

Determinants of Russian Foreign Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

محددات السياسة الخارجية الروسية في منطقة شرق المتوسط

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Abstract

The Study discusses the EastMed region's importance in the thrusts of Russian foreign policy, recently Russia has become one of the most important geopolitical players in the Eastern Mediterranean. Russia seeks to find a foothold in the region, in order to re-establish itself as a great power and assume a new global role led by Putin, who has adopted a strategy that serves Russia's interests. The Russian move in this region was according to the determinants of its foreign policy, some of which are represented in the Russian geography and its access to warm-water ports, and it has a common cultural heritage rooted in Orthodox Christianity and the region is also rich in many natural resources such as oil and gas reserves, which makes it an important player in the global energy map, whether in terms of production, export or terms of control transport Pipelines natural gas from Central Asia and the Middle East to Europe.

Historically, Russia had an influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, this region was the scene of the ideological struggle between the two poles during the Cold War. Despite the neglect that the region was subjected to during the 1990s, with Putin's accession to power, it has returned once again among the priorities of Russian policy. Since the onset of the second decade of the 21st century, Russian policy towards the Eastern Mediterranean has depended on its ability to combine elements of soft and hard power: such as the military intervention in Syria in 2015 was the first of its kind outside the territory of the former Soviet Union, or economic policies, given that this region is a suitable market for Russian weapons in addition to the role of Russian natural gas companies. So, Russia's current policies in the Eastern Mediterranean can be seen as part of a pattern aimed at enhancing its power globally.

Keywords: Russian Foreign Policy, Eastern Mediterranean Region, determinants, the military intervention in Syria

المستخلص:

تناقش الدراسة أهمية منطقة شرق المتوسط في توجهات السياسة الخارجية الروسية، فقد أصبحت روسيا مؤخراً واحدة من أهم اللاعبين الجيوسياسيين في شرق المتوسط. حيث تسعى روسيا إلى إيجاد موطئ قدم لها في المنطقة، من أجل إعادة ترسيخ نفسها كقوة عظمى والاضطلاع بدور عالمي جديد بقيادة بوتين، الذي تبني استراتيجية تخدم مصالح روسيا. فجاء التحرك الروسي في هذه المنطقة وفق محددات سياستها الخارجية، تتمثل بعضها في الجغرافيا الروسية ووصولها إلى موانئ المياه الدافئة ولها تراث ثقافي مشترك متجذر في المسيحية الأرثوذكسية، بالإضافة أن المنطقة غنية أيضاً بالعديد من الموارد الطبيعية مثل احتياطات النفط والغاز، مما يجعلها لاعباً مهماً في خريطة الطاقة العالمية، سواء من حيث الإنتاج أو التصدير أو من حيث التحكم في نقل خطوط أنابيب الغاز الطبيعي من آسيا الوسطى والشرق الأوسط إلى أوروبا.

تاريخياً، كانت لروسيا تأثير كبير في شرق المتوسط، وكانت هذه المنطقة مسرحاً للصراع الأيديولوجي بين القطبين خلال الحرب الباردة. وعلى الرغم من التغاضي الذي تعرضت له المنطقة خلال التسعينيات، إلا أنها عادت مرة أخرى ضمن أولويات السياسة الروسية مع وصول بوتين الي السلطة. منذ بداية العقد الثاني من القرن الحادي والعشرين، استندت السياسة الروسية تجاه منطقة شرق المتوسط على قدرتها في الجمع بين عناصر القوة الناعمة والصلبة: مثل التدخل العسكري في سوريا عام ٢٠١٥، كان الأول من نوعه خارج أراضي الاتحاد السوفياتي السابق، أو السياسات الاقتصادية، باعتبار أن هذه المنطقة تعد سوقاً مناسباً للأسلحة الروسية بالإضافة إلى دور شركات الغاز الطبيعي الروسية. لذلك، يمكن اعتبار سياسات روسيا الحالية في منطقة شرق المتوسط جزءاً من نمط يهدف إلى تعزيز قوتها عالمياً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السياسة الخارجية الروسية، منطقة شرق المتوسط، المحددات الداخلية والخارجية، التدخل العسكري الروسي

Introduction

The past decade has seen the rise of Russia as a key regional power in the Eastern Mediterranean region^{*}. Although it had close relations or alliances with various countries during the Cold War including Egypt, Libya, and Syria, which declined with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Russia's efforts in recovering its global power status start with President Vladimir Putin coming into power in the year 2000. Russia uses the strategic location of the Eastern Mediterranean in order to fulfill its national interests which were referred to in the year 2000 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, that the national interest of Russia in which is generally to ensure the reliable security of the Russian Federation as well as to preserve and strengthen its sovereignty and territorial integrity to achieve prestigious positions in the world community which is mostly related to the Russian Federation as a great power.⁽¹⁾

Russian present role as an important regional player was achieved primarily through the increased military presence and the parallel expansion of Russian participation in the energy markets of the Eastern Mediterranean; Russia is also very active diplomatically. The absence of coherent EU or US policies or discontent with existing ones has also facilitated Russia's ability to attract new partners, allowing it to fill the void. According to Russia, its presence in this region is one of the ways to face NATO's policies in the region, as well as the new naval doctrine of the Russian Federation, it notices the threat of the U.S. and NATO that is emerging new risks to its national security. The emergence of terrorist groups in the region and Russia's fear of its spreading to its frontiers. These groups are then defined by the President of Russia as the so-called "Islamic State, Jabhat al-Nusra, and other groups that have been declared by the United Nations Security Council". Russia had many determinants on which its policies in the region focused, both internal and external determinants.

The Study Significance

The study starts with the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean region in Russia's foreign policy and its importance in achieving its interests within the region, considering that the EastMed region represents geostrategic importance as it is a center for commercial transport in addition to being one of the most important transit points for oil and natural gas from the Middle East to European

* NOTE: the study often uses an Abbreviation (**EastMed region**) to refer to the Eastern Mediterranean region. The Eastern Mediterranean region as a "regional sub-system" is comprised of nine particular states" Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Libya, and Turkey".

countries, in addition to its importance For the countries of the European Union, it serves as a barrier that protects the European continent from terrorist threats, and the location of the Mediterranean is an important point in the strategy of all its neighboring countries between three continents and two oceans. In addition, the economic importance of the Mediterranean was imposed as a target for its military control, and the geostrategic importance of the Eastern Mediterranean increased with the huge discoveries of the natural wealth of oil and natural gas, which led to tensions that reflected the conflicting interests of local, regional and international powers within the region.

This study seeks to shed light on more matters that are; Kremlin's policy in the Eastern Mediterranean region from the end of the Cold War until the strong return that was represented in the intervention in Syria and Russia's activity in the region. The importance of the Eastern Mediterranean region for Russia, and its objectives there. The determinates of Russian foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

The Study Problem

The national interest occupies an important role in the orientations of Russian foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean region, although this region witnessed many shifts between the policy of condoning and attention by Russia, especially after the Cold War, it was characterized by a strong resurgence within Putin's orientations since his three-term. The key starting point in this study is about determinates of Russia's existence, the dynamics that control Russia in the EastMed, and how this region occupies an important priority in Russian policy. The essence of the study revolves around the main question represented:

What are the determinants of Russian foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean, and how do they affect the Russian national interests?

The sub-questions are the following:

Q1 What are the historical roots of Russian foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean region?

Q2 What is the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean region for Russia?

Q3 What is the nature of the internal determinants of Russian foreign policy in the region?

Q4 What are the external determinants of Russian foreign policy in the region?

The Study Outline:

- 1.The Importance of the Eastern Mediterranean region for Russia
- 2.Historical features of Russian foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean region
- 3.Determinants of Russian foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean region:
 - 3.1. Internal Determinants
 - 3.2. External Determinants

1. The Importance of the Eastern Mediterranean region for Russia

Some places are superior to others in the face of the earth due to having unique characteristics and features, as the Eastern Mediterranean region is one of those places that have significance in geopolitical and geostrategic terms. It remains one of the most important geopolitical regions, and one of the world's most crucial geostrategic pivots, and its importance is confirmed by all the well-known geopolitical world theories. Thus, any disturbance, disorder, or aberration occurring in the region could have a global impact. The Eastern Mediterranean region has many features to become a pioneer region in the politics of regional and international states, firstly, the region constitutes a historical, civil, political, and economic meeting point. It is a region at the intersection of three continents, Asia, Africa, and Europe. It includes a large part of the Middle East region. It is considered one of the most war-torn regions, and the home of many empires that played a prominent role in the history of the west.⁽²⁾ Secondly, The Eastern Mediterranean forms a geostrategic seam between Europe and the Middle East. It has great strategic importance in order to control and supervise the Middle East, North Africa, Anatolia, Europe, and the Balkans. ⁽³⁾ As well, it constitutes a critical hub for the world economy where large quantities of crude oil and natural gas are transferred from the Middle East via the Suez Canal or pipes either to Europe or to America. ⁽⁴⁾

Hence, The Eastern Mediterranean is emerging as one of the most important regions in the current global system due to newly discovered natural gas reserves in the region have the potential to reshape the dynamics of the Eastern Mediterranean countries and far beyond. Especially with declining gas supplies in the North Sea and Europe searching for new energy source prospects to decrease its energy dependence on Russia.

Due to “Foreign Energy Policy”, the new region appears in Russian foreign policy priorities, the restoration and increase of previous positions in the region both political and economic has become one of the priorities for Russian Foreign policy since 2000. Russia’s presence in this region has been stable in the last few years, particularly after President Vladimir Putin’s official visits to key countries in the region such as Egypt, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority in 2005 and 2006. One of the key priorities of Russia’s foreign policy in the region is to manage its multidimensional security issues, including regional conflicts, proliferation, terrorism, and energy, as well as environmental issues, by working together with the countries of the region through the United Nations (UN) and other specialized organizations for regional crisis and conflict prevention and resolution. ⁽⁵⁾

Indeed, the region represents a strategic anchor for Russia and again become a strategic priority for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs due to its immediate proximity, its international importance, its enormous mineral resources primarily oil and gas, concerns conditioned by extreme population growth, and current as well as potential religious and tribal conflicts. The analysis of the geopolitical and geoeconomic situation both in the Mediterranean and in Russia reveals Russia’s interests in the Mediterranean region:⁽⁶⁾

- compete with the US presence in the East Mediterranean region through:
 - seeking to a strategic presence in the region.
 - achieving economic and trade cooperation achievements and prospects.
- mining possible inflow of terrorists and religious fundamentalists from the region to the North Caucasus.
- relative proximity of the East Mediterranean countries to the borders of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

However, the most sophisticated issue arose with the Arab Spring in 2011 which caused Iran⁽⁷⁾ and Russia to show interest in the region⁽⁸⁾ Therefore, Russia and recently Iran as Syrian supporters have strategic goals on regional interactions.

1.2 Logic of Russian foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean

Russia’s Comeback as a major geostrategic actor in the Mediterranean is one of the most significant trends characterizing this area over the past few years. Russia’s 2015 intervention in Syria marked a new phase in Moscow’s Mediterranean engagement. Russia treats with the region from specific logic - exploiting strategic vacuums -not only in conflict areas or with traditional Russian

allies. This logic is based on where other powers leave strategic vacuums, intervening when and where the US and the EU show little to no interest – or capacity – to intervene, thus filling a vacuum, and the limits of Russia’s geo-economic influence. Russia has succeeded to carve out an increasingly central role in Mediterranean equilibria. ⁽⁹⁾ Looking at Russia’s present-day Mediterranean involvement, Moscow’s capacity to shape dynamics is surprising, compared to the early 2000s, and is a direct result of Russia’s greater foreign policy assertiveness. ⁽¹⁰⁾ This logic serves more strategic goals.

1.3 Russian foreign policy's goals in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Russia looks at this region, as a relatively easy place to achieve its goals and to exacerbate fissures and stymie consensus within the West. as Greece and Cyprus are EU member states, and Greece and Turkey are NATO allies, In the past decade, Russia’s goals in the region have revolved around the following axes: ⁽¹¹⁾

- boosting its presence in the energy sector;
- deploying a permanent military force in Syria and fighting Islamist extremism;
- partnering with Turkey for Russia’s wider strategic goals;
- and making the Russian military presence in the region more efficient through a combination of small bases and military commuting.
- the region is considered vital for the establishment of military bases and, where able to move quickly and control the situation during crises and wars, Stansfield Turner⁽¹²⁾ focused after the second Gulf War on the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean region through “This war demonstrated the importance of using the Mediterranean Sea to deliver reinforcements and supplies to the Gulf, and therefore all data was subject to the use of the maritime line, such as Gibraltar, the Suez Canal, the Gulf. ⁽¹³⁾
- **Access to the Mediterranean is fundamental for Russia:**

Indeed, historically, a crucial element informing the Russian approach toward the region was its obsession with having access to so-called “warm waters” and related ports, a long-term geopolitical driver of Russian foreign policy. ⁽¹⁴⁾ Recently, The new military doctrine defined four functional dimensions of Russia's naval strategy, namely: enhancing maritime transport activity, discovering and preserving natural resources in the open sea, intensifying marine scientific research, and then paying attention to naval military activity. Therefore, Moscow seeks to strengthen its naval military presence in many areas such as the Mediterranean Sea as the outlet to the Atlantic Ocean. It

is also seeking to modernize its military and civilian infrastructure in coastal areas to repel any threat from the alliance. ⁽¹⁵⁾

2. Historical features of Russian foreign policy in the EastMed region

Interpreting Moscow's foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean region is considered a very a semi- difficult mission especially after the fluctuations in the region in light of many Russian policies. Notably Russia, after an interruption caused by the disintegration of the Soviet Union, is returning as a stable and significant presence in this region. ⁽¹⁶⁾ Although, some observers stated that, the Mediterranean does not constitute for Russia a more or less coherent region but Russia pursues different policies towards the countries of the region on the ground of developing relations with at least four types of actors: North Africa and the Middle East, the southern EU members, countries involved in the challenges the Kremlin faces in the Black Sea region and the United States, as Moscow's worldwide policies are captured by an idea of redrawing the negative consequences of a US centered world order. ⁽¹⁷⁾

The Eastern Mediterranean region as a part of the known Greater Middle East represents great importance for the national interests of the Russian Federation through; to begin with, the region is a gift so possesses a great amount of energy resources which ensures the growth of the world economy. Second, the main trade routes that connect Europe with the rapidly developing countries of South, South-East, and East Asia historically run through the Eastern Mediterranean. Third, the division between Christian and Muslim civilizations constitutes one of the core characteristics of the region. ⁽¹⁸⁾ Accordingly, the restoration and increase of previous positions in the region both political and economic have become one of the priorities for Russian Foreign policy since 2000.

In the beginning, during the cold war period, the Eastern Mediterranean region was an area of confrontation between the two blocks (US, USSR) and both had an equipollent military alignment in the region and contested with each other for allies in the region but with the end of this period, the situation is changed. ⁽¹⁹⁾ So, The Russian foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean-as a country emerging from the womb of the collapse of the Union-passed with three periods that can be distinguished by both the presence and activity of Russia in this region:

First, the stage of retreat (during the 1990s), Second, the phase of recovery (first decade of the 2000s), Third, and the years of global destabilization after the Arab Spring⁽²⁰⁾ with the increasing Russian activity in the region, this distinction is based on a different attitude of the Russian president's towards this region.

2.1 The First Stage (Russia's role during the 1990s)

Known as the stage of retreat, During the 1990s times, Russia's role retreated in the Eastern Mediterranean region in favor of the West and its interests this period was characterized by the West's growing role, in general, came to dominate the region solely, while the Russian Federation which took the place of the dismantled Soviet Union abandoned the Eastern Mediterranean as a sphere of strategic interests to the West, which started to promote its geopolitical projects in the region and Moscow kept itself aloof from the geopolitical competition in the region and during the first Gulf War, Russia gave up taking concrete steps in preventing a coalition led by the USA from defeating the army of Saddam Hussein.⁽²¹⁾

Arguably, due to inner political and economic problems hindered Russia from implementing large-scale international initiatives in the region. Under President Boris Yeltsin, Russia was satisfied with the role of an observer in the Eastern Mediterranean in which Russia's military presence in the region virtually came to an end and relations with Eastern Mediterranean countries were drastically reduced.⁽²²⁾

2.2 The Second Stage (First decade of the 2000s)

Known as the recovery period, With President Vladimir Putin coming into power in 2000, a desire to regain a leading role in the Eastern Mediterranean became one of the most important aspects of Russian foreign policy. Compared to the 1990s time, Russia's role retreated in the Eastern Mediterranean region in favor of the West and its interests. But in the early 2000s, the growing interest and activity of Russia in the region which distinguished Vladimir Putin's foreign policy were mostly considered as an attempt to return to the Eastern Mediterranean. Consequently, during this century, the region swiftly transformed into a zone of geopolitical and geo-economics competition between Russia and Western states.⁽²³⁾ But both the nature and forms of this competition differed greatly from the struggle of the Cold War period. This competition wasn't military and ideological but a contest in the spheres of energy and arms sales that resembled market competition.⁽²⁴⁾

As well, the Eastern Mediterranean region represents great strategic importance because it is rich in many natural resources like oil and gas reserves, enabling it to become an important player in the global energy map both in terms of production and export and in terms of control of transport pipelines from Central Asia and the Middle East to Europe. So many international powers are seeking to find a foothold in the region. Among these forces is the Russian Federation, which seeks to revive its power and assume a new global role under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin, which has adopted a strategy that is in line with Russia's interests only.

2.3 Third Stage: A strong Russian return in the EastMed region

Putin depicts a different vision and a different approach to his predecessor Boris Yeltsin. This region has emerged in Russia's strategic thinking as an arena for a change in the balance of power. Moscow has deployed its capabilities with its interests through two main factors, both energy and security, through the search for control over the oil and gas pipeline network, The Mediterranean is the main opening gate for Russia outside the Eurasian region, allowing it access to the sea and the oceans, such as the Atlantic Ocean, thus representing its strategic move towards the land and sea areas that constitute a geopolitical contract.

Since Russia's intervention in Syria in 2015, Russia has asserted its presence in the Mediterranean in a clear demonstration it once again can operate outside its immediate neighborhood and also is a part of its broader strategy for undermining the cohesion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union and thus complicating the Western alliance's ability to operate,



Figure(1) Map of the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Source: UN Geospatial, available at: <https://www.un.org/geospatial/content/eastern-mediterranean>

plan, and formulate policy. Moscow is seeking on creating security dependencies in the region, cultivate governing elites, and seek economic opportunities. While its gambits in Syria and Libya are often described as vehicles through which it tries to assert its global status, Russia sees the region more as a key flank in its standoff with the West and a place where it can complicate NATO operations, planning, and decision-making. However, Russian influence in the Mediterranean is not new. Moscow has long had clout in the region, playing to common cultural, economic, or historic ties. ⁽²⁵⁾

3. Determinants of Russian foreign policy in the EastMed region:

Each country directs its foreign policy towards another country or region through its reliance on many determinants, as the study of the determinants of the foreign policy of any country is one of the main entrances to understanding the nature of the factors affecting the behavior of countries towards each other, and this explains the extent of the different decisions taken by countries regarding issues thus, Hence, the Russian presence in the Eastern Mediterranean region is determined by more factors, namely:

First, Internal Determinants

1. Russia's Physical Geography

Geography is 'a dynamic factor' in that the meaning of space, distance, territory, and borders can change in the perceptions of people and foreign policy-making elites. ⁽²⁶⁾ Some of the geographer's advocates of the school of "geographical determinism", led by Ratzel, pointed out that "geography is the basic fact that determines the politics of states"⁽²⁷⁾. It is no surprise that Geography directly determines the national goals of Russia as well as plays a vital role in its orientation of foreign policy. Russia has been characterized by expansion and contraction, but it remains the country that possesses the largest geographical area in the world. It is considered at the forefront of countries that are driven by geopolitics to communicate with the East, the West, and the South, which compensates for the lack of vitality of the frozen North.

1.1 Features of Russia's Physical Geography

Russia is a country unlike any other, the largest country in the world, a country that stretches over a vast expanse of Eastern Europe and Northern Asia; it covers over 17 million km², and; across 11 time zones. ⁽²⁸⁾ The country is located on the northeastern portion of the Eurasian landmass. Russia is a semi-landlocked

country, although it is surrounded by 13 seas connected to three oceans the Arctic Ocean to the North, the Atlantic in the west, and the Pacific in the east, it remains frozen for most of the year. Its Northern and Eastern borders are maritime borders and to the Southwest, by the Black and Caspian Seas, but with indirect borders.⁽²⁹⁾

However, this geography leads to Russia being deprived of warm water; this concept means that “are navigable water throughout the year”. This obstacle represents the first geopolitical fact that governs Moscow’s foreign policy and that always pushes Russia to secure its access to warm water. In addition to being a landlocked country that does not have open seaports, and its southern borders are land⁽³⁰⁾ (Mongolia - China - Kazakhstan) it also shares seaports with Western powers and their allies.

1.2 Outlets for Warm Water

Regarding ports, in the East, Russia overlooks the port of Vladivostok is the most important and is located in the Sea of Japan. in the west, it overlooks the Baltic Sea through the ports of Saint Petersburg and Kaliningrad, in addition to the Black Sea port to the Mediterranean through the Bosphorus Strait, but most of those ports are surrounded by NATO members, Russia’s first enemy, all of these explains the continuity crisis with Ukraine and the threat of its invasion and occupation by armed force, as a result of Ukraine’s quest to join the NATO.

Russia’s policy illustrates that access to warm-water ports is important to Russian security because they enable Russia to control the sea; sea control means that the controlling power can use the sea to serve its interests, but in today’s world, sea control also means securing it for everyone except the enemies of the system. A result of this was Russia's seizure of the port of Sevastopol after militarily annexing the Crimea Peninsula in 2014 because is a home base and then building its integrated military naval base in the Syrian port of Tartus following the military intervention to support the Damascus regime in 2015. In April 2019, the official announcement of the signing of a 49-year lease agreement.⁽³¹⁾ Furthermore, this port is a gateway for Russia’s existence in The Eastern Mediterranean region. Russia’s geography namely, its lack of major natural boundaries and its history of foreign invasion have contributed to a national discourse of vulnerability and concern about foreign threats. Stephen Kotkin, observes, “Russia has felt perennially vulnerable and has often displayed a kind of defensive aggressiveness.⁽³²⁾ Like Imperial Russia, the Soviet Union then Russia followed, for geopolitical but also for purely economic reasons, a policy of “fishing in muddy waters” of a slow but steady penetration into the Eastern

Mediterranean countries. As a result of Europe's participation with Russia in most of the seaports available to it, especially the western ports, which gives the Western powers the advantage of encircling the Russian state. This shows the extent of Russia's adherence to any area that allows it to access warm waters, whether in its immediate neighborhood, such as the port of Sevastopol in Crimea or the port of Tartus in Syria.

On the other hand, in recent years Russia has begun to turn its attention to the Arctic Sea Corridor, which is located entirely in polar waters. Although, until recently, parts of it were devoid of ice for only two months a year, the melting of the ice caused by global warming, led to the possibility of using it as a summer shipping lane between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, which contributes to solving Russia's geopolitical problem and facilitates the transportation of natural gas Russian issue.⁽³³⁾



Figure (2) Map of Russia's borders

2. Religion and Culture

Russia is considered the most diverse in terms of multi-ethnicities, nationalities, and also religions, where the main religions are (the predominant Orthodox Christianity, Catholic, and Islam). Islam is the second largest religious sect in Russia and is concentrated mostly in Chechnya, Dagestan, North Ossetia, and Tatarstan,⁽³⁴⁾ which is known as the North Caucasus region, an area close to my regions the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean are located in the southwest of Russia, This region, whose population adheres to the Islamic religion with the presence of Christian minorities, will make the geographical convergence not just a physical convergence, but a dynamic and dynamic convergence that expands and contracts according to the conditions that this region is going through.

Russia looks to the Eastern Mediterranean region with interest because of its impact on Russia's political, economic, and religious interests. As a result, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev visited the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Damascus on May 11, 2010, on behalf of other religious centers, the first of its kind for a Russian president in Syria to emphasize the role of reference for the world's Orthodox, which Moscow is keen on. In addition, one of the Kremlin's stated reasons for its involvement in Syria is the need to protect the Christian minority, because it is considered a priority for the Church. ⁽³⁵⁾

Russia historically has had a significant influence in the EMR. Putin has long used religion as a tool of domestic and foreign policy, in part by aligning the Kremlin with the Russian Orthodox Church and reviving his country's historical mission as the primary protector of Eastern Orthodox Christianity⁽³⁶⁾. Putin stressed the need to continue protecting Christians in the Middle East under the supervision of the Russian Orthodox Church and local churches. It has a shared cultural heritage rooted in Orthodox Christianity with Greece and Cyprus, which casts Russia as a trusted ally. Lebanon: especially through the "Orthodox Gathering", which was established in 2011, which focuses on "defending Christian values" and closer cooperation with the Orthodox entities in Lebanon.⁽³⁷⁾

3.Economic Determinants

For Russia, the Eastern Mediterranean region is an important economic market. As, Russia's most important economic tools in the EMR are its energy resources, and arms exports which play an important role in Russia's economy. Firstly, arms market: Russia seems to have a strong position in international arms, it already enjoys a fairly broad customer base, and Russia is one of the largest arms exporters in the world. Russia has been one of the most active players in the Middle East and North Africa region's armaments market since the mid-twentieth century, using arms exports as an important foreign policy instrument.⁽³⁸⁾ As to the Eastern Mediterranean region's countries; Syria and Egypt have remained major recipients of Russian arms. Syria is Russia's closest ally in the EMR region and also one of its largest arms recipients. Russia's close relationship with Syria dates back to the Cold War, when the Soviet Union had significant influence in Syria and provided political support, as well as military and economic aid. At the same time, the Soviet Union was the largest supplier of arms and military equipment to Syria.⁽³⁹⁾

Secondly, the Energy Sector: Russia is a major global actor in the sphere of energy, although Offshore gas discoveries in this region, Russia is the most important gas provider for some countries of the region “Turkey”⁽⁴⁰⁾. As well the other strategies such as Russia has focused on the exploration and production of both oil and natural gas, building pipelines and nuclear power plants; it has an active presence in the energy markets of almost all countries in the region. In particular, Russia’s unique economic tools have helped it manage its otherwise difficult relationship with Turkey, which depends on Russian oil and gas and is a new customer for Russian nuclear power and weapons systems.⁽⁴¹⁾

Furthermore, Russia’s intervention in Syria in 2015, and then subsequently in Libya, marked its return as a major actor in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Much has been made of Russia’s use of all elements of statecraft, including diplomatic, ideological, military, and economic instruments, to advance its interests in this region, a vital shipping, and transit corridor.⁽⁴²⁾

4. Leader: Putin’s Personality and Beliefs

Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin belongs to a very important era in the history of Russia, a political figure and a statesman. He has an ambitious personality, especially with holding many leadership positions; served as a Russian intelligence officer and served as president (1999–2008, 2012–until now) of Russia and also was the country’s prime minister (1999, 2008–12).⁽⁴³⁾ Russian foreign policy during the rule of President Vladimir Putin witnessed a great development, from a foreign policy subservient to the West under President Yeltsin to a completely independent foreign policy, and its decisions stemmed from the Russian self, which resulted in Russia's return to the ranks of major powers on the international scene.⁽⁴⁴⁾ This study will witness the role that President Putin plays in shaping and determining the parameters of Russian foreign policy to become what it is today.

In 2000, Putin decided to formulate his new principles within the framework of what is known as Putinism, aimed at restoring Russia’s international status and prestige; This is done by highlighting the underlying trends and the role of President Putin's perceptions in directing Russian foreign behavior. The Eastern Mediterranean region is of geopolitical importance in the strategic perception of Russian President Vladimir Putin in search of new areas of influence. The Eastern Mediterranean region is of great strategic importance, that has emerged in Russia's strategic thinking as an arena for a change in the balance of power as one of the international powers that are seeking to find a

foothold in the region. with the leadership of President Vladimir Putin who seeks to regain its power and assume a new global role and which has adopted a strategy that is in line with Russia's interests. The Mediterranean is the main opening gate for Russia outside the Eurasian region, allowing it access to the sea and the oceans, such as the Atlantic Ocean, thus representing its strategic move towards the land and sea areas that constitute a geopolitical contract.⁽⁴⁵⁾

The new return of Russia at the global level is linked primarily to the arrival of an ambitious Russian leadership to power, represented in the personality of President Vladimir Putin, who seeks to restore Russia to its traditional global position, with a new strategic doctrine based on the gradual penetration of former areas of influence, including the Eastern Mediterranean region, this new Russian return is its main pragmatic feature, to achieve its goals set in this region. Meanwhile, Moscow's goals in the region appear to span beyond Syria, with Moscow's growing alliance with Iran and its expanding influence in the region.

5. New Eurasian Project

One of the most pressing fundamental geopolitical demands of Russia after its collapse and defeat as a rival pole of the United States is to reassemble the fragments of the Russian Empire. Gathering the Russian Empire again requires it to open up to the warm seas. From a geopolitical point of view, Russia's natural borders represent a natural and impenetrable barrier. Therefore, Russia's openness to the warm seas in the south and west is a necessity for Russia to become complete from a geopolitical point of view.⁽⁴⁶⁾

The neo-Eurasians, led by the thinker Alexander Dugin, who enjoys great support from President Putin, formulated the foundations of the new Russian Empire project according to the geopolitical logic based on the geographical factor. Dugin believes that the basis of the geopolitical structure of this Russian Empire must be included in a basic principle, which is the common enemy. The rejection of Atlanticism, the renunciation of the strategic control of the United States, and the abandonment of the priority of liberal economic values that are the general rule and the common incentive that open the way to Russian expansion outside its borders.⁽⁴⁷⁾

6. Russian Military Maritime Doctrine

Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the country's new maritime doctrine on 26 July 2015,⁴⁸ This doctrine is based on four functional dimensions of Russia's naval strategy, namely: enhancing maritime transport activity, discovering and preserving natural resources in the open sea, intensifying marine scientific research, and then paying attention to naval military activity. Russia is looking to improve its maritime transport system, increase its presence in open waters, develop its port infrastructure, discover new natural resources, and protect energy pipelines, which is of great strategic importance.

The doctrine considers the military aspect the main tool for defending Russia's national interests and preventing aggression against it, creating a safe and stable environment for conducting economic and scientific activities in the seas and oceans. This confirms that economic goals are the main driver of Russia's naval doctrine and that the military or political aspects are employed to serve economic considerations.

The Russian Naval Doctrine illustrates the geographical priorities that Moscow attaches more attention to base on security threats. The National Naval Doctrine refers to six main regional areas: The Atlantic Ocean, the Arctic, the Pacific Ocean, the Caspian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Antarctic, although it gives a clear priority. of the Atlantic Ocean and the Arctic, given their importance and geostrategic position, and the potential threats and opportunities in them.⁽⁴⁹⁾

The interest in the Atlantic Ocean, according to the doctrine, is due to the continuous expansion of the NATO military infrastructure towards the Russian borders, and for this reason, Moscow seeks to strengthen its naval military presence in the Atlantic Ocean, the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov, and the Mediterranean.⁽⁵⁰⁾ It is also seeking to modernize its military and civilian infrastructure in coastal areas to repel any threat from the alliance.

Second, External Determinants

1- The International System Context

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States became the only superpower with virtually no ideological opponents, and NATO became the only military alliance with the ability to act on the international scene. The expansion of the alliance and its approach to the Russian border has strained relations between Washington and Moscow and put Russia on the defensive.

In light of the gradual transition from a unipolar system to a multipolar system, and the gradual transition of global power from West to East, the world

has witnessed many changes that posed many challenges and threats. During the first decade of the twenty-first century, Russia began to regain its economic and political power, which allowed it to allocate greater resources to restore its military capabilities in order to consolidate its control over its vast borders and to confront the expansion of NATO towards its borders and NATO moves to strengthen its military presence in the countries of Eastern Europe Moscow had no choice but to move quickly to retake the strategic Crimea, which is the base of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. It took this step under the pretext of defending the indigenous Russian population residing on the island. But the strategic goal was not to lose the only port with military infrastructure, in which one of the most important Russian fleets is based. However, this step was not without cost, as it led to strained relations with the West and the imposition of mutual sanctions.

2- The Situation in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Since the second decade of the twenty-first century, the Eastern Mediterranean region, as part of the Middle East, has witnessed a mass of tense events, including the events of the Arab Spring, which resulted in the fall of many regimes and the emergence of terrorist groups. These events served as an opportunity for Russia to regain its position for several reasons: The vacuum that seemed to appear in the region is represented by the withdrawal of the United States as a security guarantor in the Middle East beginning with the Obama Administration, the Trump Administration continued this trend by withdrawing troops from Syria and Iraq, and even abandoned erstwhile allies. At the same time, the European Union has been unable to formulate a common policy on Syria or Libya.⁽⁵¹⁾ As a result of the dissatisfaction of some countries in the region with EU or US policies or the absence thereof, Russia was able to restore its influence in the region through the efforts of these countries to strengthen their relationship with Russia. The biggest opportunity for Russia was its military intervention in the Syrian war in 2015 at the invitation of President Bashar al-Assad to support the Assad regime, whether with its air support, weapons, and forces on the ground to confront the rebel group or through diplomatic means at the United Nations and in several international peace talks.

3- Energy Determinants

The energy factor is an important element in determining the course and direction of Russian foreign policy, as Russia is considered one of the richest

countries in the world in terms of energy resources. It is the first country in the world in terms of natural gas reserves. It also has the seventh largest oil reserves in the world, and the energy sector is a mainstay of security. ⁽⁵²⁾ Russian nationalism and an important tool of its foreign policy. The sector includes oil, natural gas, and coal. This sector represents a major resource in Russia's economic resources. Its returns are sufficient to develop the rest of the production sectors, improve the Russian economy, and achieve independence and influence at the external level. During his reign, President Putin was keen on the survival of the energy industries under the control of the state and the use of companies operating in the energy field as a tool to extend Russian influence abroad. Europe is the main market for Russian oil and gas, as the latter supplies it with 27% of its oil needs and more than 50% of its natural gas needs, ⁽⁵³⁾ and thus Energy plays a role in enhancing Russia's growing capabilities and ensuring the stability of its economy and thus its policy. The objectives of Russian foreign policy in the field of energy are crystallized in several points: ⁽⁵⁴⁾

- 1) Considering energy as a tool of Russian foreign policy through the use of the so-called energy diplomacy, and energy as a strategic weapon to increase influence.
- 2) Directed energy investment to dominate strategically important infrastructures.
- 3) Reducing Western influence in the areas of Russian influence in all important strategic areas.
- 4) Expansion of Russian influence in Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East.

The significance of the Eastern Mediterranean has increased in the last decade, whether to the countries of the region or to the external actors, an outcome of interlocking factors associated with the civil war in Syria, the deterioration of relations with Turkey, and discoveries of new gas fields. ⁽⁵⁵⁾ After the new discoveries of gas this region appeared as one of the Russian foreign policy priorities, furthermore, Russia is interested in the export of energy resources, and Russia also seeks to maintain a dominant position in gas supplies to the European market and wants to ensure gas supplies to the Mediterranean. ⁽⁵⁶⁾ Russia's activity in the Mediterranean is part of its global aims, rooted in the rivalry with the U.S., regaining a privileged position vis-à-vis the EU, Russia will continue to undermine U.S. military capabilities, including through the supply of military equipment and support energy cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean and to weaken NATO, which it perceives as the most important threat to its security. ⁽⁵⁷⁾

4- Security Determinants

Russia is rebuilding its military presence in the region, which diminished after the fall of the USSR, as well as its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. due to The support is given to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Russia was given long-term access to two bases that arrived to 49 years from 2017: a naval base in Tartus and an air base in Khmeimim.

Russia is deeply concerned with problems associated with the spread of radical Islam and the internationalization of terrorism.⁽⁵⁸⁾ The rise of radical Islam that has been triggered by the Arab Spring may pose an additional threat to Russia's security by boosting terrorist activity. Since the 1990s, the only permanent enemy for Russia in the region of the Eastern Mediterranean has been radical Islamism. In the long-term perspective, this factor will serve to consolidate Russia's relations with other states of the region which share the same concerns. Regarding Russia's presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, throughout the last 10 years, the regional actors increasingly required Russia's both presence and activism. Eastern Mediterranean states consider Russia as an influential external actor and think that cooperation with Russia could facilitate the rise of their position in international affairs. Though Russia can't balance the US' power, the regional states can and should develop cooperation with Moscow in order to diversify their external political and economic affairs. The objectives of Russia's policy in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean annihilation of Islamist terrorism and ISIS for regional peace and stability fearing that they would spread to areas close to it.⁽⁵⁹⁾

Conclusion

Under Putin's leadership, Russia is seeking to adopt a policy different from what it was before, to be able to restore its international position and benefit from the distinguished location and the huge natural resources of some regions, including Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Eastern Mediterranean region, and to be able to protect itself and its interests from the ambitions of the major competing countries in these regions.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Research interest in Russia's role in the Eastern Mediterranean region remains high in recent times. Many determinants outline the nature of the Russian role and its presence in the Eastern Mediterranean region. As well this increasing presence is explained by energy and security issues. This study concluded with the following.

The study outcomes:

- Recently Russia has become one of the most important geopolitical players in the Eastern Mediterranean. Located in direct proximity to the Black Sea region, the Eastern Mediterranean basin is an important subregion for Russian military, economic and political interactions, which are closely interwoven with Moscow's strategy vis-à-vis the Caspian Sea region, the Greater Middle East, and the European Union.
- The main trait of the post-Soviet policy was that Russia became more pragmatic. Russia tried to follow its own interest, placing the emphasis, first of all, on mutually beneficial collaboration. The main geostrategy of Russia was focused on energy security and military security in the Eastern Mediterranean region.
- The expansion of NATO is a matter of concern to Russia, which it considers a way to surround and besiege it. Russian decision-makers found that the process of defending influence begins from being outside its borders, both in the Arab world and the Middle East region, of which the Eastern Mediterranean region is part.
- The internal and external determinants as aforementioned are the main motives behind Russia's approach to the Eastern Mediterranean region:
- Internal Determinants as:
- **A.** Geography, a crucial element informing the Russian approach toward the region was its obsession with having access to so-called "warm waters" and related ports, a long-term geopolitical driver of Russian foreign policy.
- **B.** Leader's perceptions, From the vision of Russian President Putin, "access to a multipolar world depends on the extent to which Russia achieves the objectives of its foreign policy towards the most strategic regions, including the Eastern Mediterranean region."
- Russia, under Putin's rule, is looking forward to playing new roles in many regions of the contemporary world, as indicated by a new geopolitical map. In the Mediterranean region, through its role in the revolutions of the Arab Spring in addition to the scene of the Russian military intervention in Syria in September 2015.
- External Determinants as:
- **A.** The nature of international order and competition over strategic regions especially the EastMed region due to its recent vast resources.

- **B.** The objectives of Russia's policy in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean annihilation of Islamist terrorism and ISIS for regional peace and stability fearing that they would spread to areas close to it.
- Russia's desire to court favor among Middle East states as well the EastMed region states, which in turn can help curb Islamic fundamentalist threats, is a major factor in its foreign policy decisions.

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