

“War, Wealth, and World Order: Reassessing Russia’s Role in the Syrian Conflict”

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Abstract:

Russia’s intervention in the Syrian conflict since 2015 represents a pivotal moment in contemporary international politics. Moving beyond a narrow military explanation, this article offers a comprehensive reassessment of Russia’s role through an integrated framework of war (military intervention), wealth (economic interests), and world order (geopolitical transformation). Drawing on neo-realism, political economy, and geopolitics, the study argues that Russia’s involvement constitutes a multidimensional strategy designed to secure regime survival in Syria, expand economic influence, and reassert global power status. The article demonstrates how military operations, economic agreements, and diplomatic engagement are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. While Russia has achieved significant strategic gains, including enhanced regional influence and global visibility, the intervention also entails long-term risks related to economic sustainability, geopolitical tensions, and Syrian dependency. The findings contribute to broader debates on great power competition and the evolving nature of intervention in the 21st century.

Keywords: Russia; Syria; war economy; geopolitics; hybrid warfare; reconstruction; multipolarity

1. Introduction

The Syrian conflict, which began in 2011 as a domestic uprising, rapidly transformed into a complex and internationalized war involving multiple state and non-state actors. Among the various external interventions, Russia’s military engagement in September 2015 stands out as a decisive turning point that altered the trajectory of the conflict. Unlike previous diplomatic support, Russia’s direct intervention introduced a new level of military coordination, strategic planning, and geopolitical ambition.

This article reassesses Russia’s role in Syria through a tripartite analytical lens: **war, wealth, and world order**. Rather than treating military, economic, and geopolitical dimensions as separate domains, it argues that Russia’s strategy is best understood as an integrated project where each dimension reinforces the others. Military intervention created the conditions for economic penetration, while economic engagement consolidated geopolitical influence.

The central argument of this article is that Russia’s intervention was not merely reactive or defensive but part of a broader strategy aimed at restoring its status as a global power. Syria served as both a battlefield and a strategic platform through which Russia could project influence, test military capabilities, and challenge Western dominance.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Neo-Realism and Power Politics

Neo-realism provides a foundational explanation for Russia's actions by emphasizing the pursuit of power and security in an anarchic international system. From this perspective, Russia's intervention can be seen as an effort to:

- Prevent regime change aligned with Western interests
- Maintain strategic military access in the Mediterranean
- Reassert influence in a region historically dominated by Western powers

2.2 Political Economy of Conflict

The political economy approach highlights how conflicts generate economic opportunities. In Syria, war created a fragmented economic landscape where external actors could:

- Secure access to natural resources
- Influence reconstruction processes
- Establish long-term economic dependencies

2.3 Geopolitical Perspective

Geopolitics emphasizes spatial strategy, including control over territory, infrastructure, and regional networks. Syria's geographic position—connecting the Middle East, Mediterranean, and Eurasia—makes it strategically valuable for power projection.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework – War, Wealth, and World Order



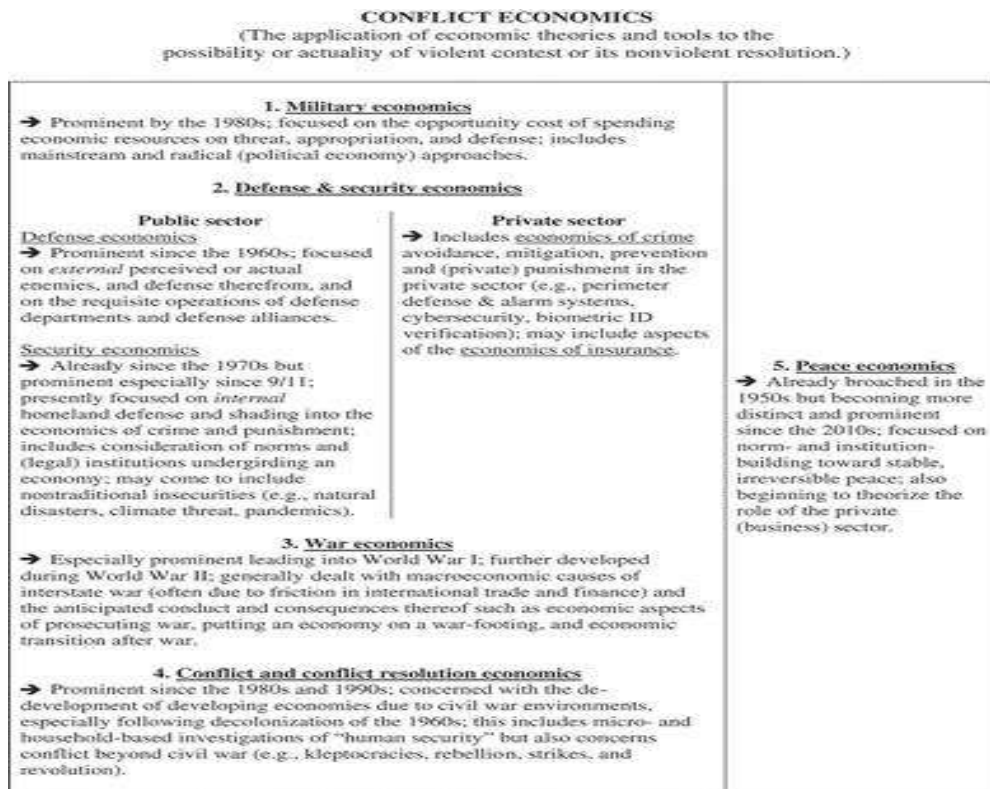


Figure 1. Integrated conceptual framework showing the interaction between military intervention (war), economic interests (wealth), and geopolitical influence (world order) in Russia’s strategy in Syria.

3. Russia’s Military Strategy: War as a Tool of Influence

3.1 Strategic Objectives

Russia’s intervention was driven by several interrelated objectives. First, it aimed to stabilize and preserve the Syrian government, which faced significant territorial losses prior to 2015. Second, Russia sought to secure its long-standing military presence, particularly through the Tartus naval facility and the Khmeimim airbase. Third, the intervention provided an opportunity to demonstrate military capabilities and signal Russia’s return as a global power.

3.2 Operational Doctrine

Russia’s military strategy in Syria reflects a hybrid and adaptive approach. Airpower played a central role, with precision strikes targeting both opposition groups and strategic infrastructure. These operations were complemented by:

- Ground coordination with Syrian forces
- Intelligence sharing with allied actors
- Deployment of advanced weapon systems

The use of hybrid warfare tactics, including information operations and diplomatic engagement, further enhanced Russia’s effectiveness.

3.3 Key Military Outcomes

Russia’s intervention significantly altered the balance of power in the conflict. Key outcomes include:

- The recapture of major urban centers such as Aleppo
- Stabilization of government-controlled territories
- Reduction in the operational capacity of opposition forces

At the same time, the intervention has been associated with substantial humanitarian costs, including civilian casualties and displacement.

Figure 2: Russia–Syria Military Strategy Map

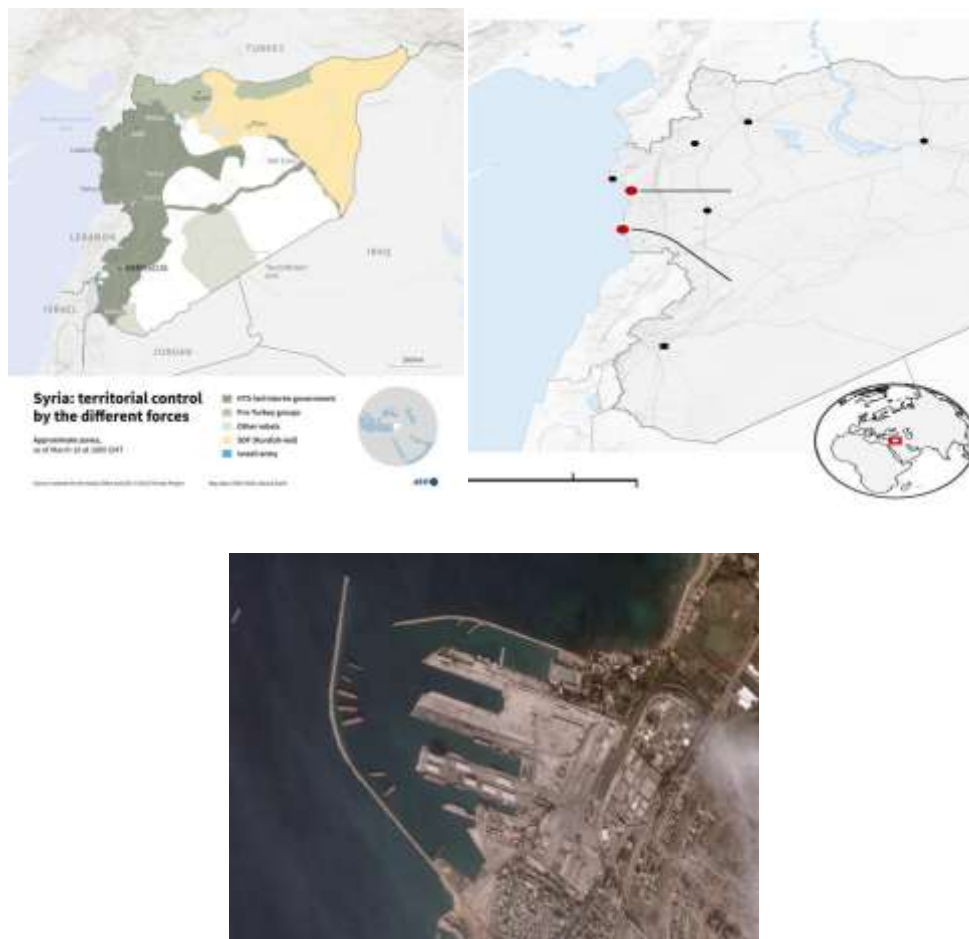


Figure 2. Map illustrating Russia’s military bases, operational zones, and strategic areas of intervention in Syria.

4. Wealth Dimension: Economic Interests and War Economy

4.1 Economic Motivations

Economic considerations are central to understanding Russia’s intervention. By supporting the Syrian government, Russia positioned itself to secure favorable economic agreements in the post-war period. These include access to energy resources, infrastructure projects, and reconstruction contracts.

4.2 Resource Politics and Strategic Sectors

Russia has been actively involved in Syria’s energy and resource sectors. Agreements have been signed for:

- Oil and gas exploration
- Phosphate mining
- Electricity generation and infrastructure

These sectors are critical not only for economic recovery but also for long-term strategic influence.

4.3 Reconstruction Economy

The reconstruction of Syria presents both opportunities and challenges. While Russia has secured key contracts, broader economic engagement is constrained by:

- International sanctions
- Limited financial resources
- Competition from other actors such as China and Iran

4.4 War Economy and Dependency

Russia's economic involvement has contributed to the emergence of a war economy characterized by:

- Informal networks and patronage systems
- External dependency on Russian support
- Limited domestic economic autonomy

This dynamic reinforces Russia's influence while complicating Syria's long-term recovery.

5. Geopolitical Dimension: Reshaping World Order

5.1 Return to the Middle East

Russia's intervention marked a significant return to Middle Eastern politics. By successfully influencing the outcome of the Syrian conflict, Russia demonstrated its ability to operate as a decisive actor in global affairs.

5.2 Managing Regional Relationships

Russia has pursued a flexible and pragmatic diplomatic strategy, balancing relations with:

- Iran (strategic ally)
- Turkey (competitive partner)
- Israel (security coordination)
- Gulf states (economic engagement)

This multi-vector diplomacy enhances Russia's regional influence.

5.3 Multipolarity and Global Norms

Russia's actions in Syria reflect a broader challenge to the existing international order. By opposing Western intervention models and emphasizing sovereignty, Russia contributes to the emergence of a more multipolar system.

Figure 3: Russia–Syria Geopolitical Influence Network



Figure 3. Network diagram illustrating Russia’s geopolitical relationships and influence in the Syrian conflict.

6. Costs, Risks, and Limitations

Despite its successes, Russia’s intervention faces several challenges. Economically, the costs of sustained military engagement and limited returns from reconstruction constrain long-term benefits. Strategically, the risk of escalation with other powers remains significant, particularly in a region characterized by overlapping conflicts.

Moreover, Syria’s fragile political and economic environment raises questions about the sustainability of Russia’s influence. Continued instability may undermine the gains achieved through military and economic engagement.

7. Discussion: The War–Wealth–Power Nexus

The Syrian case illustrates how modern interventions are shaped by the interaction of military, economic, and geopolitical factors. Russia’s strategy demonstrates that:

- Military success enables economic opportunities
- Economic engagement consolidates political influence
- Geopolitical positioning enhances global power status

This integrated approach provides a useful framework for understanding contemporary great power behavior.

8. Conclusion

Russia's intervention in Syria represents a complex and multidimensional strategy that extends beyond traditional military objectives. By integrating war, wealth, and geopolitical ambition, Russia has successfully reasserted itself as a major global actor.

However, this success is accompanied by significant risks and uncertainties. The long-term implications of Russia's involvement will depend on the evolving dynamics of the Syrian conflict, regional politics, and global power competition.

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