federation because it acts as a bastion against Islam radicalism – the threat which has been very common in Russia since the 1990s⁴¹. The Federation shares the engagement of the countries of the West in the fight against terrorism although it has a wider look at what it regards as terrorist groups. Terrorism creates for Russia a very large risk and the decision about military operation in Syria is one of the reasons to stop it.

³⁷ *U.S. and Russia Reach Deal to Destroy Syria’s Chemical Arms*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/15/world/middleeast/syria-talks.html> [access: 04.08.2018]. The agreement allowed the adoption of UN 2118 on the destruction of chemical arms in Syria, See. Resolution 2118 (2013) Adopted by the Security Council at its 7038th meeting, on 27 September 2013 [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2118\(2013\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2118(2013)) [access: 04.08.2018].

³⁸ A. Miarka, *Pozycja międzynarodowa Federacji Rosyjskiej w drugiej dekadzie XXI wieku — wybrane aspekty*, „*Studia Politicae Universitatis Silesiensis*” 2018, Vol. 21, pp. 100-101.

³⁹ *Global Terrorism Index 2015*, p. 45. Institute for Economics and Peace.

⁴⁰ See. (Ed.) T. M. Sanderson, *Russian-Speaking Foreign Fighters in Iraq and Syria: Assessing the Threat from (and to) Russia and Central Asia*, „CSIS Transnational Threats Situation Report Series” 2017 (December).

⁴¹ K. Haugevik, J. Wilhelmsen, *Strategic cooperation against terrorism 2.0? Russia’s initial positions on Syria. I:2*, „Norwegian Institute of International Affairs”, Policy Brief 37/2016, pp. 1-2; M. Skuczyński, *Interesy narodowe Federacji Rosyjskiej w Syrii na tle rosyjskiej interwencji w 2015 roku*, „Przegląd Strategiczny” 2016, no. 9, pp. 94-96.

4. Military Determinants

Naval base Tartus in Syria is probably one of the main reasons for which Russia so categorically protects al-Assad's regime. Russia needs this base both for further support of Syria army and also for implementation of its own goals – the desire to become the center of power in the Middle East and a balancing variant for those who try to secure themselves from the influence of the United States⁴². This port is a supply and survey facility which enables warships of the Russian Federation Navy to tank and supply in the region of the Mediterranean Sea without necessity to return to bases in the Black Sea. And what is important, this is the only naval base of Russia outside former Soviet Union with a direct access to the Mediterranean Sea. Moreover, it increases the operation potential of Russia so much limited after the collapse of the USSR. From the point of view of the Federation, the use of Tartus harbor is an element of the policy of strengthening of the position of Russia in the region of the Middle East and the Mediterranean Sea and also a “key” to deliver military help to Syria government forces and to supply its own ones⁴³. Bases in Tartus and Latakia are the only important element of Russia power projection in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea⁴⁴. The presence of Russia in Tartus and in Khmeimim air base near Latakia is a subsequent step in the strategy of deploying Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2AD) which is to prevent the enemy to enter the theatre of military operations and to deprive it the possibility of operations in this zone⁴⁵. The Federation within A2AD strategy located advanced arms such as the Pantsir S-1 an air defense missile gun system, the S-400 Triumph - an advanced air and missile defence system in air base Khmeimim together with mobile, ground-based, electronic warfare (EW) system (Krasukha-S4). It also located the K-300P Bastion-P a mobile coastal defence missile system and a system of the ballistic missiles 9K720 Iskander⁴⁶.

⁴² M. Kofman, M. Rojansky, *What Kind of Victory for Russia in Syria?* „Military Review Online Exclusive” 2018 (January), p. 18.

⁴³ So called Syrian Express - the sea connection between Novorossiysk and Tartus which enables cargo transport.

⁴⁴ J. Sladden, B. Wasser, B. Connable, S. Grand-Clement, *Russian Strategy in the Middle East*, RAND Corporation, 2017 p. 5.

⁴⁵ A. Jonathan, *Russian A2/AD in the Eastern Mediterranean A Growing Risk*, „Naval War College Review” 2016, Vol. 69, No. 1.; I. Williams. *The Russia – NATO A2AD Environment* <https://missilethreat.csis.org/russia-nato-a2ad-environment/> [access: 02.08.2018]; C. Kosior, *Operacja syryjska Sił Zbrojnych Rosji – wnioski dla Polski i dla NATO*, Ośrodek Analiz Strategicznych, <https://oaspl.org/2016/10/19/operacja-syryjska-sil-zbrojnych-rosji-wnioski-dla-polski-i-dla-nato/> [access: 03.08.2018].

⁴⁶ A. Borshchevskaya, *Russia in the Middle East: Is There an Endgame?* [in:] *Russia's Policy in Syria and the Middle East: Determination, Delight, and Disappointment*. CAP Paper No. 212, January 2019, p. 18.

According to the Naval Doctrine of the Russian Federation of 2015 the main aim of national naval policy of the Federation is the defence of national interests on the world ocean, strengthening of the position among main naval powers, and also the maintenance of the status of great naval power. Due to limited abilities of Russia to reach access to military installations abroad, the key issue seems to be the maintenance of the harbor in Tartus⁴⁷. During this time an intensified arms sales to North Africa and other Arab countries occurred⁴⁸ and North Africa is the second (after Asia) most important region for Russia' arms import (it constitutes 17.8% of the whole arms export in 2000-2016. This market comprises constant clients such as Iraq (1.4%), Syria (1.4%), Egypt (1.4%), and Yemen (1.2%) and also new clients such as Algeria (9.1%), Iran (2%), and United Arab Emirates (0.7%)⁴⁹. Arms export from Russia to Syria in 1991-2011 from economic perspective should be regarded as relatively of little importance. During this period Syria imported only 1% of the whole of arms sale by the Federation⁵⁰. The participation of Syria in world arms import in the years preceding the Arab Spring (2007-2011) was 0.81%⁵¹. Therefore, Syria at its best can be regarded as a rising but limited market of arms sales of the Federation. A valuable market because Russia did not have to compete with other arms deliverers⁵². In 2008-2017 the Federation delivered Syria according to official sources: T-90S (10 tanks in 2015), T-62M (25 tanks in 2017) , infantry fighting vehicles BMP-1 – armoured reconnaissance vehicle version- BRM-1K (10 vehicles in 2017), the Pantsir S-1 an air defense missile gun system,(36 sets in 2008-2013), surface-to-air missiles for 9K22 Tunguska self –propelled anti- aircraft vehicle (700 missiles 9M311 in 2008-2013), missiles for air defense system the Buk-M2 (160 missiles 9M317 in 2010-2013),the Buk-M2 systems (8 sets in 2010-2013), the K-300P Bastion-P mobile coastal defense missile system (2 sets in 2010-2011), the S-125 Pechora -2M surface-to-air missile system (12 sets in 2011-2013), supersonic anti-ship cruise missile Yakhont (72 missiles in 2010-2011), man - portable air defense missile Igla-S (200 missiles in 2008-

⁴⁷ *Morskaja doktrina Rossijskoj Fiedieracyi*, <http://legalacts.ru/doc/morskaja-doktrina-rossiiskoi-federatsii-utv-prezidentom-rf-26072015/>, [access: 19.08.2018].

⁴⁸ See. A. Borshchevskaya, *The Tactical Side of Russia's Arms Sales to the Middle East* [in:] (ed.) T. W. Karasik, S. Blank, *Russia in the Middle East*, Washington DC 2018, pp. 183-221.

⁴⁹ R. Connolly, C. Sendstad, *Russia's Role as an Arms Exporter The Strategic and Economic Importance of Arms Exports for Russia*, „Chatham House. The Royal Institute of International Affairs” 2017 (March), pp. 17-18.

⁵⁰ A. Bagdonas, „*Russia's Interests in the Syrian Conflict: Power, Prestige, and Profit*”, “European Journal of Economic and Political Studies” 2012, p. 66.

⁵¹ M. Bromley, P. D. Wezeman, „*Policies on Exports of Arms to States Affected by the Arab Spring*” [in :] SIPRI Yearbook 2012. *Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, Oxford 2012, p. 276.

⁵² A. Bagdonas, p. 66.

2010), anti-ship missile Kh31A1 (87 missiles for MIG 29 in 2009-2010), guided bombs KAB-500/1500 (100 pieces in 2012-2013), RVV-AE missiles (50 missiles for MIG-29 in 2012-2013), BPM-97 carriers (10 carriers in 2014)⁵³. Due to the break in arms export to Libya during the Arab Spring and diminishing arms export to Iran, Syria became an important but not a large client from the perspective of the Federation⁵⁴. However, taking into consideration other potential reasons of Russia's interest in the conflict in Syria one should consider the possibility of support of exports efforts of military-industrial complex of the Federation. It is also impossible not to mention the problems which face the Russian military industry itself. The firms that produce for a defense industry are almost entirely depended on the budget expenses and they generate losses. In case when national arms industry eats up the state funds on production, the increase of export is a chance to reach a balance⁵⁵. The presentation of armament during the operation in Syria, stressing its effective use, and testing it in a real conflict are to support the export efforts and to be the way to increase arms export to the global market⁵⁶. Putin by operations in Syria implies that one of their goals was to test the abilities of a new arsenal and present it to potential buyers. One of the examples is launching Kalibr missiles from frigates on the Caspian Sea on his birthday on 7 October 2015 whose aim was to present Russian abilities to both potential buyers and "enemies" of the Russian Federation⁵⁷. The tactical goal was the desire to use Syria as a testing ground for new kinds of weapons⁵⁸. According to Valery Gerasimov today Russia gains precious combat experience in Syria. He says that it is necessary to analyze it in service branches of the armed forces both at a tactical and operational level and within scientific conferences devoted to the results of military operations⁵⁹. The analysis of operations in Syria was conducted during series of public and closed conferences in Moscow (from the end of 2016 to the beginning of 2017). During the conferences the weak points of weapon and equipment were dis-

⁵³ SIPRI. Trade Registers, <https://www.sipri.org> [access: 10.01.2019].

⁵⁴ M. Skuczyński, *Interesy narodowe Federacji Rosyjskiej w Syrii na tle rosyjskiej interwencji w 2015 roku*, „Przegląd Strategiczny” 2016, no. 9, p. 93.

⁵⁵ Vide: J. Cooper, *Russia's State Armament Programme to 2020: A Quantitative Assessment of Implementation 2011-2015*, „Swedish Defence Research Agency” 2015 (March).

⁵⁶ D. Barrie, H. Gethin, *Russian Weapons in the Syrian Conflict*, „Russian Studies. NATO Defense College” 2018 (May), vol. 2/18, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁷ *4 Russian warships launch 26 missiles against ISIS from Caspian Sea*, <https://www.rt.com/news/317864-russian-warships-missiles-launch/> [access: 10.02.2019].

⁵⁸ S. Blank, *Russia's Goals and Objectives in Syria* [in:] F. Fleitz, (i. in.), *Putin's Reset. The Bear is Back and How America Must Respond*, Washington 2016, pp. 25-26.

⁵⁹ V. Gerasimov, *Based on the Experience of Syria*, „Voyenno-promyshlennyy kuryer”, March 9, 2016.

cussed. Also attention was paid to the optimization of the organization and the logistics for military expeditions. These conclusions are regularly widely spread in the armed forces of the Federation and a new solutions are implemented⁶⁰.

5. Economic Determinants

Taking into consideration other potential reasons of Russia's interest in conflict in Syria, the level of trade exchange and investments between both countries should be pondered. The level of export to Syria in 2010 reached the value of \$ 1.1 billion, whereas the investments reached the sum of \$ 18 billion. Russia invested in energy, steel, and air transport sectors and also in the expansion of the infrastructure of energy and tourism⁶¹. In 2013 Syria signed a 25 year old contract (2013-2038) with a Russian firm Soyuzneftegaz which does boreholes and extraction of oil and natural gas deposits⁶². Russia signed a number of contracts on the construction of gas treatment plants, irrigation devices, and electric plants⁶³. These actions resulted from the fact that the president Bashar al-Assad perceived the key role of Syria in the Middle East in oil and gas transit. In 2009 he announced "the four seas strategy" which was to transform Syria into a regional center of gas and oil transport from the Persian Gulf, the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea to Europe⁶⁴. Syria president's plans met a quick reaction. In 2009 and 2010 two competitive projects of oil and gas pipelines through the territory of Syria were presented⁶⁵. The route of the first one presented by Qatar⁶⁶ was to run from the Persian Gulf

⁶⁰ K. Giles, *Assessing Russia's Reorganized and Rearmed Military*, „Task Force White Paper” 2017 (May), p. 3.

⁶¹ H. Amos, *Billions of Dollars of Russian Business Suffers along with Syria*, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/billions-of-dollars-of-russian-business-suffers-alongwithsyria/443078.html> ,[access: 22.09.2018].

⁶² *Syria Signs First-Ever Offshore Oil Deal, with Russia Oil Price*, <http://oilprice.com/Energy/Energy-General/Syria-Signs-First-Ever-Offshore-Oil-Deal-with-Russia.html> ,[access: 22.09.2018].

⁶³ *Damascus wants Russia to develop Syrian oil*, <https://www.rt.com/business/323568-syriarussia-oildeposit/> ,[access: 23.09.2018].

⁶⁴ E. Elbakyan, *Involvement of the State of Qatar in the Syrian Crisis*, „Hemispheres. Studies on Cultures and Societies”, 2015 Vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 31-32.

⁶⁵ T. Costigan, *Syria Conflict and Regional Pipeline Geo-strategy*, „Research Paper” Centre for Counter Hegemonic Studies, December 2017, p. 4.

⁶⁶ Qatar has large deposits of gas under the bottom of the Persian Gulf but cannot fully make use of them because it is dependent on tankers which would deliver it to other countries therefore it is more expensive than the Russian gas. The gas pipeline through the territory of Syria was to provide a cheaper transport to Europe but the president of Syria Bashir al.-Assad did not give the permission for construction. Probably it was due to the pressure of Russia because the rejection of the suggestion of the construction was to secure Russia's interests. See. Endre Szénási, *Syria: another dirty pipeline war*, „Defence Review”, 2017, vol. 145, pp. 188-204.

through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, and Turkey⁶⁷. The route of the second one was to run from Iran through Iraq and Syria. In 2010 Syria signed a memorandum with Iraq on mutual agreement concerning the construction of two oil pipelines and one gas pipeline for the transportation of Iraq's oil and gas from oil/gas deposits of Akkas and Kirkut to a Syrian harbor Baniyas at the Mediterranean Sea. In July 2011 Iran's officials informed about signing an agreement worth \$10 billion between Syria, Iran, and Iraq on the construction of a gas pipeline from the greatest world's deposit – South Pars in Iraq through Iran to Syria⁶⁸. Russia was more favorable towards these plans. It resulted from the fact that Iran was an ally of Russia and, in contrast with Qatar, did not have – used by the USA – an air base⁶⁹. The West was against the construction of the pipeline Iran-Iraq-Syria, called “the Friendship Pipeline” because it thought that that it was an effective factor of further development of Iran. Moreover, its route was designed in such a way that it omitted Turkey, the main ally of the West in the Middle East and a member of NATO. Thus, the pipeline from Qatar to Turkey was the only route in the Middle East to diversify the supplies of gas from Russia to Europe. According to Edgar Elbakyan, Syria could remain the main obstacle in implementation of the pipeline Qatar-Turkey⁷⁰. Many countries which support or oppose the war against al-Assad's regime were engaged in the plans of development of pipelines⁷¹. The decision-makers in Russia were aware of the importance of the location of Syria as an area through which nets of gas and oil pipelines could run. A military success in Syria could help the Federation initiate an active energy diplomacy which it conducts today⁷². The Russian Federation implements the strategy which leads to gain the position of the world leader in natural gas export and to gain the control over the sources of energy in the Middle East and Africa to influence Europe. On the other hand, the perspective that Qatar or other countries could become an alternative deliverer

⁶⁷ T. Carlisle, *Qatar seeks gas pipeline to Turkey*, <https://www.thenational.ae/business/qatar-seeks-gas-pipeline-to-turkey-1.520795>, [access: 26.08.2018].

⁶⁸ E. Elbakyan, pp. 32-33.

⁶⁹ *Syria intervention plan fueled by oil interests, not chemical weapon concern*, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/earth-insight/2013/aug/30/syria-chemical-attack-war-intervention-oil-gas-energy-pipelines>, [access: 12.08.2018].

⁷⁰ E. Elbakyan, pp. 32-33.

⁷¹ On planned pipelines see: M. Taib, *The Mineral Industry of Syria*, [in:] USGS Mineral Resources Program, *2008 Minerals Yearbook*, 2010 (September), p. 55; P. Lickiewicz, *Nabucco vs. South Stream Problemy w realizacji projektów oraz perspektywy rozwoju*, http://www.pism.pl/zalaczniki/Nabucco_vs_South_Stream_Lickiewicz_1.pdf, [access: 10.11.2018].

⁷² See. R. Mammadov, *Russia in the Middle East: Energy Forever?* [in:] (ed.) T. W. Karasik, S. Blank, *Russia in the Middle East*, Washington DC 2018, pp. 212-239.

of energy for the countries of the Old Continent and could compete with its native companies was not acceptable for the Federation due to its vital interests⁷³. According to Niall Ferguson “Russia, thanks to its own extensive energy reserves, is the only major power that has no vested interest in stability in the Middle East”⁷⁴.

6. Final Remarks

The attitude of Russia to Syria has evolved in time and was the answer to the Arab Spring. The Federation evaluated the events through the prism of its own interests and in the face of a probable collapse of the government of Bashar al-Assad made the decision to defend them. The intervention in Syria is also deeply rooted in the feeling of uncertainty towards the United States whose actions are regarded by Kremlin as the attempts to weaken Russia both inside and abroad.

Russia military intervention in Syria changed the whole dynamics of the conflict, strengthening Assad’s regime and assuring that no solution of the conflict was possible without Kremlin’s consent. Possibility the overturning of the regime of a Syrian ally is regarded by the Federation as a major threat to its own regional interests. The elimination of the regime might weaken its influences in the region, strengthening at the same time the position of the USA and its allies. The military intervention in Syria was to a certain extent contrary to the preference of Russia to avoid direct, longstanding engagement in conflicts but in accordance with Russia support for a longstanding friend. Also the key role of naval and air bases in Tartus and Latakia is of importance. Their maintenance and expansion enables the projection of the power of the Federation to the Mediterranean Sea and in the Middle East.

Russia is now governed by a formally elected autocrat, the president Putin, whose main goal is to restore the part of lost status and influences to his nation. The reasons of the military intervention should be sought in the quest for:

- 1) the protection of Russia interests in the Middle East;

⁷³ See. O. Zakrzewska, *Bezpieczeństwo energetyczne w stosunkach Rosja - Unia Europejska w kontekście współzależności eksportowo-importowych*, „Kwartalnik Kolegium Ekonomiczno-Społecznego Studia i Prace” 2014, no. 1, p. 169; A.S. Makarychev, *Rebranding Russia: Norms, Politics and Power*, „CEPS Working Document 2008”, No. 283, pp. 11–13; R. Arslan, *Znaczenie Bliskiego Wschodu ze względu na jego cechy geopolityczne, geoeconomiczne i geokulturowe*, „Zeszyty Naukowe Uczelni Vistula” 2014, no. 34, p. 92.

⁷⁴ *How China and Russia Threaten the World*, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/how-china-and-russia-threaten-the-world/>, [access: 28.01.2019].

- 2) the strengthening of the presence of Russia in the region through stationing of armed forces;
- 3) the increase of its participation in arms market;
- 4) the increase of its participation in the market of oil , gas, food, and other;
- 5) the limitation of spreading of terrorism far from Russia and in its direct post-Soviet vicinity;
- 6) the support of “ friendly” regimes and formation of allies with them;
- 7) the protection civilians;

However, The Federation probably does not have long-term plans towards Syria and the Middle East but it has long-term interests. Their promotion and protection is one of the most coherent goals of the policy of Russia in the Middle East region. To keep Russia great power, Moscow must gain access to technological and financial resources for further economic development and modernization. While other superpowers aspire to limit the access of Russia to these resources, the Federation looks for new sources of the capital and technology. Russia undertakes an effort to play an important role that regulates the market of crude oil and regain the position of the main deliverer of arms to Arab countries. The Middle East is responsible for a small per cent of the whole of Russia export and is not a critical market for Russian economy. However the scale and context is important because the regional economic activity of Russia is to reach something more than a mere access to money gain. The economic chance provides Russia a regional presence and influence.

Russia is making use of the events in Syria to restore its image of a great power. Up till now Moscow has reached a significant political, diplomatic, and military success. While the basic driving factors of Russia policy (i.e. prestige, trade, and stability) are constant, Moscow interests have been widened in diplomatic, economic, and business categories. Although the strategy of Russia in Syria has brought tangible benefits, the question still remains: how long can Kremlin keep it?

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