

ARTICLES

Deciphering Russia's Geopolitical Playbook: Status-Seeking Motivations Through Intervention to Syria

Muhammet KOÇAK*

Abstract

This article analyzes the influence of status-aspiration in Russia's military involvement in Syria. By leveraging the literature on status and empirical evidence, I posit that Russia's ambition for prestigious power recognition, rooted in its search for ontological security, has played a significant role in shaping its involvement in Syria. The existing scholarly discourse has considered the status impact on Russia's foreign policies; however, this article differentiates itself by scrutinizing Russia's strategic objectives, rhetoric, and maneuvers throughout its Syrian intervention, while investigating the degree to which status-aspiration motivations coalesce with other elements to mold its participation in the conflict. By spotlighting the historical continuum, I further propose that military interventions have functioned as a vehicle for Russia to affirm its prestigious power status following the failure of non-military strategies to secure recognition of a great power status in the 1990s. Aside from its contribution to the literature, this study also carries pragmatic implications for policymakers in forecasting and reacting to Russia's moves, thereby enriching the nuanced comprehension of its foreign policy conduct and its consequential effects on regional and global stability.

Keywords

Russian foreign policy, status-seeking behavior, military intervention, Syria, great power status, Middle East, international security

* Assistant Professor, Institute for Area Studies, Social Sciences University of Ankara, Ankara, Türkiye.
E-mail: muhammet.kocak@asbu.edu.tr. ORCID: 0000-0002-6448-9250.

Received on: 11.05.2023
Accepted on: 10.10.2023

Introduction

In recent years, Russia has pursued an aggressive foreign policy strategy, marked by several military interventions that illustrate its quest for global influence and prestige. Russia's intervention in Syria is one of its most important military interventions given the regional and global significance of the Syrian civil war and the fact that Syria is situated well beyond Russia's territorial borders. What is the overarching goal motivating Russia's adoption of an aggressive strategy? I argue that the quest for status is a crucial factor driving Russia's foreign policy choices. Drawing on empirical data this study argues that Russia perceives its status in relation to other nations and Russia's military intervention in Syria serves as a means of asserting its great power status. Furthermore, this research underscores the fact that Russia's conduct in Syria is consistent with its pattern of behavior in previous interventions, reflecting a broader approach to foreign policy that seeks to enhance Russia's status in the international system.

This paper aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Russia's foreign policy behavior, particularly its military intervention in Syria, by examining the role of status-seeking motivations. By providing insights into the influence of status-seeking behavior on Russia's foreign policy decisions, the paper aims to contribute to the development of more effective policies that address the challenges posed by Russia's pursuit of great power status. Such enhanced understanding will have practical implications for policymakers, equipping them with the necessary knowledge to anticipate and respond more effectively to Russia's actions and helping to foster regional and international stability in an increasingly complex global landscape.

The paper is organized into the following sections: First, a literature review will provide an overview of existing research on the relationship between status-seeking behavior and Russia's foreign policy. Second, the theoretical framework and methodology section outlines the empirical data and comparative case studies used to analyze Russia's foreign policy choices and its quest for status in the international system. Then, I present a background discussion of Russian foreign policy and the Syrian civil war. This section aims to provide the necessary context for understanding the geopolitical landscape within which Russia's quest for status in Syria has unfolded. Subsequently, the main section of the paper offers an in-depth analysis of Russia's strategic objectives, rhetoric, and actions during its intervention in Syria, highlighting the extent to which status-seeking motivations interact with other factors

in shaping Russia's involvement in the conflict. By investigating Russia's behavior through this multifaceted lens, the research seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of the factors that drive Russia's pursuit of great power status, and its implications for regional and international stability.

Review of the Literature

While several scholars assert that Russian domestic factors significantly contribute to Russia's intervention in Syria, a closer examination of these claims reveals inherent limitations. Proponents of this view contend that Putin capitalizes on Russian nationalism to bolster his foreign policy decisions, such as the annexation of Crimea and other assertive geopolitical moves.¹ They argue that the Russian media and public discourse corroborate Putin's narrative, reinforcing his grip on power.² Additionally, it is posited that Putin uses the Syrian intervention to shore up the popularity of the regime by appealing to nationalistic sentiments.³ Trenin argues that domestic concerns also include issues related to the connection with the extremist groups inside Russia and extremist groups in Syria.⁴ The argument, however, is marred by the dearth of empirical evidence. While Russian nationalism and domestic concerns might indeed influence Putin's foreign policy choices, determining his precise motives with certainty proves elusive. In other words, whether these concerns constitute Russia's primary motivation remains highly debatable. Nevertheless, this line of reasoning provokes inquiries that are pertinent to the essence of the Russian social contract and the extent of Putin's control over the state apparatus.

While several scholars assert that Russian domestic factors significantly contribute to Russia's intervention in Syria, a closer examination of these claims reveals inherent limitations.

Several scholars posit that economic factors and related energy considerations can be the key drivers behind Russia's intervention in Syria, emphasizing proposed gas pipelines and access to the Syrian market. Numerous sources emphasize the significance of natural resources and infrastructure in their attempt to analyze foreign involvement in Syria.⁵ Central to this narrative is Iran-Iraq-Syria Pipeline, a \$10 billion project stretching from Iran to Syria, which presents Russia with an opportunity to control European gas exports. Posing an alternative to the Qatari-proposed pipeline, which would cross Syria towards Türkiye, Russia,

as Europe's main supplier of solid fuels, crude oil, and gas, favored the Iran-Iraq-Syria pipeline due to stronger ties with Iran, thereby securing lucrative EU market dominance.⁶ Other possible economic motivations include Russia's economic diversification efforts, spurred by a domestic crisis caused by plummeting oil prices and international sanctions post-Crimea, aimed at gaining access to the Syrian market, an important buyer of Russian arms. Moreover, with a trade focus pivoting towards the Middle East, Syria emerges as a vital partner in securing Russian gas exports to Europe. According to Borschevskaya, the fall of the Libyan regime, which led to substantial losses in weapon contracts for Russia, might have heightened concerns about similar losses in Syria.⁷ While existing literature often emphasizes political and security factors, the role of natural resources and infrastructure should not be discounted as potential motives behind Russia's military intervention in Syria. Overall, however, the discourse often lacks rigorous empirical analysis and it remains unclear whether Russia's economic motivation is an end in itself or serves a broader purpose.

The official justification for Russia's direct military intervention in Syria was to support the Syrian regime in its fight against terrorism. According to the 2014 military doctrine of the Russian Federation, "Russia had the legitimate right to employ the Armed Forces, other troops and bodies to repel aggression against itself and/or its allies ... in accordance with generally recognized principles and norms of international law and international treaties of the Russian Federation."⁸ One strand of the literature noted that the security factor may have played a crucial role in Russia's intervention as it aimed to preserve Syria's unity and contain the threat of terrorist groups to safeguard Russia's regional and national security interests. For instance, Zvyagelskaya shows that besides emphasizing its geopolitical status Russia intervened in Syria to fight terrorism.⁹ Manoylo argues that Russia intervened to protect its national security by containing the threats posed by terrorist groups, such as ISIS.¹⁰ Similarly, Khudyakov posits that stabilizing the region to achieve regional security in the Levant remains Russia's chief objective in Syria.¹¹ There is also a body of literature that argues just the opposite. For instance, Molodykh argues that Russia's stated goal of fighting international terrorism is used to mask its strategic objectives at the regional and global levels,¹² and that Russia's prioritization of targeting the moderate opposition indicates that its core motivation is not to target terrorists.¹³ Therefore, despite Kremlin's official motivation, it is hard to suggest that "fighting international terrorism" is its real objective in Syria.

Another strand in the literature, which this article leans towards, points to the importance of Russia's status pursuit in its intervention in Syria. According to Larson and Shevchenko, for example, following the Crimean takeover, Putin sought to re-establish Russia's global status and challenge the image of a declining regional power promoted especially by the Obama administration.¹⁴ Putin aimed to compel the United States to view Russia as an equal, highlighting Russia's power and influence on the global stage. Similarly, Kreutz argues that Russia's quest for maintaining its influence in the Middle East through its support to Syria stems from its pursuit of preserving its status in the international arena as an independent actor that achieves results through dialogue with all regional actors.¹⁵ Pieper argues that Russia's intervention in Syria is a manifestation of its efforts to resist the West's internationalization of certain norms such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and its promotion of alternative norms such as the illegalization of intervention in domestic affairs of other states under any condition.¹⁶ Regarding the way Russia protects its status through Syria, Freire and Heller argue that the reason why Russia uses military power despite its faltering economy is because Russia is a status overachiever.¹⁷ Geukjian argues that overachievers typically evade conflict and strive to preserve the status quo, providing them with a greater degree of international influence and recognition from other major powers than their resources alone would justify.¹⁸ To alter this status quo would necessitate significant resource allocation and could result in the loss of the overachiever's status. When faced with challenges to their regional leadership, status overachievers may exhibit aggression within their immediate vicinity. Therefore, it is possible to argue that Russia is a status-inconsistent power that uses military power to make up for its status deficit.¹⁹ Moulikova and Kanet demonstrate that such pursuits stem from Russia's need for ontological security.²⁰ Tsygankov argues that a similar process played out in Russia's military intervention in Ukraine.²¹ In conclusion, this strand of literature underlines the fact that Russia's involvement in Syria is primarily motivated by its ambition to sustain and advance its global status, which Russia advances in order to challenge Western norms and assert its autonomy as a powerful actor. This endeavor has entailed the use of military force as a means of compensating for its status deficit and reinforcing its identity as a status overachiever.

This article also argues that Russia's quest to regain its lost status after the Soviet Union's collapse best explains its intervention in Syria. In the early 1990s, Russia sought collaboration with the West, intending to

In the early 1990s, Russia sought collaboration with the West, intending to promote democracy and integrate into Western systems. However, the West's disregard for Russia's interests prompted a shift to a more assertive foreign policy, aiming to reclaim status, prestige, and influence.

promote democracy and integrate into Western systems. However, the West's disregard for Russia's interests prompted a shift to a more assertive foreign policy, aiming to reclaim status, prestige, and influence.²² The significance of status concerns can be observed in official documents and leaders' statements. For example, the 1997 National Security Concept emphasized Russia's interests in the post-Soviet region and its role in a multipolar world order.²³ In

the 2009 Russian National Security Strategy, Russia contested Western civilization's monopoly on cultural and political values, and opposed the United States' hegemonic global role.²⁴ Russia's responses to U.S. missile defense systems in Poland and the Czech Republic, and potential NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia exemplified its opposition to Western dominance. The Syrian intervention was another link in this chain of Russian attempts to regain its global status. The intervention showcased Russia's military prowess and projected power in a region traditionally dominated by the U.S. and its allies. By challenging the regional dominance of the U.S., Russia could position itself as an indispensable actor, establishing new partnerships and strengthening existing ties with key regional players.

To summarize, a panoply of plausible explanations for Russia's military intervention in Syria surfaces in the literature: domestic considerations, economic factors, the professed fight against terrorism, and the pursuit of international status. Domestic politics and economic and security concerns offer invaluable insights, but fall short of encapsulating the full complexity of Russia's motivations. I contend that the quest for great power status and recognition provides a more compelling framework to comprehend Russia's motivations. As such, this article advocates for a nuanced approach that foregrounds Russia's status-seeking behavior while acknowledging the interplay with other factors. This perspective underscores Russia's pursuit of ontological security and the implications of its status-overachiever identity. Russia's pursuit of status, I argue, was its primary motivator, and provides a novel pathway to understanding Russia's foreign policy behavior in Syria and its broader implications for regional and global stability.

Theoretical Framework

In the realm of international politics, status forms a core element that impacts the decisions and actions of states as they maneuver through the intricacies of the global arena. Rooted in human nature, the quest for status reflects an almost hardwired instinct towards betterment,²⁵ a mechanism that is also mirrored in the conduct of states. A country's status maintenance or enhancement is a prime objective for policymakers, bestowing upon nations decision-making autonomy and deference from other states. Since status is inherently relational, it cannot be achieved in isolation, but must occur through interactions with other states.²⁶

States engage in diverse strategies to attain a higher status in the international arena. Recognition of such a status provides ontological security, facilitating states to form coherent interests and act upon them. A state's insecurity about its status may arise from misrecognition, namely a discrepancy between self-perception and others' perceptions.²⁷ When misrecognition takes place, states may seek recognition from a constructed status community, acting peacefully and adhering to international norms and rules if successful. However, failure to secure recognition may prompt states to root their identity in material practices, such as a great power voice, military power, and spheres of influence. In the case of Russia, its self-perception as a great power forms a pivotal part of its identity and ontological security, intertwining its historical need for physical security with a narrative of its great power status.²⁸ This narrative has become an integral part of Russia's identity, constructed over time to address its physical security needs.²⁹

The existence of a social hierarchy is widely acknowledged in international relations, with great powers and superpowers holding the highest status. States endeavor to elevate their position in this hierarchy via various strategies aimed at achieving higher status.³⁰ The

literature delineates four primary approaches to understanding status, encompassing the social-psychological approach of Larson and Shevchenko,³¹ the rationalist approach of Renshon,³² the constructivist approach of Murray,³³ and the status immobility approach of Ward.³⁴

This article utilizes Larson and

In the case of Russia, its self-perception as a great power forms a pivotal part of its identity and ontological security, intertwining its historical need for physical security with a narrative of its great power status.

Shevchenko's classification of status-seeking strategies, comprising social mobility, social competition, and social creativity. Social mobility involves a lower-status state adopting norms of the elite group to gain recognition.³⁵ Social competition entails states using hard power strategies to achieve higher status,³⁶ and social creativity involves states seeking prestige through distinctive policy or issue areas.³⁷

Examining Russia's conduct since the late 2000s through this lens, this article posits that after unsuccessful attempts to secure status recognition through social mobility in the early 1990s, Russia has increasingly adopted social competition as a status-seeking strategy. Characterized by geopolitical competition, this strategy could lead to more conflicts and less cooperation between states. This shift is evident in Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia and its attempts to create a multipolar world, challenging U.S. overlay in multiple regions. An analysis of Russia's actions within the context of these status-seeking strategies offers a deeper understanding of the intricate motivations behind its foreign policy decisions, such as its military intervention in Syria.

Russia's Quest for Status in Syria as Observed in Objectives, Rhetoric, and Actions

Russia's strategic aims include preserving the Assad regime and challenging U.S. regional dominance, reflecting a deeper aspiration to reshape the existing geopolitical order. The rhetoric of Russian leadership advocates for a multipolar world while maintaining an image of Russia as a responsible global actor. Russia's military and diplomatic actions in Syria further testify to its competitive capacity to address significant regional crises. By examining these aspects, the article strives to offer a nuanced understanding of how Russia's status pursuit in Syria impacts broader geopolitical scenarios.

Objectives

Moscow's actions in the region are part of a strategy to assert its influence, challenge the global order, and establish itself as a major player in international affairs. Russia's intervention in Syria is driven by several objectives, each of which contributes to the country's pursuit of great power status. These objectives can be divided into three main categories: hampering U.S. hegemonic power, showcasing military power, and increasing its regional influence by protecting its allies. First, by actively engaging in the Syrian conflict, Russia aims to promote global multipolarity thereby challenging the dominance of

the United States in the region and undermining its ability to dictate the course of events.³⁸ This serves to counterbalance U.S. influence and create a more multipolar world order, in which Russia can assert its own interests more effectively. Second, the conflict has given the country a platform to demonstrate its advanced military capabilities, such as the use of sophisticated weaponry and technology, sending a strong signal to the international community about its strength and resolve.³⁹ This serves to reinforce Russia's image as a formidable global actor and bolsters its status among great powers. Lastly, Russia's alliance with the Syrian regime contributes to Moscow's strategic interests in the region and reinforces its position as a key global actor.⁴⁰ By steadfastly supporting its allies, Russia can maintain a foothold in the Middle East and ensure the continued relevance of its strategic partnerships. Additionally, protecting its allies serves to demonstrate Russia's loyalty and commitment, further enhancing its international standing. In summary, by challenging U.S. hegemony, showcasing its military prowess, and protecting its allies, Moscow asserts its role as a key regional and global player in contemporary international politics.

The objectives of Russia's intervention in Syria serve to advance its status as a great power. By hampering U.S. hegemonic power, Russia highlights the limitations of U.S. influence in the region and presents itself as a key player in the global arena. By demonstrating its advanced military capabilities and technological prowess, Russia attempts to capture international attention to bolster its image as a formidable great power. Despite its economic weaknesses, such display of military strength reinforces the perception of Russia as a resurgent military power and a force to be reckoned with.⁴¹ Lastly, protecting its allies, such as the Assad regime, emphasizes Russia's

By hampering U.S. hegemonic power, Russia highlights the limitations of U.S. influence in the region and presents itself as a key player in the global arena.

commitment to upholding its strategic interests and maintaining its influence in the Middle East. By standing by its allies even in the face of international pressure, Russia signals its resolve to defend its interests and showcases its ability to act as a power broker in the region.⁴² Furthermore, increasing Russian influence in the Middle East strengthens Moscow's position as a significant player in regional affairs. This enhanced influence allows Russia to shape political outcomes, build alliances, and expand its diplomatic reach, thereby contributing to its perceived status in the international community. This, in turn, further

strengthens Russia's position in the global landscape and advances its status as a great power.

Rhetoric

Russia's discourse in the Syrian conflict revolves around several key narratives that help to contextualize its involvement and justify its actions. First, through its rhetoric, Moscow emphasizes the importance of state sovereignty and non-intervention in the affairs of other countries. By positioning itself as a defender of these principles, Russia seeks to contrast its role in Syria with that of Western powers, which it accuses of meddling in the region and exacerbating the conflict. For instance, Putin has criticized the Western strategy of supporting various opposition groups in Syria, arguing that such efforts have led to a protracted and bloody conflict with negative consequences for regional stability.⁴³ Moscow has attempted to position itself as a more reliable and effective partner in resolving complex international problems, thereby enhancing its status relative to other global powers. This rhetorical strategy highlights Russia's desire to challenge the existing world order and assert its place as an indispensable player in international politics. Another aspect of Russia's discourse focuses on the fight against terrorism, with Moscow claiming that its intervention in Syria is primarily aimed at combating extremist groups such as ISIS.⁴⁴ On a number of occasions, Putin has stated that Western involvement in the Middle East is to blame for the rising extremism in the region.⁴⁵ This narrative allows Russia to present its actions as being in line with the broader goals of international security and stability, thereby garnering support and legitimacy for its involvement. Russian state officials also raise the issue of the West's need to accept the unfolding multipolar world order. Both Lavrov⁴⁶ and Putin⁴⁷ underline that the West attempts, in vain, to prevent and contain the formation of a multipolar world order by interfering in the domestic affairs of sovereign states fomenting disorder. It can be argued that compared to an alternative scenario where Russia would have limited influence under U.S. hegemony, a multipolar order potentially offers Russia more influence as a respected great power. Being a great power means that a state is consulted in every question of major importance, whether or not it has individual interests, while other powers are only consulted when they are directly affected by a decision.⁴⁸ By utilizing its military capabilities in cases like Syria, Russia increases its influence and cultivates a multipolar order where its increased influence contributes to a geopolitical landscape where Russia holds a superior position in

terms of both status and influence. It is noteworthy that such a strategy is promoted word-for-word by Bashar al-Assad who suggests, “The firm and principled stance that Russia has towards the United States and the West is one of the main contributing factors to the birth of a multipolar world order, sought by all countries and peoples who adhere to the international law and defend their sovereignty and national interests.”⁴⁹ Overall, Russia’s discourse in the Syrian conflict is designed to frame its involvement in a manner that bolsters its image as a key player in the region, while also emphasizing its commitment to international norms and principles.

At the same time Russia’s discourse in the Syrian conflict serves as a strategic tool for advancing its status-seeking objectives on the global stage. By emphasizing the importance of international norms, and its fight against terrorism, Moscow positions itself as a responsible international actor that upholds global norms and values. This image bolsters Russia’s claim to great power status and helps

differentiate it from Western powers, which Russia often accuses of partaking in destabilizing actions in the Middle East.⁵⁰ Russian officials have often highlighted their military’s success in turning the tide of the conflict in favor of the Assad regime, and their role in facilitating peace negotiations, such as the Astana Process.⁵¹ By emphasizing these achievements, Moscow seeks to demonstrate its indispensability in addressing international security challenges and further its claim to great power status.

In conclusion, Russia’s discourse in the Syrian conflict is a critical component of its status-seeking strategy. By emphasizing the importance of international norms, state sovereignty, and the fight against terrorism, Moscow positions itself as a responsible and indispensable international actor. Moreover, the showcasing of Russia’s military and diplomatic capabilities in the Syrian context serves to bolster its claim to great power status. Ultimately, the strategic use of discourse allows Russia to assert its position in the region and challenge the existing world order, contributing to its broader foreign policy ambitions and pursuit of great power status.

Overall, Russia’s discourse in the Syrian conflict is designed to frame its involvement in a manner that bolsters its image as a key player in the region, while also emphasizing its commitment to international norms and principles.

Actions

Russia's military, diplomatic, and economic involvement serve to advance Moscow's interests and project its influence in the region. Russia's military actions include deploying its air force for airstrikes against opposition forces, providing logistical support and military equipment to the Syrian Arab Army, and deploying its own ground forces in advisory and special operations roles.⁵² These efforts have been crucial in bolstering the regime and shifting the balance of power in its favor, showcasing Russia's ability to impact the conflict's outcome decisively.⁵³ Second, Moscow has played a significant role in the diplomatic arena, engaging in peace talks and ceasefire negotiations. Initiatives such as the Astana Process and the Sochi talks have been driven by Russia, working alongside regional partners like Iran and Türkiye to shape the conflict's political outcome. These diplomatic efforts have positioned Russia as an indispensable player in the Syrian peace process, further asserting its influence in the region and on the international stage.⁵⁴ Lastly, Russia has also been involved in economic action, such as providing financial assistance and investing in Syria's reconstruction efforts. Moscow has extended credit lines, facilitated trade, and supplied essential goods like oil and food to the Assad regime.⁵⁵ These economic actions have helped the Syrian government maintain its capacity to function and reinforced Russia's position as a key ally in the region. These three dimensions of Russia's actions—military, diplomatic, and economic—illustrate the diverse ways in which Moscow has sought to assert its presence and further its objectives in Syria.

The various actions undertaken by Russia during its intervention in Syria reveal the underlying status-seeking motivations driving Moscow's foreign policy in the region. Russia's successful shift of the conflict's course in favor of the Assad regime has showcased its military prowess and cemented its position as a key power broker in the Middle East.⁵⁶ This demonstration of military and diplomatic capabilities has enhanced Russia's status on the global stage, signaling its determination to play an influential role in resolving international conflicts. Russia's military intervention in Syria has allowed it to counterbalance Western influence in the region and promote a multipolar world order.⁵⁷ By directly intervening in a conflict where the United States and its allies had struggled to achieve their objectives, Russia has not only challenged their dominance but also asserted its claim to great power status. By contesting the existing global hierarchy and projecting its capabilities, Moscow has reinforced its status-seeking objectives. Russia's economic

actions in Syria have further demonstrated its commitment to supporting the Assad regime, bolstering its influence in the region. By providing financial assistance, facilitating trade, and investing in reconstruction efforts, Moscow has strengthened its ties with Damascus and secured a long-term presence in the region. This economic engagement has allowed Russia to position itself as a key actor in the Middle East, contributing to its pursuit of greater status on the international stage. Overall, Russia's status-seeking motivations have manifested through its military, diplomatic, and economic actions in Syria, reflecting its broader aspirations to be recognized as a global power.

The decisive impact of its military involvement combined with its influential role in diplomatic negotiations have enhanced Russia's global status, while challenging Western hegemony. Economic endeavors, including providing aid and investing in reconstruction, have consolidated Russian regional presence and ties with Damascus.

The decisive impact of its military involvement combined with its influential role in diplomatic negotiations have enhanced Russia's global status, while challenging Western hegemony.

These actions collectively reflect Russia's broader aspiration for global recognition as a significant power, reinforcing the key argument of this analysis.

Conclusion

This research paper has explored the role of status-seeking motivations in shaping Russia's military intervention in Syria. Through a comprehensive analysis of its strategic objectives, rhetoric, and actions, I have shown that Russia's quest for great power status significantly influences its foreign policy choices. The findings of this article suggest that military interventions, such as the one in Syria, serve as a means for Russia to assert its great power status when non-military means have failed to secure recognition from the West.

Russia's pursuit of status in Syria is evident across its strategic objectives, rhetoric, and actions. Moscow's intervention in the conflict has showcased its military and diplomatic capabilities, challenging the prevailing geopolitical order and positioning itself as a key player in the region. The strategic narratives employed by Russian officials highlight Moscow's commitment to upholding international law and advocating

for a multipolar world, further enhancing its international standing. Through a combination of military, diplomatic, and economic actions, Russia has effectively asserted its influence in the Middle East and enhanced its status on the global stage. By examining these multiple dimensions, we gain a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between Russia's pursuit of status in Syria and the broader geopolitical ramifications that emanate from its endeavors.

Looking forward, we can expect Russia to persist in its endeavor to assert its influence and actively seek opportunities to consolidate its presence in the Middle East. The recalibration of the strategic focus of the U.S. toward China, coupled with a diminishment of its commitments in the region, has engendered a palpable geopolitical void that Russia may be poised to exploit judiciously. As the U.S. presence recedes, Russia

By positioning itself as a dependable collaborator and mediator in regional disputes, Russia can cultivate more robust affiliations with Middle Eastern states, thereby solidifying its prominence in the regional geopolitical landscape.

is likely to increasingly engage in initiatives aimed at bolstering its military, economic, and diplomatic entanglements with Middle Eastern nations. This calculated approach not only affords Russia the means to extend its sphere of influence, but also furnishes it with invaluable leverage to propagate its vision of a multipolar global order. By positioning itself as a dependable collaborator and mediator in regional disputes, Russia can cultivate more robust affiliations

with Middle Eastern states, thereby solidifying its prominence in the regional geopolitical landscape.

Furthermore, as Russia continues its assertive role in the Middle East, it is probable that it will encounter intricate diplomatic entanglements and give rise to discord with other prominent stakeholders in the region. This process may entail navigating multifaceted relationships with traditional U.S. allies, like Jordan, as well as regional heavyweights like Iran and Türkiye. The intricate interplay between Russia's status-seeking aspirations and its interactions with these actors will represent a pivotal determinant of its forthcoming actions. It is likely that Russia will be compelled to harmonize its interests and objectives, considering both its pursuit of great power status and the regional stability imperatives. Consequently, the forthcoming years may witness a meticulous choreography of diplomacy, military deployments, and economic engagements as Russia endeavors to seize the evolving

dynamics in the Middle East and mold them to serve its overarching foreign policy imperatives.

The practical implications of this research extend to informing policymakers on what to anticipate and how to respond to Russia's actions in international conflicts. A more nuanced understanding of Russia's status-seeking motivations can contribute to the development of effective strategies for managing regional and international stability in the face of resurgent great power competition. Future research may build upon the findings of this paper by examining the role of status-seeking motivations in other cases of Russian foreign policy or by investigating how the interplay between status-seeking objectives and other factors shapes Russia's decision-making processes. Additionally, it would be valuable to explore how the perception of Russia's great power status influences the responses of other international actors and impacts the dynamics of global politics.

Endnotes

- 1 Pal Kolstø, "Russia's Nationalists Flirt with Democracy," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (2016), p. 132.
- 2 Yuri Teper, "Official Russian Identity Discourse in Light of the Annexation of Crimea: National or Imperial?" *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (2015), pp. 378–396.
- 3 Nikolay Kozhanov, *Russia and the Syrian Conflict: Moscow's Domestic, Regional and Strategic Interests*, Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2016, pp. 91–92.
- 4 Dmitri Trenin, "Russia in the Middle East: Moscow's Objectives, Priorities, and Policy Drivers," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, March 25, 2016, p. 1, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/03-25-16_Trenin_Middle_East_Moscow_clean.pdf (Accessed: 12.04.2023).
- 5 Nafeez Ahmed, "Syria Intervention Plan Fueled by Oil Interests, Not Chemical Weapon Concerns," *The Guardian*, August 30, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/earth-insight/2013/aug/30/syria-chemical-attack-war-intervention-oil-gas-energy-pipelines>; Pepe Escobar, "Syria's Pipelineistan War," *Al Jazeera*, August 6, 2012, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2012/8/6/syrias-pipelineistan-war> (Accessed: 18.04.2023).
- 6 Hassan Hafidh & Benoit Faucon, "Iraq, Iran, Syria Sign \$10 Billion Gas-Pipeline Deal," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 25, 2011, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424053111903591104576467631289250392> (Accessed: 10.02.2023).
- 7 Anna Borschchevskaya, "Russia's Many Interests in Syria," *The Washington Institute*, January 14, 2013, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/russias-many-interests-syria> (Accessed: 10.04.2023).
- 8 Dmitri Trenin, "2014: Russia's New Military Doctrine Tells It All," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, December 12, 2014, <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/57607> (Accessed: 18.04.2023).
- 9 Irina Zvyagelskaya, "Russian Policy in the Levant," *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 15, No. 60 (2018), p. 124.
- 10 Alexey V. Manoylo, "Konflikt v Sirii i vneshnyaya politika Rossii," *Aktual'nyye problemy Yevropy*, No. 2 (2020), p. 148.
- 11 Igor F. Khudyakov, "Sovremennaya vneshnyaya politika Rossii v regione Levanta," *Novoye slovo v nauke i praktike: gipotezy i aprobatsiya rezul'tatov issledovaniy*, No. 13 (2014), p. 79.
- 12 Leonid Leonidovich Molodykh, "Uchastiye Rossii v voyne v Sirii v kontekste vneshney politiki Rossii: motivy i prevaritel'nyye itogi," *The Newman in Foreign Policy*, No. 38 (2017), p. 28.
- 13 Bill Chappell, "Syrian Opposition Says Russian Airstrikes Aren't Targeting ISIS," *NPR*, October 1, 2015, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/10/01/444953234/syrian-opposition-says-russian-airstrikes-arent-targeting-isis> (Accessed: 08.02.2023).
- 14 Deborah Welch Larson & Alexey Shevchenko, "Russia Says No: Power, Status, and Emotions in Foreign Policy," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 3–4 (2014), p. 278.
- 15 Andrei Kreutz, "Syria: Russia's Best Asset in the Middle East," *IFRI*, November 2010, <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/notes-de-lifri/russienvisions/syria-russias-best-asset-middle-east> (Accessed: 02.02.2023).
- 16 Moritz Pieper, "'Rising Power' Status and the Evolution of International Order: Conceptualizing Russia's Syria Policies," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (2019), p. 380.
- 17 Maria Raquel Freire & Regina Heller, "Russia's Power Politics in Ukraine and Syria: Status-Seeking between Identity, Opportunity, and Costs," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 70, No. 8 (2018), p. 1180.
- 18 See "Theoretical Framework, Methodology, and Structure," in Ohannes Geukjian, *The Russian Military Intervention in Syria*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022.
- 19 Thomas J. Volgy et al., "Major Power Status in International Politics," in Thomas J. Volgy et al. (eds.), *Major Powers and the Quest for Status in International Politics, Evolutionary Processes in World Politics*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 11–26.
- 20 Roger E. Kanet & Dina Moulikova, "Russia's Self-Image as a Great Power," in Roger E. Kanet & Dina Moulikova (eds.), *Russia and the World in the Putin Era: From Theory to Reality in Russian Global Strategy*, London: Routledge, 2021, pp. 11–33.
- 21 Andrey Tsygankov, "Vladimir Putin's Last Stand: The Sources of Russia's Ukraine Policy," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 31, No.4 (2015), pp. 279–303.

- 22 Larson & Shevchenko, "Russia Says No"; Robert H. Donaldson, Joseph L. Noguee & Vidya Nadkarni, *The Foreign Policy of Russia: Changing Systems, Enduring Interests*, London: Routledge, 2014, pp. 245–251.
- 23 "The National Security Concept of the Russian Federation," *Medzinárodné Otázky*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2000), pp. 99–118.
- 24 Dmitri Medvedev, "Strategiya natsional'noy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii do 2020 goda," *Prezident Rossii*, May 13, 2009, <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/424> (Accessed: 06.04.2023).
- 25 William C. Wohlforth, "Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War," *World Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (2009), p. 29.
- 26 Michelle Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations: Status, Revisionism, and Rising Powers*, London & New York: Oxford University Press, 2019, p. 43.
- 27 *Ibid.*, pp. 48–50.
- 28 Hannes Adomeit, "Russia as a 'Great Power' in World Affairs: Images and Reality," *International Affairs*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (1995), pp. 35–68; Iver B. Neumann, "Russia as a Great Power, 1815–2007," *Journal of International Relations and Development*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2008), pp. 128–151; Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009.
- 29 Kanet & Moulukova, "Russia's Self-Image as a Great Power," p. 11.
- 30 Christian Stolte, *Brazil's Africa Strategy*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 15.
- 31 Deborah W. Larson & Alexei Shevchenko, *Quest for Status: Chinese and Russian Foreign Policy*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019.
- 32 Jonathan Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017.
- 33 Michelle Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations: Status, Revisionism, and Rising Powers*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- 34 Steven Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- 35 Larson & Shevchenko, *Quest for Status*, p. 6.
- 36 *Ibid.*, pp. 7–11.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 38 Matthew Dal Santo, "Russia's Success in Syria Signals an Emerging Multipolar World Order," *Lowy Institute*, April 6, 2016, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/russia-s-success-syria-signals-emerging-multipolar-world-order> (Accessed: 12.04.2023).
- 39 Mansur Mirovalev, "Syria's War: A Showroom for Russian Arms Sales," *Al Jazeera*, April 6, 2016, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/4/6/syrias-war-a-showroom-for-russian-arms-sales> (Accessed: 06.04.2023).
- 40 Anna Borshevskaia, "Russia's Strategic Success in Syria and the Future of Moscow's Middle East Policy," *The Washington Institute*, January 23, 2022, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/russias-strategic-success-syria-and-future-moscows-middle-east-policy> (Accessed: 08.04.2023).
- 41 "Russia's Army: An Overestimated Power," *Deutsche Welle*, September 29, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/russias-army-an-overestimated-power-in-the-war-against-ukraine/a-63264441> (Accessed: 12.04.2023).
- 42 Roy Allison, "Russia and Syria: Explaining Alignment with a Regime in Crisis," *International Affairs*, Vol. 89, No. 4 (2013), p. 818.
- 43 "Putin Speaks Out against Unilateral Intervention," *Reuters*, September 26, 2012, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-putin-idUSBRE88P0XZ20120926> (Accessed: 02.03.2023).
- 44 Don Melvin, Susannah Cullinane & Mohammed Tawfeeq, "Russia's Lavrov on Syria Targets: 'If It Looks like a Terrorist, Walks like a Terrorist...'," *CNN*, October 1, 2015, <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/10/01/middleeast/russia-syria/index.html> (Accessed: 02.03.2023).
- 45 Colum Lynch & John Hudson, "Obama and Putin Trade Blame over Syria Debacle, but Agree to Talk," *Foreign Policy*, September 28, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/09/28/iran-turkey-isil-terror-obama-and-putin-trade-blame-over-syria-debacle-but-agree-to-talk/> (Accessed: 12.04.2023).
- 46 "Vystupleniye Ministra inostrannykh del Rossiyskoy Federatsii S.V.Lavrova na vstreche s rukovoditelyami rossyiskikh nekommercheskikh organizatsiy," *Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiyskoy Federatsii*, July 19, 2023, https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1897750/ (Accessed: 06.03.2023).

- 47 Elena Teslova, "Putin Says West Tries to Contain Formation of Multipolar World," *Anadolu Agency*, August 16, 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/russia-ukraine-war/putin-says-west-tries-to-contain-formation-of-multipolar-world/2662341> (Accessed: 10.04.2023).
- 48 Jörg Kammerhofer, "Superpowers and Great Powers," in Rudiger Wolfrum, *Max Planck Encyclopedia of Public International Law*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- 49 "Asad zayavil, chto tverdaya pozitsiya Rossii sposobstvuet formirovaniyu mnogopolyarnogo mira," *TASS*, July 25, 2023, <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/18361599> (Accessed: 16.04.2023).
- 50 Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, "A Plea for Caution from Russia," *The New York Times*, September 11, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/opinion/putin-plea-for-caution-from-russia-on-syria.html> (Accessed: 11.04.2023).
- 51 Elena Teslova, "Lavrov Says Iran, Russia, Syria, and Türkiye in Talks for Meeting," *Anadolu Agency*, April 14, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/russia-ukraine-war/lavrov-says-iran-russia-syria-and-turkiye-in-talks-for-meeting/2872259> (Accessed: 06.04.2023).
- 52 Mason Clark, "The Russian Military's Lessons Learned in Syria," *Institute for the Study of War*, pp. 24-32, https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/The%20Russian%20Military%E2%80%99s%20Lessons%20Learned%20in%20Syria_0.pdf (Accessed: 08.02.2023).
- 53 Mariya Petkova, "What Has Russia Gained from Five Years of Fighting in Syria?" *Al Jazeera*, October 1, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/10/1/what-has-russia-gained-from-five-years-of-fighting-in-syria> (Accessed: 11.04.2023).
- 54 Muhittin Ataman, "Key Actors in the Current Syrian Deadlock," *SETA*, July 24, 2019, <https://www.setav.org/en/key-actors-in-the-current-syrian-deadlock> (Accessed: 10.04.2023).
- 55 Jonathan Robinson, "Five Years of Russian Aid in Syria Proves Moscow Is an Unreliable Partner," *Atlantic Council*, June 8, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/five-years-of-russian-aid-in-syria-proves-moscow-is-an-unreliable-partner> (Accessed: 03.04.2023).
- 56 Chris Brown, "Now You Can Feel Russia's Power: Russian Military in Syria Eager to Show Its Victories," *CBC Canada*, September 24, 2017, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/russia-syria-military-power-1.4299936> (Accessed: 12.04.2023).
- 57 Christopher Phillips, *The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016, p. 373.