



The impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the Syrian regime

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Prepared by: Abdulwahhab Assi - Khaled Alterkawi
- Firas Fahham

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Introduction:

Since 2011, Russia's positions have shielded the Syrian regime and stood against any attempt might affect it. Russia provided the regime with military equipment and funds necessary to confront the Syrian opposition forces. Then, Russian military air and ground forces intervened in 2015 and provided everything could help to protect the regime and prevent its overthrow. Furthermore, Russia support the regime to make it able to regain control over the entire country. It also provided the regime with diplomatic and political support.

As the conflict in Ukraine erupted in February 2022, it seemed that the Syrian regime might be affected, especially since Russia was placing Syria as one of the most prominent foreign policy priorities. Syria had often been identified as a major priority for Russia, which was reflected by providing international political support by Russia to the regime, defending the regime's positions and its point of view, preventing attacking or overthrowing it, and providing the regime with needed weapons and military hardware.

Russia did not only provide the regime with weapons, training and technical support courses, but also it ensured providing cash support in the form of loans to the regime, printing the Syrian pound banknotes required for the regime's government, selling the main inputs to the economy such as grain, encouraging Russian investments in Syria, and so on.

Therefore, it is expected that, with the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine, the regime will adopt cautious policies in order to preserve Russian support for it and contribute to consolidating its gains and minimizing the potential negative effects that may include various military, security, economic and political sectors and fields.

First: The Syrian regime's policies towards the conflict in Ukraine

1. Indecisive political position:

On February 22, 2020, the regime merely expressed Syria's readiness to acknowledge the republics of Donetsk and Lugansk without taking any further official action in this regard.¹

Even the statement issued by the regime's Foreign Ministry upheld the concept of sovereignty when it considered that US support for "separatist militias" in Syria threatens the stability of the region and the world², in reference to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

It is clear that the regime refrained from acknowledging the two republics because it fears for its own narrative about sovereignty to be affected, especially in light of negotiations with the Autonomous Administration on one side and the Syrian opposition in the Constitutional Committee on the other. This policy is also consistent with Iran's position, which the regime may be in dire need to it during the conflict in Ukraine.

Also, the regime's current position coincides with its previous ones on Russia's foreign policies; It took too much time in 2018, to recognise the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and to exchange relations with them. It seems that this came as a result of pressure from Russia, rather than being convinced of or as an initiative.

The regime was not among the first countries to support the military operation launched by Russia in Ukraine on February 23; Rather, its position was delayed until the 25th of the same month, that came during a phone call made by Bashar al-Assad with Vladimir Putin.³

It does not seem that the regime's attitude towards the conflict is linked to its distrust of the results of the military operation, but rather it is related to its desire to obtain a return. It seems that the regime wanted to be exempted from participating in the Syrian-Syrian dialogue track that Russia was about to launch in Moscow, and at the same time it wanted the economic support with loans to be resumed after the interruption since 2018.

¹ Presidency of the Republic: Syria is ready to work on building relations with the republics of Luhansk and Donetsk in the context of common interests." SANA, February 22, 2022, [link](#)

² Al-Miqdad: Russia's recognition of the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk republics is a step towards defending world peace. Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, February 21-2021, [link](#)

³ President al-Assad in a telephone call with President Putin: The enemy that the Syrian and Russian armies are facing are the same, in Syria there are extremists and in Ukraine it is Nazism. SANA, 25-2-2022, [link](#)

2. Responding to recruitment request for battles outside the country battles:

On March 11, 2022, Russia's President Vladimir Putin approved a proposal to recruit 16,000 fighters from the Middle East to fight alongside Russian forces in Ukraine.⁴

Given that Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said that the new fighters would be from the ones who had previously helped Russia in the war against ISIS during the past years, this means that Syria is the first and main destination for recruitment.

It is not the first time that Russia has resorted to recruiting Syrian fighters to participate in missions outside the borders, as it has done so since late 2019, in order to protect the oil fields and gold mines that are under its influence in Libya, Venezuela and African countries.⁵

Russia relies on the Syrian fighters due to many reasons, most notably; Ease of communication through military codes and language, combat experience resulting from joint training and combat operations, and ease of logistical operations such as roster collection and transportation.

In practice, recruiting men to fight outside the borders of Syria is one of the three issues that the Syrian regime uses to threaten the security of Europe. Similar to the drug issue, the regime will be willing or waiting to open security communication channels with the bloc to coordinate to reduce the sending of fighters to Ukraine in exchange for promises to reduce the size of the imposed economic sanctions on the regime.

This does not mean that the regime has its own independent policies on recruiting fighters but that it either has limited interference in this matter or it could circumvent Russia's request; Especially in the military units in which Russia is not able to interfere significantly; Such as registering prisoners in the lists of fighters who wish to go to Ukraine, and dodgers or deserters who have left military service, and those who have recently joined it.

Originally, Russia wants to recruit fighters from those who have combat experience and efficiency, not merely numbers. This is, however, not possible by simply relying on the units that Russia had provided training, armament, and logistical support for, such as the Fifth Corps, the First Division, the 25th

⁴ "Putin allows volunteers from the Middle East to fight alongside Russia in the Donbass". Russia Today, 11-3-2022, [link](#)

⁵ "Testimonies refuting Russia's denial of recruiting Syrian fighters to fight with Haftar." Al-Araby Al-Jadeed Newspaper, 12-17-2021, [link](#)

Special Task Force, some National Defense Forces, and the 30th Republican Guard Brigade. Therefore, Russia will need the combat power that the regime possesses in most units of the military establishment.

Indeed, the regime may not respond fully to Russia's recruiting demands; Because this deepens the attrition of the regime's military institution and poses a threat to the combat capabilities of the armed opposition factions in northwest Syria and ISIS in the Badia; Especially if the conflict in Ukraine affected Russia's ability to provide adequate air coverage, which the regime has relied on for defense and decisiveness since the end of 2015.

Recruitment in Syria takes place through three mechanisms, the first by security companies, the second at a direct request of the regime's Ministry of Defense, and the third at a direct request from official military units and the regime's paramilitaries. The monetary compensation that a recruit receives ranges between \$200 and \$500 per month.

The National Defense Forces in Mahrada and al-Suqaylabiyah in Hama countryside are two samples of the direct recruitment operations carried out by Russia, as the Hmeimim base received in mid-March no less than 500 recruits, to be joined by another 250 from the 30th Republican Guard Brigade. These recruits underwent intensive military training under the supervision of Russian officers, before some of them were transferred to the lines of engagement in the Ukrainian cities of Chernhiev and Kharkiv.⁶

In As-Suwayda Governorate, southern Syria, Al-Sayyad Security Company began recruiting men, targeting people who had previously fought alongside the Russian troops in Libya or who had participated in protecting some facilities and gained the ability to communicate in the field.⁷

In general, the regime's response to Russia's demands to recruit Syrian fighters, or not objecting to them, does not necessarily reflect acceptance of them; Therefore, it is not implemented in the way that Russia wants.

⁶ Information that the Jusoor Center for Studies has been able to access and verify its authenticity.

⁷ Interview with Rayan Maarouf, managing editor of As-Suwayda 24 Network, specialized in covering the events of As-Suwayda Governorate, Jusoor Center for Studies, 4-7-2022.

Interview with a unit monitoring Russian movements in Syria, working within the National Liberation Front, April 8, 2022.

3. Enhancing coordination with Iran:

It can be believed that the regime is taking into account the possibility of Russia reducing its military and political effort in Syria, and diverting it further to the conflict in Ukraine, which may push the regime to search for alternates to secure support. Iran has great chances in this regard.

Indeed, the pace of coordination between the two parties (Syria and Iran) has significantly increased, since Russia launched the military operation in Ukraine; Where the Syrian regime's Chairman of the National Security Bureau Maj. Gen. Ali Mamlouk made an unprecedented visit to Tehran on February 27, during which he met the Iranian President and the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, and there was a clear confirmation of the continuation and strengthening of security coordination.⁸

On the other hand, it is essential for Iran to enhance coordination with the regime, and to take advantage of the decline in coordination between Russia and Israel to expand weapons transfers, reconnaissance systems, air defense and drones from Iraq to Syria and Lebanon. This may explain the urgent visit of the head of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Authority - a militia affiliated with Iran - Faleh al-Fayyad to Damascus on March 2, 2022, and his meeting with Bashar al-Assad.

Anyway, if the regime fears that Russia's support for it will decline due to the latter's preoccupation with the conflict in Ukraine, the regime will look with great interest at the possibility of Iran signing the nuclear agreement with the United States, in the hope of obtaining more economic, military and political support to fill any possible shortage that Russia was covering.

Perhaps the regime views strengthening coordination with Iran in these circumstances as an opportunity to show more hardening of its position on the political process; Especially since the course of constitutional reform is not in line with the initiative put forward by Iran in late 2015 to amend the constitution, which was not aimed at a political solution under the auspices of the United Nations, but under a solution supervised by the regime based on 4 elements: amending the constitution and forming a national unity government, and holding elections under the supervision of international observers, and a ceasefire.⁹

⁸ Iran.. Shamkhani talks with the head of the Syrian National Security Office about the biggest obstacle." Russia Today, February 27, 2022, [link](#)

⁹" _An Iranian initiative to solve the Syrian crisis." Al-Jazeera Net, 9-3-2015, [link](#)

4. Efforts to ease the isolation and reduce sanctions:

At the end of 2021, US State Department spokesman Ned Price said that the United States might negotiate with the Syrian regime without making any shift in diplomatic relations with it in order to release American citizens.¹⁰

This came after a one-year-long of mediation efforts by Lebanon between the United States and the regime ¹¹, which may be ready for a new round of direct or indirect negotiations brokered by the Lebanese security chief, Abbas Ibrahim, in the hope of easing economic sanctions.

Assuming that the reason for the failure of the previous talks was Washington's failure to respond to the regime's demands, which often relate to easing economic sanctions ¹², the regime will not miss the opportunity to hold a new round of negotiations to achieve its demands or part of them, even in light of Russia's preoccupation with the conflict in Ukraine, especially with the keenness of Biden administration to achieve any success as the US election is approaching, which will be at the end of 2022.

Second: The impact of the conflict in Ukraine on the Syrian regime

1. The negative impact of Western sanctions on Russia:

1.1. Near-run effects:

The direct effects that may be reflected on the Syrian regime as a result of the economic sanctions on Russia could be limited to a number of points, namely:

- Rising food prices:

Russia has officially announced a ban on the export of grain to some countries except under special licenses in the context of its fear that the sanctions will indirectly threaten its ability to produce ¹³.

¹⁰ "Department Press Briefing with Spokesperson Ned Price". US Department of State, 9-12-2021 [Link](#)

¹¹ "Major General Abbas Ibrahim in response to what was published about US sanctions against him. Al-Jadeed channel on YouTube, 11-13-2020, [link](#)

¹² "Exclusive: Syria Demands Sanctions Relief, US Troop Pullout in Return for Help with American Captives". Newsweek, 19-10-2020, [Link](#)

¹³ For more see: Russia Bans Grain Exports to Former Soviet Countries, Al Bayan, 03-15-2022, <https://www.albayan.ae/economy/global/2022-03-15-1.4391771>

It may lead to an increase in the food bill in Syria, which will be one of the small countries in need of a special permit to purchase grain.

It seems that the good relations between the regime and Russia will allow the former to obtain these permits. The regime, however, will pay larger sums of money as a result of the rise in food prices globally. Also, Russia will no longer care about the regime if it is able to secure food or not, as long as this process will be an additional privilege granted to the regime by Russia.

- The decline of private aid:

A network of 13 Russian-affiliated organizations ¹⁴ operates in Syria. One of them, the Syria Support Committee, carried out 735 humanitarian missions in 244 locations in 2018 to 2020, and it is believed that this aid is not large in terms of size, but it comes within the framework of an expandable plan that will be surely undermined by the sanctions.

It is assumed that the aid provided by the Russian forces will be affected; Such as foodstuffs to different areas of the coast, Daraa, al-Hasakah, and others. Financing centers for teaching Russian language and culture and computer technology education centres will be affected too.

It is also expected that educational missions and training courses for various businesses, which are usually funded by the Russian embassy or official or semi-official bodies, will decline.

- Undermining the possibility of expanding military spending in Syria:

It is expected that the volume of Russian military spending in Syria between 2015 and 2020 will be close to half a billion US dollars annually. This does not mean that Russia did not spend other amounts before this date on military training and guidance for the Syrian regime and on establishing and developing its military bases, as well as costs related to military transportation and supply, which raises the cost of this intervention. ¹⁵

Although the military cost in Syria, with the start of Russia's battles in Ukraine, may be lower than at any time for reasons related to the decline in the conflict area over there, Russia continues to fuel potential military strikes, protect soldiers and supply them at Russian bases on the Syrian coast, which prompts Russia to reduce these costs to a minimum. This reduction may be associated

¹⁴ Russian aid in Syria..Humanitarian activity sites reveal their goals, Al Hurra, 25-07-2020, <https://arbne.ws/3L5x9VU>

¹⁵ Khalid AlTarkawi, "The Economic Costs of the War in Syria." Jusoor Center for Studies, March 29-2021, [link](#)

with a reduction in the size of troops and equipment, the number of sorties and the shells.

Furthermore, Russia's interest in the reform projects of Syrian public institutions, which it started with since its military intervention,¹⁶ may decline.

Against the background of unrealistic sympathy on the part of the regime and its supporters like Russia, we can also note in the near future an increase in the circulation of the Russian ruble, as well as the matter of sending Syrian fighters loyal to the Syrian regime to Russia to fight alongside the Russian army, where an average amount of up to \$1,000 will be paid per month. It will most likely be paid in Russian ruble.

1.2. Long-run effects:

It may be difficult to enumerate the effects of sanctions on Russia, which will be reflected on its partners, such as the Syrian regime, in the long and medium term. However, a number of points can be raised:

- Diminishing the possibility of borrowing:

Russia has provided the Syrian regime with packages of loans since 2011 in order to preserve the capabilities of its main institutions and worked to provide these loans at its request to meet its needs on the one hand and to reduce Iran's dominance in this sector on the other hand.

The last of these loans was in late 2021 when Russian Vice President Yury Borisov announced a loan to the regime for the purpose of purchasing food¹⁷. Russia did the same before 2021, but the regime often feared that it would not be able to pay and that it might entail a heavy price.¹⁸

It is expected that Russian companies canceled commercial deals with the regime due to the latter's inability to pay at different times. The Syrian regime's government institutions, however, offered to export goods in exchange for import.¹⁹ The loans were not limited to securing foodstuffs, but also to support

¹⁶For more, see: Russia's Role in Reforming Syria's Special Services, Carnegie Center, Kirill Semenov, 03-26-03-2020, <https://carnegie-mec.org/2020/03/26/ar-pub-81215>

¹⁷"Russia lends the regime to buy wheat on commercial grounds." Economy, 6-5-2021, [link](#)

¹⁸"Assad: We do not want to obtain new loans from Russia without the ability to repay." Sputnik, 10/8/2020, [link](#)

¹⁹The Syrian regime cancels the deal of one million tons of wheat from Russia." Enab Baladi, 09-13-2017, [link](#)

the main government institutions, despite Russia did not always announce these loans only informally.²⁰

Therefore, it seems that the regime's chances of obtaining loans from Russia will be greatly weakened; Because Russia currently needs the sums of money in foreign exchange more than ever. Accordingly, Russia will often not grant these loans in light of the economic sanctions on it, which have frozen parts of its assets in foreign currency and will restrict Russia's ability to access its foreign reserves.

- Exerting more economic pressures on the regime:

In late 2019, the Caesar Law came to isolate the regime and impose sanctions on those who deal with the it. It was noted that one of the biggest targets in such a law is affect Russia and Iran, which are the main suppliers of oil, weapons, devices used in interrogation and torture, and others.

In order to put more pressure on Russia, it is possible that the West will tighten its sanctions on the regime, given that - despite Iran's great influence - Russia is able to exert influence to a large extent on the making decision process and policies of the regime's official institutions, if they find it feasible. Accordingly, the West may resort to exercising more control over the regime's institutions and businessmen inside and outside Syria to prevent Russia from making any small or large moves, in order to tighten the screws on it.

2. Positive impact of Western sanctions on Russia:

2.1 Implementation of Russian projects in Syria

With the decrease in the possibility of Russian investments in the countries of the world, especially western ones, it is expected that the activities of the Russian companies will be concentrated inside Russia and the countries close to it as well as those that enjoy good relations with Russia, such as China and the Soviet countries who have good relations with Russia. In addition, small countries protected by Russia such as Syria will have good relations with Russia too.

There is a legal ground for these investments. Many agreements in infrastructure and energy have been signed with Russian companies, but these projects have not been implemented yet. For Russian companies, it is an opportune moment to implement these projects, which are considered low-cost

²⁰ “Сирия наращивает долг дружбы”. 23-10-2014, [Link](#)

in relation to global projects that are protected by the Russian forces and are accepted and welcomed by the Syrian regime. Among the most prominent projects that can be implemented are:

- Developing the Syrian coasts and the ability to access the riches of the Mediterranean, and the region may witness investments to discover gas in the opposite coasts.
- Exploration and mining: Some small Russian companies such as JSC Zarubezhneft, Zarubezhneft Geology, STG Engineering and TechnoProm Export have signed contracts to rehabilitate some of the damaged fields in Syria, and these fields include oil and gas.
- Wheat and flour: Russia signed a contract with the regime to build 4 large mills in Syria, mainly to provide wheat, at a cost of more than 70 billion euros²¹. There are also a large number of projects that have signed agreements, as shown in the following table:

²¹ "Russia is building 4 grain mills in Syria." Russia Today, 26-2-2016, [link](#)

The major projects agreed upon between Russia and the Syrian regime after 2011

The Project	About the project	Date of signing the contract or acquisition	Notes related to the project
Residential and commercial projects	In Aleppo, Homs, Latakia and Tartous	January February 2016	By Gigan Corporation of Russian businessman Artur Derbaska
Al Manara Tourist Village	Five-star hotel and commercial markets in Tartous	Agustus 2017	It is believed that the cost of the project is \$ 90 million and is implemented by the Russian company, StoryTransgas
Maintenance of Deir ez-Zor power station and increase the capacity of Tishreen and Mhardeh stations	The goal is to increase the production capacity of electricity to 2,300 megawatts	December 2017	Russian Ministry of Electricity
Connecting Damascus Airport to the city center	Via metro line	March 2018	Unknown Russian company
Freeing Oilfields Contract	It provides for recapturing various oil fields and returning them back to the regime, protecting and making them safe in return for %25 of the resources	March 2018	Contract with the Yevgeny Prigozhin's security company "Putin's Chef"
Developing a treatment plant in Tal Adas	It is a station that operates the oil fields in Al-Hasakah for the Syrian Oil	The contract was signed before 2011 but was reaffirmed in 2018	An old project signed with the regime before 2011, but the company still maintains it and seeks to acquire another, the Russian Ural Techno Stroy Company

The Project	About the project	Date of signing the contract or acquisition	Notes related to the project
investments in the Syrian phosphate fields	A fifty-year contract for the extraction of phosphates with a volume of 2.2 million tons per year from the Eastern Province	March 2018	It is expected that there will be a reserve of two billion tons, and the investing company is: Story Trans Gaz
Construction of four grain mills in Homs	At a cost of up to 70 billion Euros, Russia will build wheat and grain mills to be used in the Russian wheat and grain milling operations and to fill the market need.	June 2018	Signing with the company (Kobyte) owned by Russian businessman Ruslan Merzagonev
New port in Latakia	Construction of a new marine port to expand marine business	June 2018	Signing with the company (Kobyte) owned by Russian businessman Ruslan Merzagonev
Hosting Syrian satellite television channels on Russian satellites	As part of helping to break the ban imposed on TV channels' broadcasting will be via Russian satellites	June 2018	Signing with the company (Kobyte) owned by Russian businessman Ruslan Merzagonev
Rehabilitation of power fields and thermal stations	Rehabilitation of oil and gas fields in various Syrian regions and the rehabilitation of thermal power stations in the country	June 2018	Investing Russian companies are: JSC Zarubezhneft", "Zarubezhneft Geology", "STG Engineering", "TechnoProm Export"
Tartus port	Investing in and developing the port for a period of 49 years, and it is expected to be invested in transportation and offshore oil and gas exploration operations	June 2019	Russia has allocated half a billion dollars for its development over four years
Three oil exploration contracts to Mercury LLC and Velada LLC	A field north of Damascus on an area of 2,100 square km and another in the Syrian Jazira with an area of approximately 10,000 square km	December 2019	Mercury LLC is owned by businessman Dmitry Green and Velada by businessman Olek Kirlov

The Project	About the project	Date of signing the contract or acquisition	Notes related to the project
Offshore oil and gas exploration	Detection, prospecting and survey operations off the Syrian coast	The discussions about the contract date back to 2013, but it was officially signed in December 2019, and each company may have signed separately at a different time.	The Russian Capital Company and Soyuzneftegaz Company, and the term of the contract is expected to be 25 years.
Cultural and Scientific Cooperation Agreement	Constructing new schools in Syria and facilitating study missions for students of both countries through scientific visits	November 2020	Signed by the Russian Deputy Minister of Education
Agreements to restore Syrian antiquities	Restoration of the Arc de Triomphe and excavations in Apamea and others	April 2021	Supervised by: General Alex Slimene
Contracts with Syrian security companies	To employ a number of young guys to fight and protect facilities in Africa, Russia and other places	July 2021	The most prominent of them is the Syrian Al-Sayyad Company

2.2 Greater economic relations between the micro-states that Russia protects

The conflict in Ukraine since 2014 has produced three new microstates: Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk, in addition to the presence of similar states that Russia recognises as independent ones, such as Abkhazia and Ossetia, which separated from Georgia in 2008, as well as countries from the Russian Federation such as Chechnya.

It is in the interest of the Syrian regime to establish reciprocal relations with these countries, even if it does not recognise them all; in order to strengthen interests, enhance interactions, and benefit from the advantages of trade exchange. Although Syria is geographically very far from these countries, the possibility of establishing relations with them in the medium and long term seems possible. Also, it is expected that trade exchanges, investments, visits and joint projects will be increased between the regime on the one hand and such countries on the other.

3.2 Increasing opportunities for Syrian businessmen to have investments in Russia

In order to compensate for foreign investments, Russia will seek to encourage its allies to have investments inside Russia, whether through direct demand or through laws that facilitate their work and grant additional advantages. This makes it a potential investment destination for businessmen close to the Syrian regime who are looking for opportunities to develop their wealth.

Previously, some Syrian businessmen invested in Russia, such as Muhammad Makhoul, the father of Rami Makhoul, who died in 2020, and George Haswani, who carried out large works in the energy sector in Syria and has Russian and Syrian citizenship, in addition to other businessmen.

In the near future, businessmen close to the regime or those who wish to stay in Syria away from the opposition-regime conflict may seek to head to Russia to invest in it. They may become better able to invest after the devaluation of the ruble, which may not stop at the current limits, but may even fall even more, which means that a small investment in Russia will become possible for them.

1. Being affected by the decline in Russia's military presence in Syria:

a. Near-run effects:

Days before Russia launched the military operation in Ukraine, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu had made an unannounced visit to the Hmeimim base in Syria, which seems to be related not only to inspecting the conduct of naval maneuvers in the port of Tartus on the Mediterranean,²² but also to reorganising the operations command and distributing forces between Southern and Eastern Military District²³, i.e. transferring part of the Operations Command in Syria to Ukraine to benefit from the experience of officers and forces that they have gained since 2015.

There is a noticeable decline in the war effort in Syria. For example, since the beginning of 2022, the Russian forces have launched no less than 19 sorties against ISIS positions in the Levant Desert (Syrian Desert), only 6 of them took place after the launch of the military operation in Ukraine, compared to 13 during one month, i.e. in January. It is noted that the focus of the flights has become more focused on the Badia of Raqqa than in the Homs Dadias, the Damascus countryside and Deir ez-Zor.²⁴

Also, in the north of Syria, Russian forces have launched 13 sorties since the beginning of 2022 against opposition-controlled areas, only 5 of them after the announcement of the military operation in Ukraine.

It is assumed that this retreat will clearly affect the security, defense or military policies of the Syrian regime. On the one hand, its forces will be subjected to more attrition by ISIS in the region of Badia, because the group will find an appropriate opportunity to expand its activities. On the other hand, the regime's ability to undermine stability in the opposition-held areas will be lesser, despite it aspires to regain control over these areas.

It is likely that the regime's relationship with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) may also be affected by the conflict in Ukraine; It is expected that the SDF's confidence in Russia as a guarantor or mediator before the regime, the opposition factions, and Turkey will decrease, which may encourage it to

²² "Министр обороны Российской Федерации Сергей Шойгу встретился в Дамаске с президентом Сирии Башаром Асадом". Минобороны России, 15-2-2022, [Link](#)

²³ "Western official: Moscow assigned the command of its forces in Ukraine to a general who participated in the Syrian war." BBC, 9-4-2022, [link](#)

²⁴ Monitored by the information unit in the Jusoos Center for Studies.

escalate against the regime and try to obtain gains at its expense, as it did in the Tai neighborhood in March 2021.²⁵

On second thought, the conflict in Ukraine led to a noticeable decline in coordination between Russia and Israel in Syria, which resulted in increased reliance on bombing targets on surface-to-surface missiles from the Golan Heights, and the use of Lebanon's airspace to carry out air strikes inside Syria²⁶. Consequently, the regime's sites were subjected to more Israeli strikes.

b. Long-run effects:

The prolonged conflict in Ukraine will lead to a military and economic drain on the most important international supporter of the regime in Syria, as military losses are on the rise²⁷. Moscow's focus more on the crisis in Ukraine should deprive the regime of the momentum of Russian support it has enjoyed since late 2015.

The length of the conflict is likely to lead to Russia's retraction or abandonment of support for some military units that helped the regime restore its balance against the Syrian opposition factions, such as the Fifth Corps, the Sixth Division, and the 25th Division.²⁸ Thus, this will be undermining Russia's plan to restructure the military establishment.

This may have positive and negative effects on the regime; On the one hand, there will be a decline in the military effectiveness that the regime obtained as a result of the role played by the regime's combat units during the battles and confrontations against the opposition factions and ISIS. On the other hand, the regime will have an opportunity to interfere in the restructuring of these units and control their decision-making process as a result of the decrease in pressure and demands from Russia to reform the military establishment.

Also, the prolonged conflict in Ukraine may undermine the regime's ability to impose a military solution, except for the exposure of its forces to further attrition as a result of the opposition factions having a greater margin in carrying out security and military operations without necessarily changing the lines of contact.

²⁵ "Tit-for-tat siege in Sheikh Maqsoud and Qamishli between SDF and the Syrian regime: Causes and scenarios" Jusoor Center for Studies, 4-12-2022, [link](#)

²⁶ "Signs of decline in Russian-Israeli coordination in Syria." Jusoor Center for Studies, February 24, 2022, [link](#)

²⁷ "Russian warship: Moskva sinks in Black Sea." France 24, 4/14-2022, [link](#)

²⁸ "Russia cuts the salaries of the Fifth Corps in half and stops training." Jisr Newspaper, 4-15-2022, [link](#)

2. Being affected by the decline in Russia's diplomatic influence at the international level:

a. Current effects:

In July 2021, Russia and the United States launched the course of the strategic dialogue. Against the backdrop of the conflict in Ukraine, the negotiation rounds between the two parties were disrupted, including discussions related to the Syrian file, and Washington re-emphasized the loss of Bashar al-Assad's legitimacy.²⁹

It is expected that the US response to the demands to ease restrictions and grant exceptions will decline. Therefore, it may refrain from removing more companies of the regime's businessmen from the sanction's lists.

It is assumed that the diplomacy of indirect pressures that Russia relied on during the previous years in order to break the isolation of the regime and to activate the Arab Gas Pipeline will be directly affected. In other words, the effectiveness of Arab normalization initiatives at the bilateral and collective levels will stop or decline due to the hardening that the United States and the European Union may impose. Likewise, work on the Arab Gas Pipeline, which the United States agreed to pass from Syria in August 2021, was halted.³⁰

On the other hand, the pressure that Russia was exerting on Turkey to reduce its support for the Syrian political and military opposition could recede.

b. Expected effects in the future:

The continuation of the conflict in Ukraine is likely to lead to a significant and gradual decline of diplomacy in Syria; Because Russia attempts to push for a freeze on contentious issues with active countries such as Turkey, the United States, Iran and Israel.

This does not necessarily mean that the international powers, particularly the United States of America and Turkey, will maintain the status quo. Rather, it is not excluded that Ankara will use military pressure in order to reformulate the previous memoranda of understanding in northeastern or northwest Syria.³¹ Washington may also seek to exploit the Syrian file in order to place additional

²⁹ "Extracts from the US State Department's press briefing." Office of State Department Spokesperson Ned Price, 11-3-2022, [link](#)

³⁰ American approval for the passage of Egyptian gas from Syria. Jusoos Center for Studies, 8/21-2021, [link](#)

³¹ "Turkey seeks to change the rules of engagement in northeastern Syria." Jusoos Center for Studies, 4-12-2022, [link](#)

burdens on Russia. This is supposed to reflect negatively on the reality and internal policies of the Syrian regime.

Also, the constructive diplomacy on which UN envoy Geir Pedersen counts to implement a step-by-step approach to advancing the political process is likely to be disrupted.

Conclusion:

The scope of the Syrian regime's association with Russia has expanded since the latter's military intervention in Syria in 2015, until the regime has become organically linked to Russia, after it controlled, in partnership with Iran, the various sectors of the military, security, political and economic power. As a result, the regime is directly affected whether positively or negatively by the changes that Russia is exposed to.

Undoubtedly, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has affected Russia's diplomatic capabilities, as it is no longer able to provide the support that it was providing to the regime before, after Russia has been affected by the sanctions and has been busy advocating for its own direct interests.

However, Russia's military preoccupation with Ukraine has not yet significantly affected its ability to be present in the Syrian scene. However, Syria has ranked lower in Russia's list of interests as its predicament increases in Ukraine, which will give Iran the opportunity to expand its influence there, and try to fill any void that Russia may leave.

This exchange of roles between the two partners (Iran and Russia) is not in the interest of the regime, which in previous years has benefited from the balance between the two parties, and from the margins left by their silent struggle over influence in Syria. This reality will put the regime under greater Iranian pressure, ending all its previous attempts not to submitting to one single ally, which explains the regime's attempts to open up in the Arab world after the start of the war, in an attempt to secure alternative competitors for the possible Russian absence.

Apparently, the regime realized from the early days of the invasion that the political and military support it was getting from Russia would not remain in the form it had known, at least for a while. So the regime headed directly to Iran, although that might not be its preferred option. It is believed that Mamlouk's visit to Tehran, just three days after the start of the war, comes in this context.

The regime's losses are not limited to be military and political ones. On the economic level, the regime was negatively affected by the war, not only due to the high prices of many commodities globally- which affected many countries- but also because the regime is already subject to international sanctions, and suffers from a crisis in securing the necessary resources to import goods before their recent price hike even from its own allies.



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📍 Mall of Istanbul-office Plaza
2nd Floor, Office#3-Başakşehir
İSTANBUL / TURKEY

☎ + 90 555 056 06 66

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✉ info@jusoor.co

🌐 www.jusoor.co