

The American Russian Rivalry in the Middle East

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Abstract

The study aimed to identify the areas of American-Russian rivalry in the Middle East and the Arab region, and focused on the most important spheres of Russian influence that Russia sought to preserve under American hegemony. The study used the method of system analysis in international relations for its relevance to the subject of the study. The key question the study tries to answer is what are the internal and external determinants that directly contribute to the growing Russian role in the international system. The study concluded that Russia's reformist policies enabled it to regain its leading role at the global level and thus its ability to maintain its areas of influence free from American hegemony.

Introduction

Russia's foreign policy is based on specific determinants that the World Order can not be formed in isolation from the Middle East, and the main reason is its geostrategic location. Russia gives great importance to the Middle East as a center of balance of power. Through its policy on the events in the Middle East, Russia is trying not to interfere directly in the affairs of those countries in an effort to gain the greatest respect and credibility in order to preserve the pace of peace and security desired. In fact, Russia aimed at preserving its areas of influence from aggression. It stands in the face of the United States by strengthening its relations with countries such as Iran as a means of expanding spheres of influence in the Middle East in contrast with US dominance over the Middle East - including the Arab region . Russia set out on the basis of the war on terrorism and non-intervention in the wake of the Arab Spring revolutions. The adoption of such a policy is a means to gain support and credibility to maintain its position in strategic areas, and to regain its active roles in conjunction with the American presence.

Research problem:

The research problem is determined by the central question: What are the internal and external determinants on which the new Russian policy was based and directly contributed to the growing Russian role in the international system?

This question is divided into the following sub-questions:

- What is the nature of the new Russian foreign policy?
- What is the role of Russian-American strategic rivalry in defining their roles in the region?
- What is the importance of the geopolitical role of Russia in the Arab region?
- What is the future of Russian-American relations?

The importance of the study

The importance of the study lies in two scientific and practical aspects:

- **The scientific importance:** It lies in the fact that this study, like other studies, highlights the importance of the role of the Russian political leadership in shaping the features and dimensions and directions towards creating a kind of compatibility between their abilities to exploit their potentials and capabilities, and the possibility of exploiting those capabilities in determining the role that the political leadership can perform to play an active role in the international system and thus its ability to take a prominent place in the ladder of international interactions.
- **The Practical importance:** to highlight the policy pursued by the Russian leadership, which in fact can be considered a model because of the qualitative shift that occurred in Russia after losing the cold war, and because of these successful policies we see that Russia was able to regain its prestige and proved its ability at both internal and external levels.

This study is distinguished from others by highlighting president Putin's policy and his ability to maintain the pace of Russian progress towards international changes and Russia's ability to influence them, which changed the course of events in Syria and the American position on the Iranian nuclear crisis.

The limits of the study:

The limits of the study are within the period from 2000 to 2016.

The beginning date is because of the importance of the role played by Putin during his second term, and the impact of the reform policies that followed in the changes in visions towards the new Russia. The ending date of the study is 2016, due to Russia's ability to regain its influential role in international events and ability to maintain its areas of influence far from that hegemony.

Literature review:

1. Andrej Kreutz study¹ entitled, *Russia In the Middle East: Friend or Feo?*: Kreutz examines the goals and strategies of Russia and the former Soviet Union toward most of the Arab states in the Middle East. The author argues that Russia has been an important actor in the region for over a century and has tried to regain its influence in several countries following its strategic retreat after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. However, according to Kreutz, Moscow does not seek confrontation with the United States or with the West in general in the region. Rather, the Russians are interested in peace and stability in the region, which is close to its borders. Because of that, although Moscow wants to cultivate its links with Israel, it also seeks to reach a peaceful and balanced solution to the Palestinian-Israeli and the Arab-Israeli conflicts, taking Palestinian and Arab interests into account.
2. **Mohammed Majdan's study *Russia's foreign policy today: the search for an influential global role*² :** Majdan focused on the active role of Russia in the management and containment of crises and its rejection of the domination of one pole, as Russia calls for a multi-polar world. The study explored the leading role of Putin, where he made a quantum leap in building the Russian internal political system, and worked to adopt a foreign policy to restore Russia's global role again.
3. **Ahmed Saied's study entitled: *Russian policies towards the Middle East*³:** Saied discussed the new Russian role in the region and analyzed Russia's foreign policy that aimed at creating a stable international order based on international law, and highlighted the role of Russia in some regional issues, especially the Syrian crisis and the Iranian nuclear file.
4. **Nourhan Alsheikh study entitled: *Russian Politics and the Limits of the Role in the Middle East*⁴ :** The author highlighted the success of Vladimir Putin in formulating a policy that enabled him to overcome the chaos and turmoil experienced by Russia and it explored some issues in the Arab region.
5. **Karim Mufti study entitled: *the interests of Russia and China in the Middle East*⁵ :** This is an analytical study that focused on the emergence of active and influential forces in the region, such as Russia and China, and highlighted Russia's return to the Middle East, which is a strong return setting out from geopolitical goals, and showed the Russian position on the Iranian nuclear file and the Syrian crisis.

¹ Andrej Kreutz, *Russia In The Middle East: Friend or Feo?* Prager Security International, London, 2007.

² Mohammed Majdan, *Foreign Policy Today: The search for an influential role* / Center for Arab Unity Studies Available at: www.caus.org.Ib, Home> down

³ Ahmed Saied, *Russian policies towards the Middle East*. Journal of Democracy. Vol,52.2014.

⁴ Norhan al-Sheikh, *Russian Politics and Limits of Role in the Middle East*, is available on the link: Mesj.com.New, 2016.

⁵ Karim Mufti study entitled, *the interests of Russia and China in the Middle East*. Arab Future Journal. September, 2015.

Methodology

The study used the method of system analysis in international relations⁶, under the transition of the global system- from the Cold War to the end of the eighties- characterized by a complex mix of liquidity, chaos, irregularity, and power spread as opposed to the highly concentrated state of these resources in the global bipolar system, with the demise of the Soviet Union and the unilateralization of the United States with the resources of economic, military, and technical power. The need to analyze the phenomenon of heterogeneity between elements of which is working to achieve balance in this status; if failed to achieve by proper methods, it would resort to the behavior of the conflict, especially towards highly balance countries, and it applies to the behavior of countries both at the global level or the regional level. On the other side are the features of the new structure, which is linked to relations of the forces in the world order, especially the relationship between the United States and the dominant countries. The countries that are working to restore their effective role, such as Russia, believe that the developments in Russian policy qualify them for influential roles and thus influence the international arena and their ability to enter blocs, which will enable them to stand in the face of the domination of one pole.

Russian Foreign Policy

Russia has a distinguished international position. It has an advanced military force and occupies a geostrategic location, which has reflected positively on its economic status and is characterized by its technological and scientific progress. Due to Putin's reformist policies since 2000, Russia has been able to bring itself firmly back into the global political arena and become a powerful force in influencing international events. Because of these policies, Russia has succeeded in overcoming all the obstacles it has faced, especially the risk of fragmentation and secession movements. Russia was able to adopt positions in its foreign policy that aimed at achieving its ambitions, especially in the era of globalization and technological progress⁷. Putin was able to adopt a strategy aimed at strengthening the central state's power, tightening its grip on economic and political institutions, and strengthening its strategic capabilities. He also followed a strategic policy aimed at reviving the Russian economy and working to raise the standard of living of the individual by working on the exploitation of Russian wealth, especially oil and gas. This was directly reflected in Russian foreign policy, gradually restoring Russian status in a way aimed at achieving greater security⁸.

The main features of Russian foreign policy can be identified as follows:

- The work to end unilateral polarity in order to activate the trend toward multi-polarity.
- Supporting the means of democracy; these were the most important steps taken to strengthen the country's foreign policy, as well as to strengthen the ways in which democracy is consolidated and pushed forward.
- Engage with the Commonwealth of Independent States.
- The efforts to reduce the entry into political conflicts, which would negatively affect the objectives of the new Russian strategy, and President Putin stressed that the major powers can not determine the rules of playing in the economy and international politics of marginalizing Russia, and he stressed Russia's relentless pursuit of constructive cooperation, which would combat terrorism and monitor the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, which would be reflected in international peace and security⁹.

By this strategy, the country will be able to face the major world powers and work to integrate in many foreign political activities, such as: the Group of the major industrialized countries, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum ... etc¹⁰. Russia is regaining its former glory, and by increasing its roles in international events and convincing the world that it has been able to overcome its weakness and turmoil, it has been able to take full advantage of all the opportunities, and the country has had to recover its economic strength, in terms of oil and gas prices and worked to exploit the global economic conditions, to improve its economic conditions and thus escalating economic growth with indicators that benefited the rest of the other vital areas and was able to:

⁶ Mohamed El Sayed Idris, Analysis of Regional Systems: A Study in the Origins of International and Regional Relations, Center for Strategic Political Studies, Al-Ahram, Cairo, 2002, p. 119.

⁷ Nabih al-Asfahani, The Future of Russian-Iranian Cooperation in the Light of the Recent Convergence, International Policy, No. 144, Volume 36, Cairo, Center for Political and Strategic Studies.

⁸ Ahmed Diab, Putin's Return, Challenges and Aspirations of Russia after the Presidential Elections, International Policy, No. 188, Volume 47, Cairo, Center for Political and Strategic Studies, April 2012, p.106.

⁹ Ahmed Diab, Ibid.

¹⁰ Abdul Aziz Mahdi Al-Rawi, Trends in Russian Foreign Policy, Post-Cold War, International Studies, No. 35, p. 162.

- Nationalize Russian foreign policy and assert that Russia should regain its lost status.
- Enrich strategic relations with old friends such as China, Iran, India, and friendship with those influential countries in international politics, increase Russian influence, restore economic and political stability, and achieve security strategy¹¹.
- Conclude agreements concerning the establishment of peace with neighboring countries, which make peaceful policy a desirable goal.
- Cooperate with States of the Commonwealth of Independent States¹².

On another level of success, Russia has made a big leap in its political presence through its administration in some crises, such as: the Georgian crisis, the recovery of Crimea, as well as in eastern Ukraine. As for the Russian foreign policy in the Middle East region, especially the Arab region, we note that it follows the policy of "priority interests", ie, its interests come first. This can be explained by the relations of some Arab countries with Russia. Some can not consider relations with Russia a safe alternative to the United States, so some of Arab states show complex relations with Russia in parallel with building relations with the United States, which would impose restrictions on Russian activity in the region¹³. Based on this swing and contradictions in relations, one can say that Russia's policy in the region is characterized by ambiguity, and interests may make the state change its policy as opposite to the expected. Russian expansion in the region is dependent on the dynamics of domestic interactions in the region and on US policy. No matter how Russia tries to move towards multilateralism, it cannot go beyond some lines in its policy with the United States. The visions may change and the two parties will unite, and therefore the Arab countries will only have a policy of denunciation.

The Russian foreign policy has seen a number of developments, the most prominent of which are:

- Exploiting all means that support the expansion of its diplomacy with the major active powers in international events, especially China and India.
- Standing in the face of any expansion that would impact the Russian influence areas such as the expansion of NATO, where it's working to rearm in the field of missile defense as a guarantee of Russian security. As well as its position in the face of the United States on the Syrian crisis, a strategic ally of Russia.
- To reduce the size of economic problems in an attempt to overcome them almost radically: the aggravation of the problem of unemployment, and lack of bank balances¹⁴.

Strategic rivalry between Russia and the United States

Russian policy does not differ fundamentally from US policy in terms of objectives; it seeks to employ its foreign policy in line with its domestic objectives, especially in the light of Russia's awareness and perception that the world is changing and foreign policy may change in such a way that major countries can work to solve their internal problems especially economic ones, as they are directly linked to other problems, at the expense of other countries by placing a tight grip on their economic capabilities, resorting to the preservation of their interests to the use of means of military pressure, and since the Middle East (the Arab region), is a Russian area of influence, as in the case of Syria, Russian policy in the region is directly contending with US foreign policy. This is why Russia is working to bring the Russian fleet back to the Mediterranean, supported by a Syrian-based military base, where we see a strong Russian return to the areas of American failure. The features of Russia's move towards the Middle East have been characterized by:

- Russian return to the theater of active and influential policy in international events, especially after Russia was able to overcome the economic crises¹⁵. As it was expected to return strongly and this return bears signals can be interpreted to the possibility of Russia to follow all available means to maintain its areas of influence, especially the Syrian crisis.

¹¹ Nabih al-Asfahani, *The Future of Russian-Iranian Cooperation in the Light of the Recent Convergence*, International Policy, No. 144, Volume 36, Cairo, Center for Political and Strategic Studies.

¹² Abdel Aziz Mahdi Al-Rawi, *op. Cit.*

¹³ Mohammed Majdan, *Foreign Policy Today / Center for Arab Unity Studies* Available at: www.caus.org.Ib,

¹⁴ Ahmed Diab, "The Return of Putin", *op. Cit.*, P.8.

¹⁵ Fida Dakroub, *What Syria Means to Russia*, International Journal of Research, 16 July

- Fill the vacuum, especially with most analysis inclining to the tendency that the United States is on the verge of ending its presence in the region after being close to abandon its presence in some areas, and that the Russian strong presence is blessed by US to fill the vacuum after its departure, following its failure to solve the problems of the Middle East, and even contributing to their exacerbation¹⁶.
- Accelerate the arrangement of the region after the chaos and turmoil caused by the so-called Arab Spring, and this trend was led by Saudi Arabia, which shows a wide interest in the Syrian file so as not to cause major negative repercussions on the region; therefore, Saudi Arabia is ready to compensate Russia for losing in Syria, as an attempt to save the region from further collapse, and here there are many speculations about the possibility of Saudi Arabia financing major Russian arms deals in exchange for persuading the Russians to end the Syrian crisis¹⁷. All the possibilities remain in the field of politics as Russia is opposed to some US policies in the region, especially in concerns to the construction of missile shield, which Russia considers to be directed to Russia and not to any other region as these areas are considered areas of Russian influence¹⁸.

In light of the increasing activity of Russian foreign policy towards the region and the achievement of specific strategic interests of Russia, there are those who believe that these activities bear political visions that frame its policy with its allies and in essence are not very different from the ambitions of US in the region and bear specific dimensions. The first one is that Russia presents itself as trying to maintain the status quo in the Middle East, which came in through the revolutions of the Arab Spring, and Russia considers colored revolutions moving with external support in reference to the US and here may be the signs of cold war. Its parties are the forces supporting the colored revolutions and the forces that reject them. The second dimension is that the United States is considered a source of threat to Russian interests, which is a warning to Russia's allies of relations with the United States. The third dimension is dealing with all active actors in the region, whether States or non-state actors, such as: civil society organizations, think tanks, and those tools used by US to spread chaos and turmoil in the desired region¹⁹.

Russia's geopolitical role in the Arab region

Russian politicians view the Middle East as an important geostrategic location reliable to play an active and influential role in international events. The Russian role has clearly emerged in the Middle East by supporting Iran's nuclear program, and it seeks to create an approach by making Iran a strategic ally of Russia in the Middle East because of the geostrategic and geopolitical importance of Iran. Russia also seeks to strengthen its presence in crisis areas, such as: Georgia, Ukraine and the Crimea, and it are seeking a strong presence in Syria²⁰. Russia wants to use its political expertise and exploit opportunities. It believes that the Arab Spring's legacy can be controlled to serve its own interests, especially given the abandonment of the US of its allies. For example, abandoning the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, the United States lost its credibility to the Allies in exchange for Russia's commitment with its allies; an example is its position towards President Bashar al-Assad in the Syrian crisis, Russia entered strongly in the and Syrian crisis, and stood by the Syrian regime forces, supported military maneuvers, retained its naval base in Tartus, and established air bases in Latakia; in doing so , it provided a positive review to the Syrian ally, some viewed them with credibility, and they embodied their position on the Syrian allies. As well as its positions with Iran, which reflects the positive relations with neighboring countries such as Iraq (in exchange for the American failure), it sought to develop those relations with the aim of military deals on arms and other energy-related economic, and close cooperation between Iran and Russia provides a greater opportunity for the latter to develop economic relations with Iraq on a more comprehensive scale. These positions refute the belief that Russia is no longer able to protect its allies or are no longer able to exercise its military capabilities and thus influence international events.

¹⁶Moataz Salameh, Russia's Road to Return to the World Politics Theater, International Policy, No. 195, January, 2014, Vol. 49, p. 82.

¹⁷Moataz Salameh, ,Ibid.

¹⁸ Raed Jabr, Russia Faced with ignoring the West's interests with a comprehensive defense strategy, Al-Hayat, Issue 1065, March 30, 2007.

¹⁹Al-Arab Newspaper, London, 9/6/2014, Issue 9584 / p.7.

²⁰Sherif Shaaban Mabrouk, Russia in the Arab Region, Strategic Ambition and Geopolitical Interests, Arab Affairs, 164, 2015, p.16.

The course of events has changed, especially after the introduction of the initiative to destroy chemical weapons in exchange for the cessation of the US military strike on Syria, and was able to put several initiatives to contain the crisis and thus spare the region more disasters²¹. Russia seeks, through this policy, to imply that it doesn't aim to impose hegemony, and it followed a policy of rejection of military force prior to the Syrian crisis. The evidence was that it refused to use military force during the war on Iraq, and used the veto²²; thus, it can stand in the face of US role dominating countries, the Russian view is that major powers can use military force if necessary with convincing reasons, but their war on Iraq has some Russian reservations.

The future of Russian-American relations

Russia has been able to return to the international scene strongly due to a well planned strategy of its return in the Middle East. The great progress of the Russian presence in international forums and the impact of international decisions, along with its significantly growing relations with strategic areas in the last ten years, such as: Central Asia, East Asia, Brix Group ... " was noted. We can also see that Russia is strongly back to the areas of American failure such as Iraq, and its steadfast position on the Syrian crisis. Hence, it is possible to know the extent of the Russian vision aimed at escalating its roles in the international events and to expand its influence in the Middle East; all of this is in Russia's economic and military interests on a large scale²³. With all these changes in Russian attitudes in the Middle East, including the Arab region, it is impossible to bypass the American presence in the region. Even if the United States allowed a space of freedom to Russia to move, the competition between them remains dependent on the global scene of changes and transformations and acquires tug and pull to achieve the interests of each country separately. Despite Russia's strong presence in areas such as Iran and Syria, this can not marginalize the US presence and role.

Despite Russia's sharp criticism of the US position and the diplomatic activity of Russia, and its contradictions with US policy on many issues, this does not mean a radical change in Russian foreign policy towards the confrontation or the full challenge of the United States, whether in relation to Middle East or other issues. This is confirmed by a set of considerations, the most important of which is the vision of the Russian leadership of American policy as a source of danger to Russian interests, so it seeks to play an active role, yet Russia is fully aware that the United States will allow it to regain some of the positions of influence lost in the region²⁴. The United States cannot give up strategic areas of influence; it may return to it at any time, despite Russia's growing ambition to regain Russia's global standing, and the United States stands idly by in the face of Russia's rising role. The changes in international variables may witness alliances that achieve common goals. The success of foreign policy does not depend on constants, but on the interests that make foreign policy change its course²⁵.

The changes and international events indicate that Russia is making strategic and diplomatic moves that are in its interests no matter what the Russian justification for intervention are, and its interests intersect with the interests of the United States in the region. Therefore, no matter how Russia tries to exploit the opportunities, the American objectives intersect with them, taking into account the different means of each to maintain their interests. Russia presents itself, through crises and revolutions, as a state that does not seek to use violence and military intervention in the affairs of states. Russia is, thus, different from the US, and people view it differently. Based on that policy, Russia believes that some Arab Spring revolutions are moving under the influence of external forces, supported by the United States. Hence, in the event of continuous and spread crises, this will impose the presence of supporting parties against the forces of rejection and the result in the increase of tension. On the other hand, the Middle East - with its allies - is characterized by balance and this reflects the credibility of its allies, so its political history and positions of allies increases the chances of showing America as a threat to the stability of the region and this threat is another opportunity for Russia to gain more confidence to maintain its interests. Russia's opposition to US policy is not limited to its policy in the Arab region.

²¹Sherif Shaaban, op. Cit., P. 213.

²²Salam MUSAFAER, Anatomy of the Russian Position on the Invasion of Iraq 2003, Paper for the Conference: "Ten Years of the Occupation of Iraq, April 2013, Doha, Arab Center for Policy Research and Policy 2013, p 112.

²³Moataz Salama, op. Cit., P. 83.

²⁴Norhan al-Sheikh, Russian Politics and Limits of Role in the Middle East, is available on the link: Mesj.com.New.

²⁵.Mu'taz Salama, op. Cit., P. 84.

President Putin opposed US and Western policies in extending NATO on the Russian border, which is a sign of rejection of American hegemony or a single pole²⁶. This may support Russian positions in the Arab region. Furthermore, the Russian moves are also extending its diplomacy to China, India, and the major Asian countries, with the aim of strengthening the Russian role, thus increasing the effectiveness of performance in international events²⁷. Such Russian moves make Arab countries accept it as an alternative ally to the United States, especially since these alliances may attract Russia in various areas, especially economic ones.

This polarization may affect America's relations with its allies in the region, having abandoned them in crises. Moreover, the future of Russian policy in the international arena is increasing in size because, according to some, it is realistic, especially after²⁸ restructuring itself, and it has achieved more at the level of national interests. Such credibility is supported by the Arab Spring region, after losing its confidence in its regimes and its allies. Russia has also deepened its relations with allies in the Arab region and has opened channels of communication between the Russian intelligence services and their counterparts in the Middle East, including Israel, which Russia regards as a reliable ally in the region and has expanded its relations with it, and signed several agreements in the fight against terrorism including the sale of Israeli drones to Russia²⁹. Russia has become increasingly competitive to the US in the Arab region. It is witnessing a great arms race because it refuses to abandon its leading role in international events due to its ability to change the rules of the game³⁰. The country intervenes in crises in a way that differs from that of the United States, which tends to use military force and direct intervention.

Remain cautious is the dominant feature of the relationship between Russia and the US; no matter how developed their relations are. The history between them is characterized by competition because of the American desire to remain the only dominant force in the world in return for Russia's relentless attempt to regain its leading role in the world arena, especially as Russia gave up its ideology³¹ and became convinced that the world is governed by the will of interests, and thus this shift in international relations has become a service positions of power and control. which has taken to serve their interests from the use of two means: soft power and solid power; that is, Russia adopts the policy of soft power, but does not hesitate to use military force if necessary to preserve its interests in a world where the concepts of sovereignty and power have changed³².

Conclusion

Russia has adopted a new strategy in its foreign policy through Putin's announcement of the new principles of Russian foreign policy, with the aim of restoring Russia's leading roles in international events and changes, adopting a foreign policy through which one-pole dominance can be eliminated, and turn the international system into a multipolar system. It has witnessed changes in its foreign policy, especially in the Middle East; it has begun to follow new methods generate impressions of the new Russia, which struggled to restore its former power and showed, through its foreign policy and how it dealt with Crises, that it doesn't aim at hegemony, On the contrary, its intervention seeks to find a strategic partnership on the economic and development aspects in a way that benefits all parties. It is thus preparing the world for the rejection of unipolarity, especially in light of the failure of the United States in its wars with Iraq, Afghanistan, the Caucasus, and crises under the Arab Spring. In these crises, it changed the balance of power and changed strategy from solid to soft.

²⁶ Mr. Amin Shalaby, Putin and Russia's Foreign Policy, International Policy, No. 175, Volume 44, Cairo, Center for Political and Strategic Studies, January 2009, p. 257.

²⁷ Abdul Aziz Mahdi al-Rawi, op. Cit., P. 166.

²⁸ George Friedman, "Russia's Window of opportunity" Start for Global Intelligence, August 12,2007.For more details, see: [Http: www.Start For.com](http://www.StartFor.com). Russia- window, opportunity.

²⁹ Basem Rashed, Associated Interests: A New World Role for Russia in the Arab Spring, Paper Series, No. 9, Alexandria, Future Studies Unit, 2013, p.83.

³⁰ Naser Zidane, The Role of Russia in the Middle East and North Africa from Peter the Great to Vladimir Putin, I 1, Beirut, Arab Science House, Publishers, 2013, p. 216.

³¹ Mohamed El Sayed Selim, The Great Transformation of Russian Foreign Policy, International Politics, No. 170, October 2007, p.15.

³² Amin Shalabi, Putin and Russia's Foreign Policy, International Policy, No. 175, Volume 44, (Cairo: Policy and Strategy Center, January 2009, p.54.

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