
THE SYRIAN CRISIS AND IRAN'S MIDEAST POLITICS. GLOBAL AND REGIONAL DIMENSIONS

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After the 'Arab Spring', globalization actively shapes local attempts to build a new political order in the Middle East. The impact of global processes on nations and state-building has become more evident today. These processes affect the transformation of Middle Eastern states in terms of changes in the scope of the state's sovereign powers as a result of protracted crisis. Given the current political situation in the region, the mutual influence of countries has increased. The processes of institutionalization of foreign relations in the region are closely connected with the unfolding globalization in the Middle East.

Keywords: *globalization, internationalization, world order, politics, international relations, Syria, Iran, Middle East, Russia, USA.*

Introduction

The present article attempts to show how global processes and external influences affect the transformation of the Middle Eastern states and their interrelationships, using the example of the Syrian crisis and Iran's policy in the region. The Syrian crisis has lasted for twelve years. It has resulted in the destruction of the key political institutions of the state. The duration and complexity of this crisis has been determined by its considerable internationalization. The main attention is paid to Iran's policy in Syria. The author briefly characterizes the historic background of Arab-Iranian relations and shows the place and role of Syria in Iranian policy. The article highlights the challenges posed by the crisis in Syria for Iran and its relations with other Middle Eastern states. The author focuses on the Iranian activities in Syria and shows why and how Iranian influence has managed to penetrate so deeply into the social fabric of the Syrian society. The article identifies the main spheres of Iranian, Arab and Russian interactions in the region and in Syria, in particular, paying special attention to the development of the Russian-Iranian relations in Syria. The author tries to forecast transformations in Iran's Middle East policy in view of further political developments in the region and in Syria in particular.

The Syrian Uprising: Causes and Results

The armed conflict in Syria is one of the major issues of the contemporary situation in the Middle East. It is also shaping a new political and security order in the region. The Syrian

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crisis has been triggered by a number of factors: Assad's long stay in power, the deterioration of the socio-economic situation, growing unemployment among a large number of educated youth, injustice and corruption. Let us formulate some main points that characterize the causes, development, peculiarities, and some results of the Syrian civil war.

The Syrian revolution began in March 2011 as a peaceful movement of social protests.¹ Later, it degenerated into a bloody civil war.² Syria was plunged into both a secessionist upheaval and the collapse of its population's national identity. The duration and complexity of reconciling the Syrian crisis has been caused by a sequence of fundamental factors, including global processes.³

The specific features of the Syrian uprising can also be categorized in terms of the traditional distinction between the urban and rural areas of the country (which has very deep roots [Dusen 1972]), and the role of the uprising in the peripheral regions (at least in its early stages).

It is well known that the provincial centers were the hotbeds of the revolution. This can be explained by the fact that it was exactly in those centers that the army and the security forces originally lost their authority among the population. The situation before the uprising was complicated by the sudden socio-economic deterioration of the population in the periphery due to several years of drought and the crippling drought of 2010. As a result, around 1 million bankrupted farmers and unemployed villagers began to migrate to Syria's main population centers right before the uprising (see, e.g., Grinin *et al.* 2019).

In fact, globalization considerably changes the states' sovereign prerogatives, as it contributes to changing and reducing of the scope of the states' sovereign powers (Grinin and Korotayev 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2011; Grinin 2012). Syria's former political system and its institutions (Perthes 2001 143–154; Seal 1988: 420–440) have been deformed and the country's new environment has made them incapable of influencing the conflict without foreign assistance (Quilliam 1999: 27–60).

The distinctive feature of Syria's previous political model was its institutionalized authoritarianism and a strong security environment (Akhmedov 2010: 29–49). Indeed, civil-military relations in the country over the past 40 years have been mainly dictated by the security priorities of the country's key domestic and foreign policies (Hinnebusch 1993: 243–257; Zisser 2001: 5–8). In view of this, the control during the current crisis has been placed in the hands of the armed forces, which actually means the intelligence services (Ziadeh 2013: 143–170). In this context, it would be logical to pay special attention to the behavioral patterns of different state institutions (Seale 1988: 552) within the framework of a well-structured and vertically integrated political model. Top-down directives drove official explanations – insurgent protests were a direct result of enemy conspiracies against Syria (George 2003: 8, 40–87; Wedeen 1999; Van Dam 1981).

The radicalization of the Syrian conflict and its mutation into a sectarian struggle was intensified by the use of jihadist brigades in the armed resistance, and led to their initial popularity in the liberated neighborhoods.

Basher Assad's recruitment of Lebanese, Iraqi, and Iranian mercenaries⁴ which was prompted by the heavy losses suffered by the national military and the lack of combat experience among the newly recruited soldiers, legitimized the involvement of jihadists from other Arab countries in the eyes of some sections of the opposition.

To remedy the situation, in 2013 the regime began training new armed formations based on militias. By the end of 2015, these formations, according to various assessments, numbered between 35,000 and 40,000 soldiers.⁶

The arrival of the Russian Aerospace Forces (RAF) helped to start improving the situation. The conflict in and around Syria changed radically with the involvement of the RAF. In less than a year, the area under Syrian control grew to 35–40 per cent of the country's territory. Moscow became the key player in the Syrian conflict, a situation that the US, Europe, Turkey, Israel and neighboring countries were forced to acknowledge. In 2015, under the guidance of Russian and Iranian advisors, the regime began to create its fourth and fifth army corps, which integrated the above-mentioned units.

3. Iran's Policy in the Middle East: Major Developments and Specific Features

In view of the new situation in the Middle East, a brief retrospective analysis of the main directions of Iran's foreign policy in the Middle East and its evolution may give some idea of Iran's policy in the region and in Syria, as well as in the near future.

The fundamental principles of Iran's foreign policy, proclaimed at the beginning of the Islamic Revolution, such as 'neither the West, nor the East, but Islam,' the export of the Islamic Revolution, which prioritized relations with the countries of the Muslim world, underwent certain changes. Iran's foreign policy changed in the 1990s, becoming more flexible and moderate after losing the radical features of the 1980s.

The main focus of foreign policy was on ensuring the country's internal security, its territorial integrity, and maintaining good neighborly relations with the Iran's neighboring states (see Hasseb 1988: 3–18, 73–103). In 1997, a newly elected Iranian president, Mohammad Khatami, proposed a new foreign policy concept of a dialogue between the cultures and civilizations of the Western and Eastern worlds, based on the principles of mutual understanding and trust. Iran's foreign policy was based on these guidelines and Iran intensified its relations with both Western and Eastern countries. Iran came out of the international political isolation it had been in during the first years after the Islamic Revolution. Relations with the EU countries were improving.

This was of particular importance for Iran, whose economy needed foreign investment and technology. The most active cooperation with the EU was in the oil and gas industry. Business circles in European countries expressed their willingness to invest in Iranian infrastructure, construction and tourism.⁷ In implementation of its policy of normalizing relations with Arab countries, Iran relied on Syria, which was one of its main Arab allies (Hunter 2010: 51–70). The war in Iraq and its aftermath unpredictably changed the configuration of political forces in the region and made Iran fear for its security. In this context, Iran's foreign policy priorities began to change. After the return of the 'conservatives' to power in Iran in 2005, Iran, together with its Arab allies in the region, primarily Syria, pursued an active policy of strengthening its influence in the Middle East. This political line of Iran was reflected in Iraq, where a government controlled by Tehran was formed; it was manifested during the war in Lebanon in the summer of 2006, during the events in Beirut in the spring of 2008, when Hezbollah actually took power into its own hands, during the war in Gaza in the winter of 2009. Using the mistakes of Arab leaders, inter-Arab disagreements, and the presence of a Shia minority as a pretext for intervention, Iran achieved certain results in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen.

The attempts, made by the American administration over the past three decades to change the system of power in Iran and restrain the growth of Iranian influence in the Middle East have not brought the desired results. Iran's activities in the Middle East have been determined by a number of important factors that have had a significant impact on its policies. This is Iran's support for the Lebanese Hezbollah, which it used to strengthen its influence in Lebanon and as a tool to contain Israel's ambitions. Iran has been involved in the inter-Palestinian and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. It provided international support and assistance to the Palestinian Hamas (Ehteshami and Hinnebusch 1997: 27–57).

The development of the revolutionary process in the Arab world was viewed positively in Iran. The emerging situation in the region, according to the Iranian leaders, contributed to the implementation of Iran's far-reaching domestic and foreign policy plans. In particular, the international community, distracted by the events in the Arab world, did not follow the implementation of the Iran's nuclear program as closely. Taking advantage of this situation, Iran sought to strengthen its position in the region, which had been one of the most important directions of Iranian foreign policy in recent years. The resumption of relations between Cairo and Tehran can be attributed to a certain success on Iran's part. The normalization of Iranian-Egyptian relations meant not only that Cairo left the camp of 'moderate' Arab countries created by the United States against Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas, but also that Iranian foreign policy in Arab countries received additional recognition and legitimacy. This created a serious gap in the policy of anti-Iranian mobilization of the Arab countries, which was carried out by the monarchies of the Persian Gulf,⁸ often using confessional contradictions between Sunnis and Shiites, which in practice led to the split of the region into two camps – Sunni and Shiite.

The process of ongoing changes in the Arab countries could not be considered in isolation apart of the results of the continuing confrontation between Iran and the Arab monarchies of the Persian Gulf, on the one hand, and between Iran and the international community, on the other. Because of the events in Bahrain and the intervention of the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) armed forces, relations between Riyadh and Tehran seriously deteriorated. Iran obviously underestimated the fact that the Arabs consider Bahrain exclusively their own zone of influence. Arab monarchies feared that Iran could take advantage of their potential weakness because of the development of Arab revolutionary movement and use it to strengthen its position in the region. The events that took place in the states of the Arab Mashriq were closely related to the situation in the Gulf. The warring parties in the Levant and the Persian Gulf carefully watched for any signs of a change in the situation in order to reconsider their positions in time and react to it (Kulagina and Akhmedov 2012: 500–508). Events in Syria put Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas in a difficult position. The unrest in Syria showed the full extent of the severity of the division of the former alliances in the region. Although the West condemned Damascus for the excessive use of force against protestors, it – along with the GCC countries – until recently, generally viewed the Assad regime as part of the upcoming changes and reforms in Syria.

4. Why does Iran Fight in Syria?

Iran needed Syria for a number of reasons. Due to the efforts of the regime of Bashar Assad, Tehran managed to thwart the emergence of united front of the USA and its Arab

allies in the region against Iran. Damascus served as a conduit for Iranian policy in Lebanon. Iran has always viewed Damascus as an important link in the 'axis of resistance' along the Tehran-Baghdad-Damascus-Beirut-Gaza line, in order to exert deterrent influence on Israel, on the one hand, and to spread its influence in the region, including the support of Shiite communities in several Arab countries of the region, on the other. It is worth mentioning that Syrian-Iranian alliance shaped due to the varying degrees of the experiences and different geography of the two states.

As to their political elites' ideologies and worldviews, they played an important role in building this alliance. Syrian and Iranian leaders share some perceptions; their ideologies in certain aspects overlap. Iran tried to spread revolutionary Islam to create Muslim unity in the region by surmounting Arab-Iranian political division. Tehran demonstrates its solidarity by actively participating in the Arab-Israeli struggle.

Meanwhile, Syria, as the heartland of Arabism, strove to overcome the political fragmentation of the Arab world by acting as a trigger for Arab unity. Hafez Assad and Ruhollah Khomeini regarded their alliance as a vital tool to increase regional autonomy by diminishing foreign penetration into the Middle East. Iran's influence on Syria increased especially after Basher al-Assad had come to power in Damascus in June, 2000, and the large-scale reforms he had carried out in the Syrian security structures at the turn of 2004–2005. Iranian penetration into Syria peaked in 2007–2009. Iran signed a whole series of profitable economic contracts with the new Syrian leadership and an agreement on military cooperation that has got its prolongation in 2019–2022 (Akhmedov 2022b: 19–45). This allowed Iran to penetrate almost all the institutions of the Syrian state, at first in the army and security apparatus, and start to play an increasing role in Syrian society, exerting a beneficial influence on the mentality and views of the ruling Syrian elite.

However, as events developed in the Syrian Arab Republic, Tehran could no longer count on the previous support of Damascus to protect its interests in Lebanon. In addition, taking into account the Syrian events, many Lebanese political forces could change their attitude towards Iran; reconsider the previous nature of their ties with Tehran. When Syrian rebellion started, many regional and international actors considered it as a good opportunity to rid Syria of Assad.

These calculations included Iranian dimensions. Once Assad was gone, attacking Iran would be easier. Iran considered Syria as its strategic depth. Iranian leadership saw Assad's survival as vital for its own security. Iran also feared that regime change in Syria could undermine Iranian interests in the region (Akhmedov 2010: 152–173). Iran played a leading role in maintaining the current regime in the SAR. Since January 2012, the Iranian Central Bank opened a multi-billion dollar line of credit to the Syrian authorities, which allowed them to regularly pay salaries to the personnel of the Syrian armed forces fighting against the armed opposition. At the same time, Iran sent several thousand Lebanese Hezbollah soldiers, advisers and specialists from the elite al-Qods corps, as well as Shiite militias from Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, to the SAR to assist the army of Basher al-Assad. As the Syrian armed uprising expanded, turned into a civil war, and Syrian armed conflict became internationalized, which resulted in the participation of a growing number of regional and international players, Iran saw this as a threat to its interests and increased its military presence in Syria through Al-Qods officers and Shiite militias, mainly Lebanese Hezbollah. Iran has created its own Syrian

army, Levant Liberating Army, which numbered up to 5,000 soldiers and essentially consisted of Shiite mercenaries from Iran and Afghanistan, some Arab countries, and a small number of Syrians. According to data from the Syrian opposition, there were some 60–62 Shiite militia combat formations operating in the country. The insurgent Free Syrian Army (FSA) consisted of deserted soldiers and officers, militia detachments, and numbered no more than 30,000–35,000 soldiers. The insufficient provision of arms and ammunition from their Western allies (principally the United States, Great Britain, and France) has made it extremely difficult to confront even the regime's substantially weakened army, not to mention the Lebanese, Iranian, Iraqi and Afghan Shiite armed units. In fact, many of Iranian actions in the foreign policy arena, including in Syria, were dictated by considerations of the internal order and the desire to achieve by any means the nuclear power status, like Israel and Pakistan.

From this point of view, Iran could view Syria as a 'trump card' in a larger geopolitical game, but at the same time not forget to preserve its interests in this Arab country, which Tehran considered an important springboard for spreading its influence in the region (Akhmedov 2018: 134–153).⁹

5. Iran's Interaction with Key Regional and International Players in the Syrian Crisis and Prospects for Reconciliation

After Moscow became the key player in the Syrian conflict, Tehran was forced to take its position into account. Despite the traditionally allied relations between Moscow and Tehran, Iran, not without reason, feared that a massive Russian military presence in Syria and Moscow's growing political influence in new formats of international relations could force Iran to seriously adjust its plans in the region and, above all, in Syria. Outwardly, Iran has tried to demonstrate its support for Moscow's plans in every possible way. However, in practice, Iran was categorically opposed to the involvement of Saudi Arabia and the United States in the negotiations on Syria, and its loyal ally in the region – Lebanese Hezbollah, rejected in principle even to raise the question of the withdrawal of Shiite militias from Syria. Tehran understood that Syria was only one aspect (albeit not an insignificant one) of Russian-Iranian relations and that Russia was several times superior to Iran in military terms (including its presence in Syria). Therefore, Tehran, which did not dare to openly confront Moscow in Syria, sought to reduce Ankara's role as one of Russia's leading partners in the Syrian settlement and replace it with Iran in order to exert a beneficial influence on the outcome of the peace talks on Syria.¹⁰ At the same time, Tehran was forced to reckon with the new realities emerging in the United States. Iran was concerned about the unilateral US withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal and was closely monitoring the reaction of the EU and Russia. In this context, the US and European pressure on Iran appeared sufficient to achieve a breakthrough in efforts to avert escalating tensions and to return to the negotiating table. Moreover, it could put Iran's actions on the agenda of the United Nations Security Council and lead to the re-imposition of international sanctions.

It is worth noting that since the signing of the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) in July 2015, pragmatic elements in Iranian leadership have shown that Iran has been able to compartmentalize certain issues in its engagement with the West. The key issue is Iran's engagement in global politics by recognizing its role in specific areas. In addition, it is quite possible that discussions on the Middle East and Syria will allow

for some kind of rapprochement. The EC could use Iran's economic interests as an advantage to project the desired influence over the Assad regime and groups in certain parts of the battlefield. Notwithstanding the peculiarities of decision-making mechanism in Iran, such compromise is quite possible as long as the decision-making is supervised and coordinated by the Supreme Leader, particularly through the Supreme National Security Council.

It is worth noting that the risk of religious conflicts is equally high for Russia, the West and Iran; but none of them has the capacity to prevent them beyond placatory declarations. In this regard, the West is likely to work to strengthen Egypt's leadership role. Indeed, only Egypt, as the leading Arab power, would be in a position to counter the defamation of Arab Shiites by emphasizing their Arab-Muslim identity. On the other hand, it can be assumed that Egypt, the KSA, Turkey and Iran will be able to actively influence the issues of war and peace in Syria in the near future.

After all, all these countries are clearly trying to increase their role in the Syrian crisis. Given the special nature of Russia's relations with them, which are much broader than the Syrian issue, it is more profitable for Moscow to adhere to a consistent course of cooperation with these states in resolving the crisis in the SAR. As for Syrian reconciliation, Moscow seems to have the upper hand in Syria and much more influence in Damascus than Tehran. In view of this fact, Moscow may be in a better position to force changes in the regime and the Syrian political system as a whole. As a reliable partner of Turkey and the Gulf states, Russia could play an important mediating role in the transition process. Meanwhile, Moscow is unlikely to make any compromises that are less favorable to Iran. The idea of pulling Syria away from Iran is unlikely in the current circumstances. Recent developments in the region call for the establishment of an Arab-Gulf-Emirati authority in Syria in parallel with the Iranian presence. This could become an effective channel in post-conflict Syria. This could open up some solutions that would appeal to Saudi Arabia and its Gulf partners. As for Assad, Russia and Iran seem ready to consider all alternatives, but it is quite clear that a new leader alone may not be enough to solve Syria's deep-rooted political problems. On the other hand, any short-term transition would come as a free face-saving gift for Saudi Arabia and Turkey.¹¹

6. Conclusion

The armed conflict in Syria is one of the most important issues of the current situation in the Middle East. The uprising against the Assad regime posed serious political challenges for Tehran. As events unfolded in Syria, many regional and international actors considered it as a good opportunity to rid Syria of Assad. The Iranian leadership saw Assad's survival as vital to its own security. Iran feared that regime change in Syria could undermine Iranian interests in the region.

The Syrian crisis marked a new phase in the political and military struggle for the Middle East. In the wake of the escalation of the crisis in Syria and the hostilities in Iraq caused by the 'Islamic State' insurgency, the 'direct force' component of Iranian foreign policy began to prevail. This provided the impetus for military intervention in Syria and Iraq to ensure Iranian security and preserve the regional balance of power in Iran's favor. Iran increased its military presence in Syria through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the regular army (Artesh) and Shia militias. Iran's decision to intervene in Syria by force was determined by several influential factors.

The most important factors affecting the Iranian intervention were geopolitical and domestic in nature. The presence of the typical confessional population groups seems to be almost a prerequisite for Tehran's interventions. All Iranian ground interventions have affected the countries with such population groups.

The regional balance of power and stability has also been a critical factor in the likelihood of hostile military interventions. Iran views itself as a fundamentally vulnerable state in a predominantly Arab and Sunni region, where it has historically felt marginalized and often attacked. From Iran's perspective, unless the balance of power is in its favor, the country could once again become a target for hostile forces. A key strategy pursued by Iran to ensure a favorable balance of power has been to ensure that no regional competitor is strong enough to pose a threat to Iran.

Many of Iran's military interventions have resulted from the perception of external threat posed by state adversaries. The rise of the ISIS (banned organization in the Russian Federation) gave an opportunity for Iran to increase its military presence in Syria. Iran's intervention in Syria was much larger in terms of the estimated number of forces deployed there and the different services involved in the country. Training and assistance have been key components of many Iranian military interventions. Syria is an exclusive example of this model, because Iran has also recruited non-local foreign fighters for combat. Iran has used its 'Coup de force' in order to facilitate and accelerate the process of socialization of Shia communities, to increase their influence in Syrian society, and to create positions in the political systems of the state. By bringing the Shiites of Syria and Lebanon to power, Iran was able to strengthen its political and military presence in the Levant. However, the warring parties in the Levant and the Persian Gulf watched carefully for any signs of change in the situation in order to reassess their positions and react in time. One of the future footholds for Iran's advance in the region is Syria, or rather the division of spheres of influence in that country after the final withdrawal of foreign troops. In this regard, Iran would rather not aggravate its relations with Russia and Turkey over the Assad regime, which can significantly limit its sphere of interests in Syria. The ongoing clashes in different parts of Syria and the continued Israeli attacks on Iranian objects have shown that Iran did not want to reduce its military presence in Syria, but is seeking to aggravate the armed confrontation with Israel in order to maintain and expand Iranian positions in Syria, and to undermine the Sunni-Israeli alliance in the region. The military operation in Syria has helped Tehran to approve the core components of Iran's policy in the Middle East. Tehran has succeeded in strengthening its place and role in the Middle Eastern politics.

The attitude of the key international and regional players towards the given situation has demonstrated their low capacity to reverse the developments of the current Iranian role in the political and military balance of power and security environment in the Middle East. Even if there is still some hope for optimism regarding Iran's role in the region and the Syrian settlement, one should remember that no matter how difficult the transformation process in Syria may be, the future of Iran and the region in general also depends on whether an agreement can be reached on the nuclear issue. As far as Iran is concerned, this is not just a political issue, but also much more of an ideological and vital concern. Iranian intervention in Syria marked a new era of Iranian politics in the Middle East that might challenge key international and regional players in the Middle East.

Several factors, both internal and external, could change the Iran's approach to war. Khamenei's eventual departure and subsequent succession may have a profound impact on Iranian national security thinking, including Tehran's role in armed conflicts and broad regional portfolios. The accession of an IRGC-aligned figure (Ebrahim Raisi) could increase the presence of the Revolutionary Guards and their affiliates in the political realm. The coming to power of a more reform-minded individual (such as Rouhani) could strengthen the Artesh. Significant changes in the international relations could affect Iran's motives and calibrate its approach to military intervention.

The future of great power competition in the Middle East plays an important role in shaping Iran's vision of its military activities. A bygone period of greater Washington power in the region appears to offer Iran fewer threats and more opportunities. American interventions in the region over the past two decades and the instability resulting from the collapse of central authorities have paved the way for Iranian involvement in key countries. Ethnic or sectarian tensions combined with weak governments facilitate Iranian interventionism. Iran's policy towards Syria is similar to its policy towards Iraq with some differences in the details and some objectives.

In general, this policy is aimed at building a regional axis led by Tehran. Iran may increase its focus on Syria in the coming period, given Iraq's resentment of Iranian attempts to control the Iraqi decision-making process. Under the current circumstances, it is difficult to expect a quick Syrian reconciliation, especially in light of the Western continued stubbornness in dealing with Iran and the Assad regime. The Arabs have failed to comprehend the danger of repeating the strategic void in the Middle East. The Arabs are taking a very long time to reintegrate Syria into the Arab neighborhood. In view of this, it is certainly ridiculous to speak now about pulling Syria away from Iran. The Syrian reconciliation may take place at this critical phase that the region is going through, it may be a strategic step to rearrange the failed regional security system to meet the political and military challenges ahead.

NOTES

¹ About general causes of the Arab Spring revolutions see Grinin, Korotayev 2022; Goldstone *et al.* 2022.

² About Syrian armed opposition, see Akhmedov 2015: 52–57; Abdurrahman Aal-Haj 2013; Al-Tamimi 2019.

³ For more details see Akhmedov 2019b.

⁴ For more details about pro regime foreign fighters see Lister, Nelson 2017.

⁵ For more details about militia formations see Syria Deeply 2017.

⁶ For more details about new formations in Syrian Arab Army see Akhmedov 2014; An-Nahas 2019.

⁷ For more details see Lake 1994.

⁸ With the exception of Qatar (Vasiliev *et al.* 2019).

⁹ For more details about Iranian military intervention in Syria see Akhmedov 2022b. For more details about impact of the 'Arab Spring' on Iran's Middle East politics see Akhmedov, Kulagina 2021.

¹⁰ For more details about Russian-Iranian interactions in Syria see Akhmedov 2022a.

¹¹ For more details about perspectives of Syrian reconciliation see Al-Kotobi 2023.

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