

# The Russian Military Intervention in Syria

Ohannes GEUKJIAN

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In *The Russian Military Intervention in Syria*, Ohannes Geukjian attempts to explain Russia's military intervention in Syria using the status-seeking theory. The theory claims that Russia risks conflict to retain its great power status. According to Geukjian, Russia is a status-inconsistent power, which means its status and capability are not aligned. Russia considers itself a great power due to its nuclear capabilities, veto power in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), and its role in the Cold War. However, its economic, military, and material capabilities are insufficient to support this perception, hence making Russia an "overachiever." Russia utilizes strategies to regain recognition as a major player in global politics, occasionally resorting to force. The book explores the events that led to Russia's military intervention in 2015, with a particular focus on the factors that shaped its decision to support the Assad regime and contribute to the conflict resolution process.

The book argues that while Russia sought opportunities for cooperation after the Cold War, the West disregarded its security concerns and even engaged in policies that heightened Russia's sense of threat. Notably, Russia perceives the inclusion of former Soviet states into the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as well as the color revolutions in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005), as actions supported by Western powers aimed at destabilizing Russian influence in its near abroad. Additionally, Russia considers the Arab Spring and NATO's intervention in Libya in 2011 as threats to its regional influence and geopolitical interests. Russia perceives that the United States (US)-led unipolar structure of the international system has diminished its global influence and poses a threat to its geostrategic interests (p. 57, 71). Therefore, Russia believes it is necessary to strengthen its position and establish a set of rules for a multipolar world that protects its geostrategic interests. To achieve this goal, the Kremlin has been working towards proving itself a global player by identifying specific spheres where Russia can exert its influence. According to Geukjian, Syria is one of these spheres where Russia has been actively involved in enhancing its status. This desire led to Russia's involvement in the conflict in Syria.

The book is organized into five chapters, including an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction outlines the theoretical framework, methodology, and structure of the book. Geukjian employs qualitative research methods in the book, including open-ended interviews and secondary sources such as government documents, academic articles, and media reports. The author analyzes three key variables to understand what drives Russian power politics: attribution, willingness, and capability. He examines the identity factor regarding attribution, the opportunity factor regarding willingness, and the cost factor regarding capability. The author examines two hypotheses about how the US recognizes Russia's desire for status. The first hypothesis suggests that the US will most likely grant Russia a higher status when neither country perceives the other as a primary threat. The second hypothesis proposes that the US will recognize Russia's status to counterbalance a common threat.

The first chapter examines Russian foreign policy from the Yeltsin era to Putin's rise to power at the beginning of 2000. Chapter two covers Russia's foreign policy between 2001 and 2011 under the presidencies of Putin and Medvedev, respectively. The author utilizes three different strategies -social mobility, social competition, and social creativity- in order to classify Russia's behavior in these periods. This classification provides a historical backdrop that helps shed light on Russia's shifting attitudes towards Western policies as well as its emerging proactive and assertive posture on the global stage. Chapter three examines the period between 2011 and 2014, focusing on the involvement of various regional and international actors in the Syrian conflict. The chapter highlights that Russia capitalized on America's lack of clear policy in Syria. Russia aimed to take on the responsibilities associated with its significant influence on international conflict management in Syria and the broader Middle East region by undertaking diplomatic initiatives. Chapter four analyzes Russia's intervention in Syria in 2015, followed by the evaluation of the military and diplomatic dynamics that occurred between mid-2016 and mid-2017. The author argues that Russia intervened militarily in Syria to maintain its status as a global power and to restore its position among other significant nations to establish a multipolar international order. Chapter five delves into diplomatic and military events between 2018 and 2019 and how they fit into Russia's strategic pursuit of a higher status. The author discusses Russia's power politics in Syria by analyzing three key factors: identity, opportunity, and costs.

The author concludes that Russia's attempt to increase its status through hard power did not resolve its "status inconsistency." According to Geukjian, Russia needs to boost its economy, diversify its industries, improve healthcare, increase transparency, take on more global responsibilities, and develop a broader range of technological capabilities to improve its status. Furthermore, the author asserts that Russia's claim of being a great power depends on the recognition of other nations. In keeping with the first hypothesis, the author claims that the US considers Russia a revisionist actor and a significant threat to its global order vision due to Russia's annexation of Crimea and its backing of separatists in eastern Ukraine. This leads to reluctance to grant Russia higher status. Under the second hypothesis, even though Russia aimed to collaborate with the US in the fight against terrorism, the US did not exhibit an attitude that would fulfill Russia's quest for high-status objectives. The author predicts that the long-term conflict between Russia and the West will continue unless the US recognizes Russia's status.

*The Russian Military Intervention in Syria* by Ohannes Geukjian does not focus on its stated objectives, making the title somewhat misleading. Besides covering the main subject, the author gives detailed, tangential information about Russia's policies towards the former Soviet Republics and the Middle East. Repetition of certain sentences and an over-reliance on direct quotes rather than paraphrasing throughout the book disrupt the flow. However, this book will attract the attention of readers interested in Russia, geopolitics, international conflict management, and conflict resolution.