

lems, and may have actually made them more complex and difficult to solve.

Lastly, Monshipouri states that if the U.S. were to support the citizens rather than the military rulers in the region, help with the problem of unemployment there and stronger relations were built between U.S. and countries' in the region, then MENA's problems could be solved, and even terrorist groups could be spirited away. Unfortunately, this is a naive and unreliable wish that will not come true. The U.S. always pursues what is essential for its benefit (leading to mixed results in the MENA region) as a pragmatic rather than an idealistic country. The merits of the book are following: content of the book is well-designed, the author explain almost everything concisely. Besides, well-organized graphs, tables, numbers, some statistical data make book both more reliable and coherent. The author does lots of citations and references after the end of every

chapter and reserves thirty one pages only for references which make the book trustworthy and confidential. Despite the fact that the book is almost two hundred pages, one can learn almost every important events, dates or narratives before and after Arab Spring, reasons behind Arab Spring and how social media and 'youth bulge' have an impact on protests and rebellions. One can also learn how hip-hop culture is important for Arab people's identity both ones living in homeland and ones moved abroad. Furthermore, one can learn how Arab people's identities have been affected by new technology devices, whether these tools were affective or not for 'Spring,' learn Arab women's point of views toward the revolts as well as the dictatorships, the idea of freedom, dignity, justice; so, they can decide whether these people match with West's orientalist perspective or not. Hopefully, the region will not deteriorate much further, and will return its peaceful, calm and wealthy times.

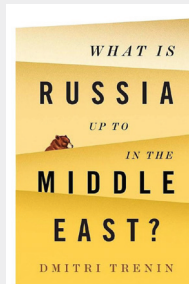
## What is Russia up to in the Middle East?

By Dmitri Trenin

Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2018, 144 pages, €11.69, ISBN: 9781509522316

Reviewed by Nazlıhan Babaoğlu, İstanbul Şehir University

Dmitri Trenin, the current director of the Moscow based think-tank the Carnegie Moscow Center, raises a question that has been the interest of many nowadays, owing to recent developments in the Middle East. A turbulent region shaken by constant political and military conflicts and outside interventions, the Middle East is now witnessing an ongoing war, namely the Syrian civil war, which has welcomed



Russia to meddle in defense of the Assad regime through military intervention. Moscow's interest in the region is not new; the Middle East drew Russia's attention during the Cold War and even before. Trenin addresses the Syrian War as well as Russia's relations with the other states in the region at different levels of transactions. The book functions as a kind of introductory essay for Russian-Middle East

relations, aiming to give simple hints about Russia's involvement in Middle East affairs.

Trenin begins by expressing his apprehension about the many wrong interpretations of Russia's involvement in the Middle East due to misrepresentation, misinformation and media bias. According to Trenin, this book aims to correct these errors by clarifying Russia's role in the region. He does not directly answer the question of the title; instead he delves into the historical relations between Russia and the Middle East region since the times of the Tsars. Instead of giving causal arguments one by one, Trenin analyzes the interstate affairs that arose over time around conflicts of interests, the economy, and regional and international developments.

For Trenin, Russia is not out to usurp the status of the U.S. in the Middle East as the "principal actor or main security provider" (p. 2). The Ukrainian Crisis of 2014 and Russian intervention in the Syrian War since 2015 are cases in which post-Soviet Russia has re-emerged as "a major independent geopolitical player" (p. 3) in world politics. Russia's return has both regional and international implications in the eyes of the writer. He connects Russia's stance on the Syrian War with Moscow's discontent with the Arab Spring. He asserts that the Kremlin is not supportive of the revolutionary movements occurring in Middle Eastern states. After seeing Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi overthrown by a western coalition, Moscow became dedicated to preventing Syria from suffering the same fate. Fear of extremist Sunni terrorism and its possible effects on Russia's Sunni minority could be inferred from the book as Moscow's justifications for its side in the war.

The book consists of four chapters. The first chapter, under the heading "History," begins

with Russia's first involvement with the nations of today's Middle East. The interaction between nations dates back to the marriage between Moscow's Duke and the niece of the Byzantine Emperor, thus gaining Moscow the title of "Third Rome," after the conquest of Constantinople and the demise of the Byzantine Empire. According to Trenin, this development incited Russia's quest to reach the Black Sea and then the Caspian basin. This trajectory continued with wars with the Ottoman Empire and the Persians, partition agreements with European powers during WWI, and the USSR's alliances with and support for the newly emerging Middle Eastern countries. Key events, such as the Arab-Israeli wars, the Iranian Revolution, the Afghan War, the dissolution of the USSR, the 9/11 attacks, the Arab Spring, and lastly the Syrian crisis are evaluated from the perspective of the Kremlin vis-à-vis most of the states in the region. This section refers to nearly all the major turning points in the history of the Middle East; however, due to the short length of the chapter, they are not presented in a very detailed way. Nonetheless, this section offers a perfect introduction to Russia-Middle East relations.

The second chapter, entitled "War," examines the Syrian war and Russia's motivation for involvement. For Trenin, Russian involvement in the Syrian crises symbolizes its comeback onto the world stage as a principal, decision maker country. Trenin emphasizes the Putin administration's calculations about the scope and limitations of the war, and the lessons Russia learned from the Afghan war. The primary concerns of this chapter include the sources of Russia's motivation to side with the Assad regime, Putin's strategy for the war, a summary of military conflicts between the belligerent parties, air operations, coalitions, and the involvement and calculations of other players in the region, such as the U.S., Iran,

Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. Last but not least, Trenin makes two remarkable observations: first, after taking a lesson from the failure of intervening in a foreign, Muslim country in the Afghan War, Moscow only deployed air and naval forces but not ground forces in the Syrian conflict; and second, stepping into the war gives Russia a chance to test its weaponry and conduct military exercises, thus promoting its arms and its credibility as an ally.

The third chapter, “Diplomacy,” deals with how Russia aims to assume a diplomatic role in the region. The Kremlin plays upon the calculations and disagreements between states to preserve its interest in the region. A critical notice in this chapter, which also runs throughout the book, is that Russia has relinquished a foreign policy that had sharp edges, in which a state could only be a friend or foe. Russia no longer follows a policy of unconditional support or full objection towards states as it did in the Cold War days. Instead, Moscow engages in relations with conflicting sides simultaneously without preferring one state to another. Trenin provides numerous examples in which Russia plays with diplomacy politics: the Arab-Israeli conflict, Israel-Syria, Iran-Israel and Iran-Turkey relations, as well as Libya, Egypt, and Gulf States specifically in and after the Cold War and the Arab Spring.

Chapter four, “Trade,” is the last chapter, and it gives an account of Russia’s trade potential.

Weaponry, nuclear and hydrocarbon energy, grain, and tourism are among Russian exportable products. Trenin notes that Russia ranks second in the world after the U.S. as an arms supplier; Russia has been supplying arms to the states of the region since the Cold War years while supporting anti-western Arab nations such as Egypt and Syria. Even after the Cold War, arms trade continued with nearly all of the states in the region except Israel. In the case of hydrocarbon energy trade, there is no exchange due to the abundant energy resources of the Middle East. Grain exports and the tourism industry are the other sectors in which Russia has dealings with the states of the region.

To summarize, this book is very informative in addressing the asymmetric relationship between Russia and the regional states, and Russia’s involvement in the Middle East. The book focuses on all of Russia’s endeavors to tie itself to the region through conflict resolution and diplomacy, trade, arms sales, and tourism. This is an outstanding merit for the book, as Trenin uses comparative analysis to give a precise picture of Russia-Middle East relations. Methodologically, the author presents different cases by making the book very descriptive and easy to read. This book is highly recommended, especially for new students of IR and political science, and those wishing to be more fully informed about current developments in which Russia intervenes in the region.