

Article

Russia in the Middle East: A New Dominant Actor?

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Abstract

Like many Arab countries, Syria had to face a massive popular revolt in 2011 that was transformed into an extremely violent civil war, the outcome of which remains uncertain. A collapse of the regime in place could deprive Russia of its main ally in the Arab world, which has been an unwavering support for years with the official justification of the struggle against radical Islam, but above all a will to influence relations between forces and to impose a new multilateralism by resuming its place in a region that can not be ignored on the global geopolitical scene.

Keywords

Russia, Syria, Arab Uprisings, Multilateralism, Islam

Like most influential countries in the Middle East, Russia quickly positioned itself at the beginning of the Syrian revolt in 2011, appearing as the archetype of the counter-revolutionary regime, because, by opposing, in the name of non-interference with democratic aspirations, it has taken the risk of going against the backdrop of a fundamental trend. From the outset, it hoped that the geopolitical evolutions that would emerge from this insurrection revolt would offer new prospects by allowing it to become again a key actor in the Arab world and beyond. It is the outcome of the Syrian crisis that will determine whether Russia will be able to consolidate its position at the regional and international level or whether, on the contrary, it will halt its willingness to form a counterweight with other emerging countries effective to western hegemony.

In order to evaluate these prospects, the old ties between Moscow and Damascus, and more generally in the Middle East, will be recalled. We will then analyze the extent to which the Syrian crisis constitutes an inadequately assessed risk or is not the fate of the region. Finally, it should be recalled that the question of the muslims of Russia is positioned in the background of its action.

Old Links Constantly Renewed

An Ancient Interest

Since Catherine II, who brings to the Russian Empire its “window on the Mediterranean” by founding Sebastopol in 1783, to the buildings of the 5th Soviet Operational Squadron, which criss-cross Mediterranean waters since the 1970s, the Kremlin has continually sought to perpetuate its presence in the Mediterranean basin. Thus, Tsarist Russia (and later the Soviet Union) could not ignore the Arab world or the Middle East as an influential nation, although it was often referred to as a colossus of feet of clay at the beginning of the twentieth century. During the Sykes-Picot negotiations of 1915-1916, it was for a time envisaged to place Palestine under international guardianship, so that it would not be attributed to any particular state since each of them defended divergent interests. Russia was in a good position to integrate this circle of protective states, since among the Palestinians, or rather the Arab natives, if the vast majority is Muslim and Sunni more precisely, there is a non-negligible Christian minority, essentially orthodox, which inevitably creates links with the main power claiming this confession. But the fall of the tsarist empire, followed by the advent of the Soviet system and Stalin, at first anxious to consolidate the communist and partisan grip at the outset of the revolution in one country, moved Russia away from the region, despite the sending of Comintern agents, and then the emergence of Communist movements or parties affiliated to the USSR. Then the collapse of the Axis powers in the Mediterranean during the second world war will provide an opportunity to claim a portion of Libya without success and Stalin does not insist on the refusal of the Westerners. It is generally a cold realism that he adopts as at the time of the “Greek affair” where the supporters of Moscow, soon after the liberation from the German yoke are abandoned by their mentor against the anti-communists, The Soviet regime having obtained a form of non-interference in the countries of its new sphere of influence in Central and Eastern Europe.

Yet, the Arab-Muslim space, especially the Near and Middle East, will be like the rest of the world a zone of confrontation between the two blocs, with allies more or less aligned, Confrontation will be less virulent than it could be on other fields of operation, if one thinks of Vietnam, Angola or not far from the Arab world, Afghanistan. Thus, South Yemen will be the only truly communist state, although Syria is an important ally since the 1950s¹ and even more so when the

¹ The USSR established diplomatic relations with Syria as early as 1944 (although not yet formally independent), and then military-technical co-operation between the two states began in the mid-1950s. In 1955, Damascus refused thus adhering to the Pact of Baghdad, pro-Western and perceived as too Franco-British. On the other hand, in the name of “positive neutrality”, theorized before the Bandoung conference (1955), military cooperation (arms purchases) and then economic cooperation with the USSR began in 1956, especially after the crisis of Suez: Syrian diplomatic choices are therefore comparable to those of Nasser's Egypt. In August 1957 the first treaty of economic co-operation with the USSR was signed, but Syria was far from becoming a “red satellite of the USSR”.

Baathists came to power in 1963. Indeed, while remaining close to Egypt, they have renounced a merger in the United Arab Republic (UAR), as this ephemeral political union quickly became unbalanced in favor of Cairo. Nationalists, they can not submit totally to the communist “big brother”, but, pragmatic, they realize that in order to be able to maintain a relative strategic and political parity with Israel, they must rely on a military power that can not be the United States, above all anxious to satisfy their Gulf allies (hostile to Arab nationalist, socializing and secular regimes), and increasingly their new hebrew partner.

Moreover, as in Cyprus, we find the same underlying and totally paradoxical religious dimension: an atheist country like the USSR and secular as Syria can not officially put forward the least confessional solidarity. Thus, the Syrian Christian community, at the time mostly close to the Baath Party (or other secular groups such as the Syrian People’s Party or the Syrian Communist Party) and which represents much more than the current 5 to 7% orthodox.

Nearly similar relations are forged between the USSR and Iraq by Saddam Hussein, another country which claims to be an Arab nationalist, secular and socialist, and which is particularly hostile to Israel. Initially supported by the USSR, because its Labor founders were supposed to have a certain ideological proximity to Moscow (and also because many of the founders of Zionism were from the Slavic world), the Jewish state would see the Soviets move away to profit of the palestinian cause. Just as the fall of Tsarist Russia had partially and temporarily removed Moscow from the Arab world, the collapse of the USSR would, for nearly a decade, diminish its influence in this area. Thus, in the last years of the twentieth century, it sees its main points of support move away: South Yemen (the only Marxist state in the Arab world) is forced to merge with its brother enemy of the North in 1990, Iraq (who naively believed that his Russian ally could prevent any military pressure to force him to leave Kuwait illegally annexed) was considerably weakened following the 1991 western intervention, and the PLO of Arafat and even Syria were partly distancing themselves from Moscow and felt more or less open to new partners who were likely to weigh more in the fate of the region (the United States in particular). For Russia, priority is at this time to manage the delicate economic and political transition that stemmed from the collapse of soviet structures, and the strategic imperative is to limit western penetration into its immediate geographical environment.

Progressive and Non-aligned Return

It was above all with Vladimir Putin’s coming to power in 2000, which inherited the main attributes of power of the defunct USSR (permanent seat with veto power in the UN Security Council in particular) that Russia confirmed its ancient ties with Syria, somewhat distended by an unresolved debt problem and a cir-

cumstantial rapprochement between Damascus and Washington in the wake of the first Gulf War in 1991. It was true that if it had never really left it, Moscow's influence in the Middle East was declining.

In spite of an agreement at the outset hearty (once is not customary), with the United States, the situation will gradually deteriorate for reasons that concern as much American unilateralism as to considerations specific to the political Russian life, and in particular the concern to adopt a nationalist position likely to rally the largest part of the population. September 11 will thus allow the two ex-great Cold War to cooperate on the issue of terrorism, and Russians and Americans become allies almost unstoppable since they now have the same enemies or almost: Islamist terrorists. The Russian attacks on human rights in Chechnya, which have been denounced in the past, were forgotten and the United States didn't hesitate to cooperate with the Arab intelligence services (Syrians in particular) in the search for extremist jihadists, even if Washington is not the dupe of the double game led by Damas which often closes the eyes on the passage of the supporters of Bin Laden in Iraq from 2003 to the destabilize the "hyperpower".

The first sign of this return was the designation of Russia (together with the United States, the European Union and the United Nations) as a member of the « Quartet for the Middle East » in 2002, an informal structure created to find a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which was relaunched and aggravated following the second Intifada. Syria, which is then the main ally of Russia in the Middle East, observed with interest this increase in power since 11 September, gradually puts this state in the eye of the cyclone that will ravage the region after the attacks perpetrated on the American ground. The neo-conservative project wanted not only "imposing democracy" in Iraq, which had to be punished for the supposed detention of weapons of mass destruction, but also crushing all those who are not in the Washington line. A message well understood by Libya and Yemen, but Syria still deafened it, which led to the implementation of the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act (SALSRA) in 2003, which reinforces the sanctions against it and urges Damas leaving Lebanon, considered under occupation, resulting in the Security Council's surprise resolution 1559, on 2 September 2004, premises for the departure of Syrian troops in 2005.

But this interim agreement will not last, first because the United States more or less discreetly support the "colorful revolutions" that take place on the backyard of Russia (in Georgia in 2003, in Ukraine in 2004, or in Asia Central), but also because it sees its economic and military projects thwarted by the Iranian crisis or the American presence in Iraq. Thus, the President of the Russian Federation expresses his wish to invest 4 billion dollars "in the immediate future" for the reconstruction of Iraq, and in 27 February 2005 is announced the signing of an agreement on an amount of 800 million dollars for the commissioning of the first

ranian nuclear power plant in Bouchehr, but the pressure of Washington and its allies (Israel in particular) didn't allow these ambitious projects or contracts to deploy in all their plenitude. Moreover, the economic offensive of Russia in the Middle East was not limited to these two countries, as it extended to Egypt, Syria but also to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen and Israel, where Vladimir Putin was invited on 27 April 2005, when no Russian leader had ever visited the Holy Land, since relations between Moscow and Tel Aviv had hitherto been complicated. Russia is at this time, despite growing tensions with the United States, in the position of a state that wants to get along with everyone and is not aligned with any particular camp.

The Syrian Revolt: Risk or Opportunity?

The Revolt in Syria: A Manifest Under Evaluation?

It should be pointed out that for the Russians, the "Arab Spring" is also called the "great islamist uprising"², which is enough to situate Moscow's perception of these events and the least that can be said is that it is embarrassment, mistrust and caution that prevail, more than the enthusiasm or hope of seeing its influence growing in North Africa or the Middle East.

Because arab revolts initially concerned states that were allied or close to the West (Egypt, Tunisia), even recently like Libya³, Russia thought that they would not touch Syria, since the last baathist regime would in some way be immune to any risk of contagion and for several reasons: a young president, graduated from a british university and enjoying a certain popularity; a relatively stable country (which fear above all chaos) in a region undermined by violence, an authoritarian and partly corrupt political system, but advocating relative religious freedom. Thus, as it touches its country with a slight lag, President Assad could even afford, arrogantly or unconsciously, to come before the international media to give lessons of good governance, inviting his peers to reform before it is not too late, in early 2011. He didn't knew at this time that the revolt that will shake his power will become the most violent of all those that will overwhelm the arab countries. Russia preferred to see in the revolutionary movements an opportunity to witness the weakening of american imperialism in a region that is part of its privileged zone of influence and from which Moscow has been gradually and partially evicted rather than a threat to its own allies, since Algeria (which mainly buys russian weapons) has hardly been impacted and the revolt has been slow to gain

² As proposed by the "Valdai Discussion Club" in a report published in June 2012: Transformation in the Arab World and Russia's interests, analytical report, Moscow June 2012 (valdaiclub.com). The latter is close to the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences and therefore to the position of the Russian official authorities.

³ The main rival of Washington, China, simultaneously competing power and punctual ally, being for the moment almost absent from this zone

momentum in Syria.

The libyan affair and its erratic management will help to freeze part of the future Russian attitude, since by abstaining to the UN Security Council during the vote of resolution 1973 of 17 March 2011, Moscow wanted to leave a chance to the forces of the predominantly Western coalition, but it is clear that the Eurasian power was cheated (like China), the spirit and the letter of the UN decision having been quickly violated. The mission of protecting threatened civilian populations quickly became a belligerent operation, with each civilian or military entity associated with libyan power considered a potential threat to opponents of the regime. Russia feared that this precedent could be used to weaken it on its backyard and contribute to military-humanitarian interventions that could lead to the collapse of allied states or the re-ignition of burnt embers, as in Georgia.

This is why it reacted so strongly during the Franco-American maneuvers aimed at putting Syria in the line of sight again (Trenin 2012a). The fall of the Syrian regime would in turn have an effect on Iran which would see its influence decline and its “Shiite axis” shaken, which would simultaneously weaken Russia, which along with China and other emerging countries, tried to play a role moderator and alternative on the nuclear crisis in that country. But the reasons for this very strong support for this long-standing ally, with which economic and military cooperation is very advanced, are deeper and go beyond the strict framework of a close partnership or the continuation of Bashar Al Assad, is not, contrary to what is often advanced as important to Russia as one would think (Trenin 2013). Nevertheless, the fall of the last baathist system risks bringing more favorable personalities to Washington, because a certain number of them are hosted by that state or because their financing is provided by the Americans or their allies. Then, it is a matter of sending a message to other privileged partners, especially since there are fewer than in the Soviet era: “we support our friends until the end”. Politically, there were also elections, and Putin was again a candidate, embodying a more nationalist posture than Medvedev.

Finally, there are unknown and less well-known strategic issues: for Moscow, the West must know that if Russian interests are threatened, a reply will be inevitable, since the question of their maintenance in the Mediterranean (and beyond in Asia) would be the loss of the port of Tartous which certainly does not have the value of Sebastopol, but which is a valuable lever of penetration towards the “warm seas”. In addition, there are significant gas discoveries in the eastern Mediterranean (Israel, Lebanon and Cyprus), which bear the seeds of a weakening of Moscow’s position as a player in this new energy game. Even if it remains hazardous to analyze the arab geopolitical upheavals through an oil prism, as demonstrated by the american fiasco in Iraq, some do not hesitate to give an energetic reading of the Syrian crisis, stating that Qatar, one of Iran’s biggest rival, aimed

to build a gas pipeline that would bypass the straits of Hormuz, Bab El Mandeb and the Suez Canal, via the Arabian Peninsula, Jordan and finally Syria. Bashar al-Assad would have rejected this proposal by privileging an oil pipeline from Iran and passing through Iraq, which would have triggered the wrath of petromonarchies that had also largely invested in Syria in recent years.

It should be emphasized that among the countries that are critical of the western position and even that of the Arab League on Syria, some are old allies of Russia (like Algeria), who would hardly understand a sudden reversal. But there is another risk, the reverse, of alienating pro-american arab countries with which Moscow has tried to improve its relations in recent years and which have strong economic potential, such as Qatar or Saudi Arabia, with whom a number of projects have been put in place or envisaged⁴. Vladimir Putin thus played a very tight game, which he didn't not fully master, and where he had as much to gain as to lose, even if confronted with the stall that can be observed today in Syria (because recent successes of the Syrian regime resemble victories of Pyrrhus), one can not rule out a return of Realpolitik which will oblige the various protagonists of this crisis which is internationalizing to return to less dogmatic positions.

Moreover, a major but not decisive event took place at the end of 2011, with an unprecedented wave of protests against Vladimir Putin following the declaration of the results of the parliamentary elections, considered rigged in favor of power by a party population. Of course, foreign policy is probably not a primary issue for the Russians, but in this country where patriotism is not a vain word, it can not be neglected by the rulers and must be handled with skill. Thus, too much support for authoritarian regimes beyond the arab world alone could increase the resentment of the population (some displaying the portrait of Putin next to that of Gaddafi) and emphasize concomitant western pressure on Moscow to demand more democracy and transparency, a potential tool for lobbying in international fora. The Russian position now obeys a double external and also internal logic and as long as power controls the opposition, disunited and without a large-scale federator, it can continue to display a pro-Assad position, even if this results in relative political and economic isolation, and it will have to make a choice in the long term and to distance with its bulky ally.

The Syrian Crisis as an Opportunity to Return Definitively to the Middle East?

But Russia's role is not only "defensive", because in its view it can help ensure a non-violent transition in Syria, through its links with a part of the opposition, sometimes resulting from the communist movement, which has been received on several occasions in Russia. Working mainly with the CCNCD (National Coor-

⁴ A "gas OPEC", for example, or initiatives within the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), as will be explained later.

minating Committee for Democratic Change), hostile to american hegemony and any foreign intervention, it has not joined the Syrian National Council (CNS) and the Syrian National Coalition and includes several personalities from within who had signed the Damascus Declaration. They advocate a gradual transition to a democratic transition, even if it means negotiating and making concessions, rather than playing the all-or-nothing card or the departure of Bashar al-Assad. It should be noted that many successful political transitions in the arab world or elsewhere have resulted in significant concessions to the ruling leaders at the time they were held (Spain, Chile and Yemen). Similarly, Russia was behind a resolution presented to the UN Security Council in december 2011 and condemning the violence in Syria. But it was not really a break with the baathist regime, contrary to the hopes that had arisen from this initiative, since it did not incriminate only Bashar Al Assad, it also took noticed the radicalization of the opposition, which ultimately amounts to adopting the positions of Damascus which considers that the “activists” are more terrorists or armed gangs thirsting for vengeance than civilians in love with democracy and justice.

Rather, it was a question of taking up the initiative to avoid the events, without excluding the possibility of a transition like Yemen’s in 2011, which would allow Moscow to preserve the essential, namely its interests in the Mediterranean. It seems that the mission of the Arab League, begun also in December 2011 (but quickly interrupted) has partially met the Russian objectives, since it was not in a anichean logic. In addition, it began as contacts between the CNS and its CCNCD rival began. The latter, which seems to benefit from a more limited audience, acquires at this moment a beginning of recognition, and comes to compete with the first organization, which made an intense lobbying with the main western powers. It can not be ruled out that an opposition close to Russia will eventually be strengthened politically moreover it has hardly any armed relay) since the “pro-Western” current is slow to take hold and that on the ground it didn’t manage to really control the activists themselves very divided between jihadists, who gradually rise in power and “nationalists”, without real leader and limited armaments.

Then, again in december 2011, a rumor from the israeli press said that President Bashar Al Assad would seek political asylum, and that his vice-president, the sunnite and so far loyal Farouq Al Shareh, would replace him during an interim period, the latter having made an informal trip to Moscow during the same period. It is probably a classic propaganda and disinformation work aimed at destabilizing the regime and supporting opponents, but it confirms the idea that Moscow is truly a key player in the syrian crisis. In june 2012, it supported the Geneva agreement, which stipulated that the Syrians should set up a transitional government that would include personalities from both sides (power and opposition) in

order to resolve the crisis peacefully. But this attempt failed mainly because of the place reserved for Bashar al-Assad: for the Russians, departure was an issue that was to end at the end of the process of power-sharing and reconciliation, and for the majority of opponents of the CNS, supported by westerners and their regional allies, it was a prerequisite for any serious discussion.

The Syrian crisis is therefore more than ever a multi-faceted issue and its outcome will depend in large part on the geopolitical balance that can be drawn from the revolts begun in 2011. Only Bahrain, despite its small population and its narrow territory, is an issue almost equally important, but the outcome, at least in the medium term, is known, while in Syria all scenarios are possible (partition, maintaining of Bashar ElAssad in power, cohabitation). Although a member of the “BRICS”, Russia, backed by its position of support to Syria, is closer to the other authoritarian state of the group, China, unlike the emerging and democratic powers formed of Brazil, India (a major purchaser of Russian arms) and South Africa. The latter, which form a distinct trilateralism, consider, however, that Syria does not constitute a threat to international security, and have a critical attitude towards western positions in relation to the Arab revolts (a kind of neo-colonialism) but are not systematically obstructed. In some cases, internal issues are not entirely absent, as in the case of Brazil (which is home to a large community of Syrian-Lebanese origin, mostly Christian and therefore skeptical about the Syrian Islamic alternative). Moreover, it should be remembered that Brazil, which has been close to Tehran (a key ally of Syrian regime) in recent years, has attempted an unsuccessful mediation on this subject with Turkey and that India, which imports Iranian oil (and also many Israeli weapons) join the pipeline that will soon link Iran and Pakistan.

If these nations prove that they are the ones that are likely to change the situation in Syria, they nevertheless show the limits of the BRICS group (Abdenur 2016), not united on all issues. Some experts, moreover, believe that the BRICS, or at least the most “moderate” of them, are the only ones that can lead to an exit from the crisis (thanks to an independent and non-aligned mediation able to gain the confidence of both the Russians and the Iranians as well as the United States), the majority of the Arab countries being out of the game, like most western nations. However, the BRICS are as much allies as rivals, like China, even if their shift to the Atlanticist positions could influence that of Moscow.

A massive Russian intervention in 2015 and a turning point at the end of 2016?

Faced with the stalemate on the ground of the Syrian forces, the western procrastination, and the attacks they are subjected to on their soil (in Paris in particular), Russia decides that 2015 is the right moment to take a decisive blow and begins sending weapons and especially war planes in Syria from the month of September

ber (Kozhanov 2015), which prevents any project of creation of “no-fly zone”, long hoped by Turkey and its allies in the north of the country. This intervention, which was supposed to last only a few months but finally extends beyond, allowed Russia to show a certain know-how (Trenin 2016), test its weapons and strengthen its status as a leading exporter without too much damage because most of the troops on the ground, those who suffer the most losses in the battles are composed of Syrians loyal to the regime or foreign shiites, framed by Tehran. Though Putin announced a withdrawal a few months after, the reality turned out to be quite different (Kozhanov 2016).

The end of the year 2016 marks a turning point probably decisive but which goes far beyond the syrian crisis alone and may determine eventually Russian foreign policy in the region and the future of the latter. The first clap of thunder is the surprise election of Donald Trump at the beginning of november which is characterized by a desire to cooperate more closely with Russia whose ruler he admires, and seeking to “co-manage” the world. Then came the victory of Aleppo, a month later, which allowed the loyalist forces to regain the integrity of the second city of the country, now largely destroyed. Finally, there is a new Russian-Turkish-Iranian partnership on Syria, an unprecedented success, a direct consequence of the attempted coup in Ankara in July 2016. If Putin was once again designated as the “ the most influential man in the world by Forbes magazine », he owes it largely to his action in the Middle East, epicenter of international crises for a long time.

Muslims in Russia as a Political Issue

This is often forgotten, but Russia host the largest Muslim minority in Europe, the vast majority of which are indigenou, and the Chechen conflict sometimes tragically recalls this reality⁵. In spite of the often very nationalist posture of the current government, as previously stated, it can not be said that Russian muslims are persecuted, even if the position of Moscow remains ambiguous. In recent years, power seemed to want to give both internal and external pledges, so that Vladimir Putin managed to be invited by the OIC (Organization of the Islamic Conference), a first for a non-muslim country and recalled that the majority of the russian autonomous regions are muslim and more surprising that islam was present before christianity in Russia, thus caressing in the sense of the hair its listeners. Putin received support from Iran and the most unexpected one from Saudi Arabia, while wahhabi support for the Chechen cause is notorious. Ryad shows pragmatism and cultivates its relations with a power close to its main opponent, Iran, and also a major player in the oil scene. In 2007, for the first time, a russian head of State visited Saudi Arabia, while King Abdullah visited Moscow in 2003

⁵ There have been attacks on Russian Muslim religious dignitaries such as the Mufti of Tatarstan in the summer of 2012. See also Alexey Malashenko, “The Dynamics of Russian Islam”, February 1, 2013, Carnegie Moscow Center

as the Crown Prince.

It is difficult to estimate the number of muslims in Russia, but it is often assumed that it is between 10 and 15% of the population (14 till 20 millions) and that in Moscow alone there would be nearly one million of muslims out of a total of eight million inhabitants. Sometimes these figures include non-russian muslims who came from the former Soviet republics to work in sometimes precarious conditions. Putin has not, however, formally designated a principal interlocutor or a privileged institution because he prefers to divide the community so that it can, if necessary, constitute a powerful counter-power. Under Boris Yeltsin the parliament was at one time presided over by the Chechen Ruslan Khasbulatov, and that the very strategic post of interior minister was occupied by Rashid Nurgaliev in recent years. The situation in Chechnya now seems to be more under control in recent years, but it remains to be confirmed that the autocrat and heir Ramzan Kadyrov really benefits from genuine legitimacy, which will positively affect the image of Russia in the arab and muslim world. Russia also hopes to contain its own islamist radicals by supporting regimes that try more or less to bring them under control in the arab world, sending them a message and hoping to weaken and contain them in their "living space". But others believe that this position of support for Syria and sometimes its shiite allies (Iran, Iraq) risks further radicalizing sunni extremists active in the Russian Federation or its periphery.

Conclusion

Russia has made a strong comeback in recent years in the Middle East and has even become a key player in the various crises in the arab world since the beginning of the revolts that affected it in 2011. If it contributed to its body defending the departure of Colonel Gaddafi, Russia up to now supports the Syrian regime. But this unavoidable position is as much an asset as a formidable challenge, for if its ally is finally ousted and the country sinks into chaos (perspective that Putin first evoked at the end of 2012 (Trenin 2012b)⁶), then it will be reproached its imperium and will lose some of its credit beyond the arab world. If, on the contrary, it maintains itself or contributes to an exit from the crisis, then it will have proved that nothing can be done without it in the region. Finally, it must wait and count on a disaffection of the masses vis-a-vis the islamists to be able to incarnate an alternative vis-a-vis the latter and the pro-american regimes whose legitimacy is of this fact in part disputed. This involvement is probably a search for a genuine multilateralism (Stepanova 2016), thwarted by Washington since the end of the Cold War.

⁶ This position which surprised is not really a "letting go" of Bashar Al Assad. It is also a means of putting pressure on the Syrian regime in order to allow it to consider more flexibility or concessions and to show the Americans or the Syrian opponents that they are not unconditional of the regime and therefore of the credible partners for a negotiation.

Bio

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