

lations with various countries (e.g., Türkiye and Egypt), but not so much separately. It would have been a much better contribution to the literature on this subject. It would also be interesting in the second part to include the Sputnik vaccine diplomacy against novel coronavirus disease in Middle East and

North Africa. However, it is not included in the book, which has been heavily promoted by the Russian government to attempt for gaining prestige in international politics. Indeed, it would have also been interesting to see whether Moscow's vaccine diplomacy was successful or not.

## The Russian Military Intervention in Syria

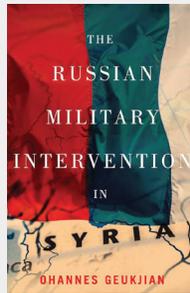
By Ohannes Geukjian

Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022, 315 pages, \$119.19, ISBN: 9780228008309

Reviewed by Seher Çakan, Afyon Kocatepe University

The Syrian civil war, which began in 2011, saw its complexities intensify as various states' interests converged, culminating in Russia's military intervention in 2015. The book intricately explores this event alongside other significant geopolitical shifts, suggesting that Russia's actions were a response to what it perceived as a series of Western oversights. Key incidents highlighted include interventions in Serbia and Kosovo without UN Security Council approval, the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq without Putin's consultation, and the integration of Baltic countries into Western blocs, coupled with NATO's expansionist policies. These developments are depicted as being dismissive of Russia's security interests, thus prompting its military interventions in Crimea in 2014 and Syria in 2015. Geukjian's analysis in the book seeks to unravel the complex motivations behind Russia's assertive foreign policy maneuvers during these pivotal moments.

Many books try to explain the actions of Russia in Ukraine and Syria. As stated in



the introduction, what makes this book different is that it provides a detailed analysis of the causes and objectives of Russia's actions in the former Soviet Republics and the Middle East (p. 1). In his book, the author, highlights the relationship between status inconsistency and conflict (p. 1). In addition, the book is particularly different in that it examines how Russia has used its membership in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to make status claims and lead international discussions in Syria and the Middle East. Furthermore, the book differs since it employs status theories taken from social psychology and social anthropology by International Relations "to explain and analyze Russia's seemingly irrational and unpredictable behavior" (p. 13). The book includes examples of how Russia used its veto power in the UNSC to avoid military intervention in Syria. In this direction, between 2011 and 2015, Russia sought peaceful resolutions to the conflicts in Syria. However, because the West and the U.S. do not consider Russia's interests, Russia launched a military intervention in Syria

in 2015, which the author describes in detail. Russia, refusing to remain a regional power, likewise sought to maintain multipolarity by balancing the U.S.' dominance. In this context, Geukjian proposed two hypotheses based on the theoretical framework. The first hypothesis proposes that the dominating power (the U.S.) is more likely to give a higher status to the regional power (Russia) when they either ignore or do not regard each other as primary threats. The second hypothesis suggests that if the dominating power (the U.S.) and the regional power (Russia) share a common primary threat, the dominant power (the U.S.) is more likely to give a higher status to the regional power (Russia).

The research employed a qualitative approach. Geukjian conducted open-ended interviews with the Russian and Iranian ambassadors in Lebanon to learn about the Russian and Iranian governments' official viewpoints on the Syrian war. The author also analyzed by reviewing official documents such as the Russian National Security Strategy of 2015 and by giving space to political discourses in the study to support his hypotheses. In addition to these, secondary sources such as books and journals were employed to support the points of the book.

The book is divided into five chapters. In the first chapter, the author explores Russian foreign policy during Boris Yeltsin's Administration (1991-2000). During this time, Russia was determined to work with the West and join its economic, political, and military institutions. Nonetheless, after the mid-1990s, Russian foreign policy changed and adopted multipolar diplomacy. Chapter 2 discusses Vladimir Putin's contribution to the evolution of Russian foreign policy, the determination of Russia's role in the world, and its national priorities from 2001 to 2011. Despite

signing or ratifying treaties such as the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START II) in 1993 and the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) in 2002, Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia was a significant shift in Russian foreign policy. Chapter 3 discusses Russia's intervention in the Syrian civil war, including its regional and international implications, as well as Russia's international efforts to reach peace. Again, thanks to its permanent membership in the UNSC, Russia's role in preventing Western engagement in Syria is discussed in this part, putting Russian diplomacy to the fore. Chapter 4 investigates the goals of Russia's military participation in 2015-2017. It examines Russia's motivations for participating in Syria in September 2015, as well as Russia's efforts to negotiate and develop coalitions in the battle against international terrorism. Chapter 5 covers political and military developments from 2017 to 2019. During these times, Russia was diplomatically successful, particularly in mediation. However, it has been thoroughly investigated that the Syrian conflict has remained unresolved due to conflicts of interest of the U.S. and regional states such as Iran and Türkiye. To summarize, Geukjian stated that "Russian annexation of the Crimea in 2014 and intervention in Syria in 2015 illustrated the continued Russian bitterness in its loss of great power status. Still, Russia expected that the use of force in Ukraine and Syria would contribute to recognition of its great power status" (p. 25).

The book is an important study as it deals with how international peace and security cannot be achieved since states act in their own interests. Moreover, it reveals once again that states must agree on solving problems under international law. The scope of the study was constrained by the author's discussion of the foreign policies that heads of state

have adopted from the Boris Yeltsin era to the present, as well as Russia's actions in the Middle East and the former Soviet Republics. The author should have explained in his study why he conducted open-ended interviews with the Russian and Iranian ambassadors in Lebanon. To assess Russia's position, it should

have also been required to interview diplomats from the former Soviet states and the Middle East. The book is worth reading by anyone interested, such as academics, journalists, and policymakers, students, who want to know about Russia's foreign policy, Syria, and the Middle East.

## Russia in Africa: Resurgent Great Power or Bellicose Pretender?

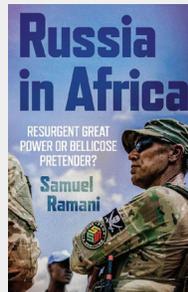
By Samuel Ramani

London: C. Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2023, 326 pages, \$52.00, ISBN: 9781787387072

Reviewed by Siyat Abdi Maalim, Social Sciences University of Ankara

Samuel Ramani's book deeply analyses Russia's connection with the African continent. It provides a comprehensive overview of the history of Russia-Africa ties, depicting their interactions, starting from the times of 16<sup>th</sup> century connections between the Russian Orthodox Church and Egyptian Coptic Christian communities as well as Russian and Egyptian Muslim communities' links to the times of Soviet Union support for the decolonization process of Africa. This well-written book is based on interviews and includes over 1300 references from academic and media sources in Russian, English, French, and Arabic from numerous African countries. The author provides a much-needed resource for understanding the dynamics of Russia's policy towards Africa and the understudied periods of Russian engagement with Africa, such as the 1990s and Putin's first two terms in office (pp. 2-24).

The emergence of a competitive and geopolitical rivalry among great powers in recent



years has led to increased interest and engagement of countries and organizations with Africa. Recognizing the continent's growing importance, Russia, under the leadership of President Putin, devised strategic policies to navigate this competitive landscape. Crucial to this endeavor was the groundwork laid by Yevgeny Primakov, Russia's foreign minister (1996-1998) and prime minister (1998-1999), who established the foundation for Moscow to restore its influence on the African continent (pp. 26-49).

Following the disengagement from Africa during the Soviet and Kozyrev eras, Putin adeptly managed domestic forces and orchestrated a significant shift in Russia's presence in the early 2000s. Throughout his first and second terms in office, Moscow reemerged as a prominent player in Africa, forging enduring alliances and cementing its position. Over the ensuing decade, Russia showcased its capabilities in challenging Western liberalism, resisting popular uprisings, extending