



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

Russia's Military Intervention in Syria

Motives, Objectives and Repercussions

October 24, 2015

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Introduction

Troubled by the most recent military advances by the Syrian opposition, Russia opted to militarily intervene in Syria following five years of unconditional support for the Syrian regime. Earlier signs of direct intervention were first seen in July of 2015, when Russian military tank-carrying supply ships began arriving in Syrian ports. These carried the equipment and materials needed to construct and supply a large Russian forward operating base built near a Syrian regime airfield in the Latakia district. Direct Russian military action, including aircraft sorties, began on September 30, following the completion of the base and immediately after a meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Barack Obama at the opening of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

While Moscow insists that Russian airstrikes and cruise missiles fired from the Russian fleet in the Caspian Sea were part of the efforts of a multinational coalition formed and led by Russia to attack the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), most reports from on-the-ground sources in Syria indicate that Russian activity indiscriminately targets Syrian political forces opposed to the rule of Bashar al Assad. Putin's own press announcements have supported these assertions, the Russian President having himself declared that the airstrikes will provide aerial cover for ground assaults by the Assad regime's forces against "terrorist groups", a label which Moscow and Damascus indiscriminately apply to all groups within the Syrian opposition.

Russia's decision to militarily intervene has taken many observers by surprise, especially in view of the increased contact and deliberations between Russia and Saudi Arabia over the Syrian crisis in the preceding months. Indications of Russian flexibility in finding a solution to the Syrian crisis had even led Barack Obama and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to welcome what they believed to be growing Russian acceptance of the need to remove Bashar al Assad from power as part of the solution to the Syrian crisis, but these feelings were shown to be illusory. Bizarrely, Russia's direct military action in Syria came in parallel with preparations in Moscow for a multilateral conference bringing together parties to the Syrian conflict and forming the third in the series of the Geneva conferences which

seek to resolve the conflict in Syria. These parallel sets of developments have left many confused as to Russia's true objectives in the conflict.

Regional and global reactions to Moscow's military campaign in the meantime have been varied, and have sharpened existing disagreements over the Syrian question. Unsurprisingly, the Syrian regime welcomed the move just as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey were adamantly opposed to it, while Egypt's support of Russian intervention has left many puzzled. Israel, on the other hand, was quick to rush and coordinate its efforts with the Russian military, even announcing a joint military committee to avoid "misunderstandings" in Syrian skies. The reaction from Europe and the United States remains more ambivalent.





Time Table

09:00 - 09:30	<p style="text-align: center;">Opening Remarks</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Azmi Bishara</p>
09:30 - 11:00	<p style="text-align: center;">Session One</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Russian Intervention in Syria: Motives and Objectives</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Chair: Abdelwahab El-Affendi</p> <p>Victor Mizin: The Syrian Conundrum as an Internationally Significant Case</p> <p>Sergei Strokan: Russian Intervention in Syria: Pros and Cons</p> <p>Marwan Kabalan: Russian Intervention in Syria: Beyond a Historicization of the Moment</p> <p>Emmanuel Karagiannis: Reasons for the Change in Russia's Position on Syria</p>
11:00 - 11:30	<p style="text-align: center;">Coffee Break</p>
11:30 - 13:00	<p style="text-align: center;">Session Two</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Military and Political Repercussions</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Chair: Faleh Al Hajri</p> <p>Fateh Hassoun: Implications of the Russian Intervention on the Military Balance of Power in Syria</p> <p>Burhan Ghalioun: Russian Military Intervention: Implications for the Political Solution</p> <p>Radwan Ziadeh: The US Stance on Russian Military Intervention in Syria</p> <p>Haider Saeed: Prospects for the Expansion of the Russian Military Campaign to Iraq</p>
13:00 - 15:00	<p style="text-align: center;">Lunch Break</p>

<p>15:00 - 16:30</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Session Three Regional Reactions</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Chair: Mohammed Al Misfer</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Majed al-Turki: The Saudi Stance on the Russian Military Intervention in Syria Hasan Özertem: Russia's Shifting Strategy in Syria and Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy Rod Thornton: Russia and Iran in Syria: Alliance or Competition? Mahmoud Muhareb: The Israeli Attitude towards the Russian Military Intervention in Syria</p>
<p>16:30 - 17:00</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Coffee Break</p>
<p>17:00 - 19:00</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Roundtable Discussion Prospects and Future of Russia's Military Intervention in Syria</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Chair: Marwan Kabalan</p>



Participants

Participant	Biography
<p>Abdelwahab El-Affendi</p>	<p>Professor of Politics and Head of the Politics and International Relations Program in the School of Social Sciences and Humanities at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. Prior to joining the Doha Institute, El-Affendi was a Reader (Associate Professor) of Political Science at the University of Westminster. Within Westminster University's Centre for the Study of Democracy, he established and served as the Coordinator of the Programme on Democracy and Islam. El-Affendi holds an MA in Philosophy from Swansea University, and a PhD in Political Science from Reading University in the UK.</p>
<p>Burhan Ghalioun</p>	<p>Director of the Centre d'Etudes sur l'Orient Contemporain (CEOC, "the Center for the Study of the Contemporary East"). He is professor of Political Sociology at the Université de Paris III (Sorbonne Nouvelle). In March of 2011, Ghalioun became the first President of the Syrian National Council, the body which brought together all factions of the Syrian opposition under one umbrella. He is widely published in both Arabic and French, and holds two doctoral degrees from France's Sorbonne University: one in Humanities and a second in Political Sociology.</p>
<p>Emmanuel Karagiannis</p>	<p>Senior Lecturer at King's College London's Department of Defence Studies. After completing his PhD in post-Soviet politics, he lived and worked in the former Soviet Union. Karagiannis has published extensively on Russian foreign policy, energy politics, political Islam in Central Asia, and interstate relations in the Eastern Mediterranean.</p>
<p>Faleh Al Hajri</p>	<p>Deputy Editor-in-Chief at Qatar's Al Sharq newspaper. He holds a degree in Mass Communication from Qatar University.</p>
<p>Fateh Hassoun</p>	<p>Senior military dissident from Syria, who was previously an assistant to the Syrian Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Colonel Hassoun also helped to establish the National Liberation Movement within the Homs Governorate, where he later was appointed to head the local Revolutionary Military Council. He earned a Master's degree in Military Studies from the Syrian Higher Military Academy in Damascus.</p>

Participant	Biography
<p>Haider Saeed</p>	<p>Researcher at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, where he is also Deputy Editor-in-Chief of <i>Siyasat Arabia</i>. Saeed, who earned his PhD in 2001 at Baghdad University, is the author of <i>The Politics of Symbolism and the End of the Culture of the Nation-State in Iraq</i> (2009). He was a contributor to the UNDP's Human Development Report on Iraq between 2009 and 2014.</p>
<p>Hasan Özertem</p>	<p>Director of the Center for Energy Security Studies at the International Strategic Research Organization (USAK). He is a contributor to the German Marshall Fund's "On Turkey Series" and one of Turkey's prominent foreign policy monthlies "Analist". He is also the co-editor of the academic journal "Review of International Law and Politics". Özertem's research interests are security, political economy, energy, elite politics, Russia, the Caspian Basin, and Turkish Foreign Policy.</p>
<p>Mahmoud Muhareb</p>	<p>Associate Researcher at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. A Palestinian academic, his publications cover Zionism and Israel, the Palestinian Cause and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Muhareb earned his PhD in Political Science from the University of Reading in the UK.</p>
<p>Majed al-Turki</p>	<p>Head of the Center for Media and Arab-Russian Studies, and since 2009 an academy member of the Russian Academy of Social Sciences. He holds a doctorate in Political Science from the University of Moscow, 2004, and a PhD in Media Systems and Policy from Imam University in Riyadh in 1998. He has authored more than 20 articles on media and in political and historical domains and has undertaken the supervision of a number of translations from Russian to Arabic.</p>
<p>Marwan Kabalan</p>	<p>Associate Researcher at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. He was previously Dean of the Faculty of International Relations and Diplomacy at the University of Kalamoon, Damascus. Kabalan is the author of several books and essays in politics and international relations. He earned his PhD at Manchester University, UK.</p>

Participant	Biography
Mohammed Al Misfer	Professor of Political Science at Qatar University. He is a regular columnist for both Doha-based and pan-Arab newspapers, and writes widely on Arab nationalism and related issues. Al-Misfer earned his PhD in Political Science from New York University.
Radwan Ziadeh	Executive Director of the Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Washington, DC, and, since 2005, has served as the Director of the Damascus Center for Human Rights, which he founded. He is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding in Washington, DC and is also the Head of the Syrian Commission for Transitional Justice.
Rod Thornton	Professor at King's College London and currently based at the Joann bin Jassim Joint Command and Staff College, Al Wakrah. His original degree being in Russian, Thornton has written widely on the Russian military. He has lived and worked in both Kiev and Moscow and is the author of <i>Asymmetric Warfare: Threat and Response in the 21st Century</i> (Polity Press, 2007).
Sergei Strokan	Moscow-based geopolitical analyst and an observer with Russia's "Kommersant" Publishing House. He is also a host of "Red Line", a weekly analytical program broadcast by Sputnik International and an author of Troika Report, published by Russia Beyond The Headlines (RBTH) media company. Strokan is a regular contributor to leading international electronic and print media like Aljazeera, BBC World, CNN, CCTB.
Victor Mizin	Leading Researcher in the Moscow State Institute of International Affairs (University) (MGIMO) and Deputy Director of the Institute for International Studies of the MGIMO. He is also a Senior Research Fellow with the Center of International Security at the Russian Academy of Sciences. Mizin obtained his PhD in Political Science/History from the Moscow-based Institute of USA and Canada Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in 1991.

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