

# Russian-Arab Military and Political Cooperation After the Arab Spring: Priorities and Prospects

**Rakhmatullaev A. I.**

abdulazizrakhmatullaev928@gmail.com

University of World Economy and Diplomacy, Tashkent

**Mannanova N. Kh.**

Scientific Supervisor

**Abstract:** Historically, Russian-Arab relations have been essentially different. There are two blocs of countries in the Middle East that traditionally have long-standing political and economic ties with Western countries that have retained their role in the region. At the same time, there is a bloc of countries with which Russia has strengthened relations after the "Arab Spring" in the Middle East. The countries that historically had relations with the Soviet Union, and then with Russia, include Syria, Egypt and Libya, and to a lesser extent Iraq and Yemen. And for a more detailed study of bilateral relations, in the author's opinion, Syria, Egypt and Libya should be highlighted. Since it was with these countries that Russia began to use a new approach in the military-political aspect and in the field of education. The relevance of this work is the increased role of Russia in international relations in the Middle East and North Africa, where, in accordance with the latest concept of the country's foreign policy, Russia intends to develop bilateral relations with the countries of this region and make a significant contribution to ensuring peace and security.

**Key words:** Middle East, North Africa, politics, education, cooperation, security.

## 1 Introduction

The scientific novelty of this work is due to a comprehensive study of Russia's foreign policy in the Middle East and North Africa, where the emphasis is on the country's achievements in the field of peaceful settlement of conflicts in this strategic region. This aspect is poorly studied in the scientific field and in the field of international relations.

The main purpose of the work is to study a new strategy in Russia's foreign policy in the Middle East region through its efforts to peacefully resolve conflicts.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks have been identified:

- To characterize the main political trends in Russia's relations with the studied countries of the Middle East and North Africa;
- To show Russia's achievements in the field of peaceful settlement during the main conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa region.

## 2 Methods

In writing this work, a retrospective and situational analysis was used, which made it possible to study the dynamics of changes in Russia's foreign policy after the "Arab Spring". With the help of a systematic analysis, it was possible to reflect similar connections in Russia's foreign policy in different conflicts. To determine some features of Russia's foreign policy in resolving the conflicts under study, a comparative analysis was used.

## 3 Results and Discussion

The protest movements that began in the Middle East in 2010 were called the "Arab Spring." And this process has swept the entire Middle East and has become a kind of reason for changing the "Status Quo" in the sphere of international relations in the region.

Since the beginning of the civil war in Syria, Moscow's position on this issue has been aimed at a speedy settlement of the situation in the country. In February 2012, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov paid an official visit to Damascus, where he met with Syrian President B. Assad, Vice President F. Sharaa and

Foreign Minister V. Muallem during the meeting, both bilateral relations and the situation in the region were discussed. At that time, Russia promoted the settlement of the Syrian conflict within the framework of the Arab League and through dialogue with the Syrian opposition. At the same time, the Syrian side informed Sergey Lavrov that a new Syrian constitution for general elections and an increase in the participation of other parties in the country's politics besides the Ba'ath Party was already being prepared. According to Sergey Lavrov, Russia was committed to a comprehensive dialogue, which should contribute to the restoration of peace in Syria, which should have a positive impact on the region as a whole [1].

Simultaneously with the escalation of the intra-Syrian conflict, Russia's position and goals in Syria have changed due to new challenges. The situation inside Syria over the next three years began to change in a negative direction. From the southern and northern parts of the country, Syrian government troops began to retreat, and the opposition took their place. This problem was felt in the provinces of al-Suwayda, Idlib and Aleppo [2]. At the same time, with the strengthening of the opposition in Syria, the rise and strengthening of banned groups in the region began. There was a problem of the transition of ISIS (banned in Russia) from Iraq to Syria in connection with the significant withdrawal of Syrian government troops from the borders of the country.

These factors have become serious tests for the Syrian government. At the same time, the preservation of sovereignty over the entire territory of the country has become problematic and practically impossible for the official government. The Syrian military was also exhausted from the civil war and was unable to effectively confront the Syrian opposition and banned groups, relative to the latter they became a major problem by the end of 2014. Already at that time, the role of such actors as the United States, Turkey and some European countries began to increase in the Syrian conflict, which in turn became one of the motives for the speedy adoption of actions on the part of Russia.

As noted by The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Russia Alexander Aksenok: since the beginning of the civil war in Syria, military cooperation has mainly prevailed between Russia and Syria, Russia's entry into the conflict in Syria was enshrined in an intergovernmental agreement, and unlike cooperation with other Arab countries, relations carried specific obligations. And at the time of the intervention of the Russian Air Force, banned groups were located near Damascus, and the change of power was a matter of several days [3].

The main goals of Russia's foreign policy at that time were: the fight against banned groups that posed a threat to Russia; assistance to the Syrian government in maintaining territorial integrity and sovereignty over the entire territory of the country; striving to achieve peace and security through a peaceful settlement of the military-political conflict in Syria through fruitful dialogue and mutual cooperation with all parties [13].

In this aspect, Kolesnikov P.M. in his article determines that, Russia adheres to a political settlement of this conflict, the same approach is proposed in the resolution of military-political conflicts in Yemen, Libya and Iraq. A military solution to the problem is not a way to resolve conflicts. Settlement through the restoration of state institutions and the consolidation of peace are the main goals of Russia [4].

For Russia, military participation in resolving the Syrian conflict was the first military operation in the Middle East and North Africa. Such a step confirmed the strengthening of the country's geopolitical potential. A new approach to Russia's foreign policy in the Middle East has been demonstrated in the framework of actions to resolve the Syrian conflict and other conflicts in North Africa, where Russia sought to resolve the conflict through UN mechanisms in accordance with international law.

It is worth noting here that Russia, within the framework of the Geneva Communiqué under the auspices of the UN since June 2012, supported the inter-Syrian dialogue, and also advocated that the future of Syria should be determined by the Syrians themselves. At the negotiation processes "Geneva-2" in 2014 and "Geneva-3" in 2016, Russia managed to ensure that the negotiations took place without a precondition, which included the resignation of Syrian President B. Assad. At the same time, Russia adhered to the position of participating in the negotiations of all Syrian opposition groups, without which the solution of the Syrian conflict was not possible [5].

The negotiation processes within the framework of the Geneva Communiqué contributed to the cooperation of European countries and the United States on the Syrian settlement and at the same time were

a platform for coordinating actions with Russia. The main purpose of this platform was to promote a ceasefire in the combat zones of the conflict in Syria [5].

Russia's actions for a peaceful settlement of the conflict were continued within the framework of the Astana process in January 2017 and during the talks in Sochi in January 2018. Representatives of Turkey and Iran participated in these negotiation processes, given that these are one of the main regional actors in the Syrian conflict, the dialogue on the direction of settlement was relevant. These negotiations contributed to the emergence of de-escalation zones in Syria and a temporary ceasefire [6]. All these ceasefire actions initiated by Russia contribute to the phased implementation of the fundamental UN Security Council Resolution No. 2254 of December 18, 2015.

Thus, thanks to such efforts by Russia on the Syrian peace settlement, it was possible to prevent a military campaign against Syria. Russia's approach to the Syrian settlement shows how much the country's foreign policy and geopolitical potential in the Middle East region have changed.

With the situation in Syria, Russian diplomacy has achieved great success in the track of resolving the conflict. But in North Africa, the consequences of the Arab Spring were horrific and in the early stages of the conflict in Libya, Moscow lost its position and influence in the region. Initially, Russia believed that UN Security Council Resolution No. 1970 of February 26, 2011, adopted by a unanimous decision, should be a key moment in achieving peace and security in Libya [6]. But we must not forget the fact that the paragraphs of the resolution on the imposition of an arms embargo were grossly violated by some European countries and some countries of the Persian Gulf. Under the guise of providing humanitarian assistance in accordance with the provisions of this resolution, the rebels in Libya began to receive weapons [14]. And despite the fact that the UN Security Council resolution did not contain clauses on a military operation, NATO countries carried out military operations in Libya, which led to a protracted civil war.

After the NATO military operation, Russia sought to achieve a balance in relations between regional and international actors influencing the Libyan crisis. On December 23, 2015, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution No. 2259, which reflected the positive changes in the situation in Libya, and Russia introduced clauses ensuring dialogue between different forces in Libya to advance the political process [7]. Russia, again through the UN mechanisms, tried to promote a peaceful settlement, this strategy in some form is similar to the actions to resolve the Syrian conflict.

As noted by the Russian Ambassador to Libya I.N. Molotkov in June 2016: "Russia is conducting a dialogue with all parties to the conflict in Libya with the Government of National Accord Fayed al-Sarraj and the Commander-in-Chief of the Libyan Army Khalifa Haftar to strengthen relations and achieve a peaceful settlement" [8].

Thus, five years after the events in Libya in June 2016, the commander-in-chief of the Libyan army, Khalifa Haftar, arrived in Moscow on a visit where he met with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. A few days after that, Deputy Prime Minister F. Sarraj Ahmed Maitig arrived in Moscow, with whom there was a meeting of Russian official representatives at the Russian Foreign Ministry [8]. This confirms Russia's commitment to dialogue with different parties to the Libyan conflict, as well as during the negotiations on the Syrian conflict, since, only taking into account all the positions of the parties, it is possible to come to a settlement of the conflict. These meetings should be considered the beginning of a new partnership between Russia and Libya after the consequences of the "Arab Spring".

Also, Russia supported the "road map" proposed by the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Libya G. Salamé presented in September 2017 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. The main purpose of the roadmap was to promote the implementation of previous agreements and UN resolutions to resolve the Libyan crisis [9]. It is worth noting that special attention was paid to the beginning of the all-Libyan national conference on the creation of unified executive bodies in Libya, which were supposed to ensure all-Libyan elections and create a centralized government.

For 2020, the situation in Libya is complex in the sense that the influence of external actors on the parties to the internal Libyan crisis contributes to further escalation. In the Syrian conflict, one of the main problems in achieving a full settlement and the extension of sovereignty to the entire territory of the country by the official authorities was the presence of pro-Turkish forces in the province of Idlib. A similar situation has been going on since the end of 2019 in Libya, when Turkey began to support the Government of National Accord in Tripoli with the help of militants brought from Idlib [10].

In this aspect, on July 22, 2020, Russian-Turkish consultations on Libya were held in Ankara, where both countries stressed the need to advance the political process in Libya in accordance with UN mechanisms and noting the importance of combating banned groups. The two countries also agreed to promote an inter-Libyan political dialogue in accordance with the agreements of the Berlin Conference on Libya [11].

Thus, the strategy of establishing contacts with different parties in Libya is a priority in resolving this conflict. After the Syrian conflict, Russia has a certain plan to interact with the parties to the conflict and find a compromise. Another factor in connection with which Russia's participation in Libya is necessary for both sides of the conflict is related to weapons. The Transitional National Council of Libya and the commander-in-chief of the Libyan army, Khalifa Haftar, by and large use Soviet and Russian weapons. This, in turn, opens the way to cooperation with Russia in the direction of training military personnel and repairing military equipment, and also allows Russia to become one of the main players in the settlement of this conflict.

In North Africa, Egypt is another country with which Russia's military-political relationship has historically been very strong. The Arab Spring influenced the change of power in Egypt, but there was no armed conflict there.

New Russian-Egyptian contacts began in 2013, when Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi was the Prime Minister of Egypt. At that time, these were the "2 + 2" contacts, which laid the foundation for further interaction between the countries and it is worth noting that on June 24, 2019, regular negotiations took place in this format, which shows the desire of the countries for mutual cooperation in various fields. Already in August 2014, the president-turned Abdel Fattah al-Sisi made his first visit to Russia, and in this respect Russia was the first non-Arab country to be appointed president. During the meeting, special attention was paid to the issues of the military-technical plan and the situation in the Middle East. During the period of contacts, contracts were agreed for the provision of MiG-29M/M2 fighters, 12 Mi-35M attack helicopters, Mi-8/17 helicopters, the K300P Bastion mobile missile system and other modern equipment [12].

In the sphere of Russian-Egyptian bilateral relations, the Syrian conflict occupies a special place. The position on this conflict is similar in both countries, where both states emphasize the preservation of the territorial integrity of the country and dialogue with all parties to the conflict, which should contribute to a peaceful settlement. It should also be noted the coordination of Russian-Egyptian actions in the Libyan conflict, where the points of view of the countries on resolving the conflict are quite similar. Both countries support all actions proposed by the UN and during the Berlin Conference on Libya in January 2020, both countries advocated an immediate ceasefire and a transition to peace talks.

Thus, the relations between Russia and Egypt are quite successful, despite the political crisis that occurred after the "Arab Spring" in the Middle East [15]. Cooperation remains strong even in the context of overcoming the consequences of the tragedy in the sky over the Sinai in October 2015. Since the domestic situation in Egypt was more stable than in Syria and Libya, and the initiative to preserve traditional ties came from Egypt, the dynamics of cooperation between the countries will continue.

#### **4 Conclusions (Summary)**

Russia's bilateral relations with the countries of the Middle East and North Africa have changed in a positive direction since the Arab Spring. This was primarily due to the fact that Russia tried to maintain a stable situation in these countries through various military-political support. The results of such actions were the strengthening of bilateral relations between Russia and the Arab countries, as well as the strengthening of measures to achieve peace and security in the region.

#### **5 Conclusions**

Based on the foregoing, it should be concluded that Russia's policy in the Middle East and North Africa after the "Arab Spring" has become more successful in the military-political aspect. This is confirmed by Russia's position in Syria, where the main negotiations on the Syrian settlement do not take place without Moscow's participation. And its achievements on the ceasefire and the rebuilding of state institutions in Syria reflect its commitment to achieving stability in the region. Regarding the internal Libyan crisis, Russia is also promoting peace initiatives to create a dialogue inside Libya with all parties to the conflict and calls on other

countries to facilitate this. And this, in turn, brought Russia closer to Egypt, which have quite similar positions on the conflicts in Syria and Libya. After 2015, Russia began to adhere to the policy of peaceful settlement in all conflicts, this is due to the country's foreign policy concept of cooperation for the sake of peace. Thus, this work reflects Russia's activities in the field of peaceful settlement of conflicts and cooperation in this area with other countries in the region. To further strengthen Russian-Arab relations, it is necessary to highlight the following points:

1. Russia should maintain constant contacts through bilateral and multilateral negotiations;
2. Russia needs to consolidate its image as a country that advocates the peaceful settlement of conflicts through the mechanisms of the UN;
3. The Arab countries should rethink their political views and concepts regarding Russia's military-political role in the Middle East;
4. The Arab countries should support Russia's efforts to achieve peace and security in the Middle East and North Africa.

### References (Bibliography)

1. Comment of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia S.V. Lavrov for the media on the results of the visit to Syria, Damascus, February 7, 2012 // MFA RF // [Electronic resource] Access mode: [https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/sy/-/asset\\_publisher/9fcjSOWMERcf/content/id/171350](https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/sy/-/asset_publisher/9fcjSOWMERcf/content/id/171350) (date of appeal: 13.02.2021)
2. Russian War in Syria: Causes and Machinery " Al Jazeera " [φooooooooo: <https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/article/569> (φoo: <https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/article/569> (oo: <https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/article/569> (ooo: <https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/article/569> (ooo:2021)
3. Aksenonok A. Rossiya i Siriya: nuances of allied relations. RSMD // [Electronic resource] Access mode: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/rossiya-i-siriya-nyuansy-soyuznicheskikh-otnosheniy/> (date of access 13.02.2021)
4. Kolesnikov P.M. The future of russian-Arab relations in the context of a political crisis in the Middle East [Electronic resource] Access mode: [https://kpfu.ru/portal/docs/F193952061/C\\_\\_Users\\_2lkhasan\\_Desktop\\_Buduschee.rossijsko\\_arabskih\\_otnoshenij.v.usloviyah.politicheskogo.krizisa.na.Blizhnem.Vostoke.pdf](https://kpfu.ru/portal/docs/F193952061/C__Users_2lkhasan_Desktop_Buduschee.rossijsko_arabskih_otnoshenij.v.usloviyah.politicheskogo.krizisa.na.Blizhnem.Vostoke.pdf) (date of access 13.02.2021)
5. Vakhshitekh A. N. The role of Russia in the settlement of the Syrian conflict // Izv. Sarat. Un-ta Nov. Sir. Sir. History. International Relations. 2018. №4. – P. 514 - 522.
6. Shcheglov Yu.B. Reflections on the Syrian conflict – M.: IBV, 2018. - 218 p.
7. Lacher W. Libya's Fragmentation: Structure and Process in Violent Conflict. –UK. I.B. Tauris. 2020. – 299 p.
8. Russia's position on the situation in Libya // MFA RF // [Elektronnyi resurs] Access mode: <https://www.mid.ru/pozicia-rossii-po-situacii-v-livii> (date of access 14.02.2021)
9. Interview of the Ambassador of Russia in Libya I.N.Molotkov to the news agency "Russia Today" from June 29, 2016 // MFA RF // [Electronic resource] Access mode: [https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/sovesanie-poslov-i-postoannyh-predstavitelej-rossijskoj-federacii-30-iuna-1-iula-2016-g.-/asset\\_publisher/sznBmO7t6LBS/content/id/2338047](https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/sovesanie-poslov-i-postoannyh-predstavitelej-rossijskoj-federacii-30-iuna-1-iula-2016-g.-/asset_publisher/sznBmO7t6LBS/content/id/2338047) (date of access: 13.02.2021)
10. Egypt and Russia Studied Libya / Al Arabiya » [φooooo: <https://www.alarabiya.net/politics/2020/07/24/egypt-and-dres-russia-libyan> (φo: 14.02.2021)
11. Joint statement on the results of russian-Turkish high-level consultations on Libya, Ankara, July 22, 2020 // MFA RF // [Electronic resource] Access mode: [https://www.mid.ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4251704](https://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4251704) (date of access: 14.02.2021)
12. Vtorushin Yu.I., Koshkin R.P. Russian-Egyptian relations and their impact on the stabilization of the regional situation in the Middle East // Strath. priorities No. 1 (21), 2019. – S. 18-28.
13. Souleimanov E.A., N. Abbasov, Why Russia Has Not (Yet) Won Over Syria and Libya // Middle East Policy 2020 / 06 Vol. 27; Iss. 2. –P. 81-93.

- 
14. Moritz P. 'Rising Power' Status and the Evolution of International Order: Conceptualizing Russia's Syria Policies // Europe Asia Studies 2019/ № 03. –P. 1-23.
  15. Biziukova V. Uncertain New Middle Classes: Changing Consumption Practices and State Policies in Russia. // East European Politics & Societies 2020 / 05 Vol. 34; Iss. 2. –P. 464-484.