



RUSSIA AND THE ARAB SPRING

Alexey Malashenko



CARNEGIE
MOSCOW CENTER

RUSSIA AND THE ARAB SPRING

Alexey Malashenko

© 2013 Carnegie Moscow Center. All rights reserved.

The Carnegie Moscow Center and the Carnegie Endowment do not take institutional positions on public policy issues; the views represented here are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Carnegie, its staff, or its trustees.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the Carnegie Moscow Center or Carnegie Endowment. Please direct inquiries to:

Carnegie Moscow Center
16/2 Tverskaya
Moscow, 125009, Russia
Tel. +7 495 935 8904
Fax: +7 495) 935 8906
info@Carnegie.ru

This publication can be downloaded at no cost at Carnegie.ru

Contents

About the Author	v
Summary	1
Introduction	3
Russia's Historical Ties to the Middle East	3
Putin's Russia: Seeking the Soviet Legacy	5
The Arab Spring	8
The Radicalization of Russian Islam	15
Crafting a Post-Arab Spring Policy	21
Notes	23
Carnegie Moscow Center	26

About the Author

Alexey Malashenko is the co-chair of the Carnegie Moscow Center's Religion, Society, and Security Program. He also taught at the Higher School of Economics from 2007 to 2008 and was a professor at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations from 2000 to 2006.

From 1976 to 1982 and again from 1986 to 2001, Malashenko worked at the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences. He is a member of the RIA Novosti advisory council, as well as a member of the editorial boards for the journals *Central Asia and the Caucasus* and *Acta Eurasica* and the newsletter *Russia and the Muslim World*. He is also a board member of the International Federation for Peace and Conciliation.

Malashenko is the author and editor of about twenty books in Russian, English, French, and Arabic, including *Islam in Central Asia* (Garnet Publishing, 1994), *Russia's Restless Frontier* (with Dmitri Trenin; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004), *The Islamic Alternative and the Islamist Project* (Carnegie Moscow Center and Ves Mir, 2006), *Russia and Islam* (Carnegie Moscow Center and ROSSPEN, 2007), and *My Islam* (ROSSPEN, 2010).

Summary

Russia has spent over a decade trying to recapture the influence the Soviet Union once enjoyed in the Middle East, but President Vladimir Putin's attempts to position Moscow as a key regional player have come up short. With revolutions across the Arab world overturning old orders and ushering in Islamist governments, Russia's chances for strengthening its position in the region look increasingly slim. The Kremlin must change course and ensure that its approach to the Middle East and Islamists reflects post-Arab Spring realities.

Key Themes

- Under Putin, attempts to shore up Russian influence in the Middle East are motivated by nostalgia for Soviet influence, a desire to demonstrate to Russia's Muslim population that the Islamic world's affairs matter to the Kremlin, and strategic national interests, including having a military presence in the region.
- Putin's strategy has involved emphasizing Russia's special position as a power that can act as a bridge between the West and the Muslim world.
- Moscow has tried to act as mediator in a number of conflicts, including failed attempts to prevent the U.S. invasion of Iraq that toppled Saddam Hussein and the overthrow of Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi. Both leaders were Kremlin allies.
- Many in Moscow see mediating a solution to the Syrian crisis as crucial to the Kremlin's regional strategy. But Russia's support of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has been met with international criticism and has eroded Moscow's position.
- The changes in leadership ushered in by the Arab Spring have damaged Moscow's few remaining political and economic ties to the Middle East.
- The rise of Islamism has resonated with the Russian Muslim population and encouraged the development of radical Islamist opposition movements within this community.

A New Russian Approach

Define a contemporary Middle East strategy. An effective Russian policy would reflect current realities and a pragmatic understanding of national interests. Moscow should carve out Russia's place in the new regional dynamic rather than attempt to preserve what it inherited from the Soviet Union.

Deepen cooperation with Arab countries based on shared interests. Moscow could help establish a regional security system that can preserve stability in the Middle East and stop the spread of Islamist upheaval before it destabilizes Russia and its neighbors.

Develop a more sophisticated approach to Islamism. The Kremlin would benefit from reaching out to newly elected Islamist governments in the Arab world and addressing the growing influence of Islamists in Russia.

Introduction

Since Vladimir Putin was first elected president in 2000, Russia has pursued a foreign policy designed to recapture the influence that the Soviet Union once enjoyed in the Middle East. These efforts, however, have been unsuccessful, and the Russian Federation has never reclaimed the vestiges of Soviet power in the region. Now, the Arab Spring has brought to a close the era of Soviet-Arab relations.

The Arab revolutions have drastically changed the situation not just in the Middle East but also globally. The world's leading powers are directly or indirectly being drawn into the developments unfolding in the region. The revolutions have helped fuel contradictions between Russia and the West, which took opposing stands in the Libyan conflict and even more so in the Syrian conflict. The Arab Spring has also given Islamism a seal of legitimacy as a permanent factor in politics in the Muslim world, a development that has ramifications for Russia's domestic stability. As Russian Middle East analyst Georgy Mirsky said, the "Arab world is radical political Islam's testing ground."¹

The changes in the Middle East in general are forcing the Kremlin to reflect on Russia's prospects in the Arab world and on how to go about building relations with the new elites coming to power in several Arab states. Moscow now has to concentrate not on trying to preserve what it inherited from the Soviet Union but on developing a new strategy and tactics to define Russia's place in the post-Arab Spring Middle East.

Moscow now has to concentrate not on trying to preserve what it inherited from the Soviet Union but on developing a new strategy and tactics to define Russia's place in the post-Arab Spring Middle East.

Russia's Historical Ties to the Middle East

Russia's relationship to the Arab world has gone through several distinct phases. Pre-Soviet Russia, or the Russian Empire, did not have any major aims and ambitions in the Arab Middle East, save for protecting the Orthodox Church's interests in Palestine. Its strategy focused instead on other regions—the Mediterranean Straits, Persia, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and China. The Middle East itself lay at the periphery of the Russian Empire's interests, all the more so as the region was dominated by Turkey and the European powers.

There was no fundamental change in this situation after the 1917 revolution that overthrew Russia's czarist regime and established the Soviet state. The Middle East held little strategic interest for the ruling Bolsheviks, who decided

that the Arab countries did not have great revolutionary potential. Marxist circles and parties set up in the Arab world with Moscow's help had little influence, and local liberation movements did not depend on the Bolsheviks.

The situation began to change after World War II, when, flush with victory, the Soviet Union's global ambitions grew and seemed entirely realistic to Soviet leaders. The substance of Soviet policy in the Middle East and the Arab world was the fight against the West, and Moscow's approach to the region fit into the paradigm of confrontation between the two systems that characterized the Cold War era. The Soviet Union sought alliances with those Middle Eastern countries whose political orientations were closer to the Soviet system, so its main allies in the Middle East were Egypt, Iraq, Algeria, and Libya.

These partnerships gave Moscow political advantages in its confrontation with the West, but the Kremlin harbored hopes for the ideological as well as political rapprochement of these Middle Eastern countries with the Soviet Union. Kremlin ideologues sought to plant the Soviet version of social, economic, and political development in the Arab world, and Moscow did its best to facilitate this work. Governments in Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Algeria, and Libya did indeed at various moments show interest in the Soviet model, and some of them spoke favorably about Marxism. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Soviet scholarship developed the concepts of "socialist orientation" and the "noncapitalist development model," which were supposed to explain the reasons why Arab countries and others were drawing on the Soviet model and make it look like an attractive path for the Third World.

Many of these socialist-oriented countries became military-political launch pads for the Soviet Union in its confrontation with the West. The Arab-Israeli conflict remained the epicenter of Middle East tension, and here the Cold War turned into actual military action, at times with the direct involvement of the Western countries and the Soviet Union. Such was the case in 1956, when the British and French took Israel's side in its conflict with Egypt. Soviet military personnel—pilots, air defense crews, even tankers—after 1967 took part on Egypt's and Syria's side in a number of clashes with Israeli forces, though this was never officially recognized by Soviet officials. In Libya during a military parade in 1979, tanks were driven by Soviet sergeants.

The benefits of political and ideological rapprochement with Middle Eastern countries outweighed the fact that economic benefits from cooperation with Arab "clients" were minimal for the Soviet Union. Indeed, Arab countries built up billions in debt to Moscow that post-Soviet Russia eventually ended up having to forgive.

For their part, Arab governments stood to gain significantly from cooperation with Moscow. The Soviet Union carried out ambitious projects in these countries, such as constructing the Aswan Dam in Egypt and the Nag-Hammadi Steelworks in Algeria; supplied them with cheap and quite effective weapons; and gave them unconditional support in their wars against Israel.

The Soviet Union offered the only counterweight to Western pressure to accept Israel's existence, and the Arabs thought that in extreme circumstances Moscow could take extreme measures, even military ones, to support its Arab allies. But that was an illusion. The Cuban missile crisis of 1962 made it clear that the Soviet Union was not willing to resort to direct military confrontation.

This was the heyday of Soviet influence in the Middle East, but it did not last long. Arab disappointment in cooperation with the Soviet Union set in during the 1970s. Soviet military and political support failed to turn the Middle East conflict in the Arabs' favor, and in financial and economic cooperation the Soviet Union could not compete with economically and technologically more developed Western countries. The Soviet Union suffered from an internal economic crisis that made it harder to expand support for its Arab allies. Some Middle Eastern countries expressed dissatisfaction with Soviet military supplies. Local media, especially in Egypt, complained that Moscow was supplying the country with defensive weapons when offensive arms were needed. When Soviet Jews started emigrating to Israel, people in the Middle East noted wryly that the United States was supplying Israel with weapons and the Soviet Union was giving it soldiers.

In 1972, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat expelled Soviet military advisers and specialists from his country. This was the beginning of the end for the Arab-Soviet friendship. At the same time, together with the United States and Israel, Sadat initiated the Camp David peace process, in which Moscow was given no role.

With the start of perestroika in 1985, the Arab world gradually shifted to the periphery of Soviet foreign policy. Post-Soviet Russia had neither the means nor the strength to maintain its former level of relations with Arab countries. Soviet diplomacy in the region underwent a reexamination, a symbol of which was the restoration of diplomatic relations with Israel in 1991. The Arab governments, for their part, were disappointed in Russia as an economic partner and political ally. According to a survey of Moroccan college students, Arab citizens did not recognize Russia as a strong successor to the Soviet Union—whereas 96 percent of respondents viewed the Soviet Union as a great military power, only 52 percent considered Russia a great power. As Soviet influence faded, Russia was left with only a tenuous foothold in the Middle East.

Putin's Russia: Seeking the Soviet Legacy

During the 1990s, Russia did not even attempt to define its national interests in the Middle East and the Arab world. It was not until after Vladimir Putin came to power at the turn of the century that Moscow started pursuing a more active policy in the region.

Putin's attempts to shore up Russian influence in the Middle East were motivated by a combination of nostalgia for the legacy of Soviet influence and

Putin's attempts to shore up Russian influence in the Middle East were motivated by a combination of nostalgia for the legacy of Soviet influence and strategic national interests.

strategic national interests. In part, Moscow's policy in the region reflected its continuing "superpower" complex and the desire to be equal to—or at least comparable to and able to oppose—the West and, above all, the United States. But it also reflected Russia's general loss of great-power status, waning global influence, and shrinking sphere of national interests, even if Moscow formulated these interests in overly ambitious and often populist terms.

Origins of Putin's Policy

Unlike postimperial Britain, which managed to carve out a new place for itself in the world relatively quickly, post-Soviet Russia's loss of global status was a painful process. Giving up its imperial claims lightened Britain's load and gave it an international profile that more accurately reflected the country's real economic and political weight in the world. By contrast, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia went through a prolonged bout of "Sovietism" in which it attempted to recapture its Soviet heritage.

To this day, the Kremlin sometimes gives the impression of having not yet realized the fundamental differences between the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation and the impossibility of reversing history. This mentality contributes to Russia's desire to demonstrate at least some kind of military and political presence in the Middle East. Moscow hopes to hold on to the vestiges of the former Soviet base in the Syrian port of Tartus, for example, which is the sole remaining Russian military base in the region.

Putin's Middle East policy is also motivated, at least in part, by military-technical cooperation, which—despite falling volumes—earns money for Russia's defense industry and is seen as a means of "binding" the Arabs to Russia. Beyond this limited revenue stream, however, actual economic ties between Russia and the Middle East have little importance for both sides. This is especially true for the energy producers. Russia and the Persian Gulf countries, Iraq, and Algeria are direct and indirect competitors in the fight for markets. Attempts to organize cooperation in this area, such as Moscow's efforts in 2009 to establish a gas-producing countries' version of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, ended in failure.

Islam and Moscow's Middle East Policy

Russia has another reason for attempting to establish an active presence in the Middle East—the Kremlin wants to show Russia's own Muslim citizens that it is willing to cooperate with their fellow Muslims abroad. Russia has a significant Muslim population, especially in the North Caucasus and the Volga Region, and Moscow is anxious to demonstrate that it is involved in the Islamic world's affairs and ready to defend Muslims' interests if need be.

The Kremlin does not have a clearly defined historical position with regard to Islam or to working with Islamist regimes. Russian politicians have repeatedly declared their willingness to work with whichever government a people elects, reflecting a pragmatic position. Moscow is engaged in dialogue with Iran's leadership and has tried to build relations with the Hamas Islamic resistance movement. After Hamas won Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006, Russia even offered its services to help settle the differences between the movement and the president of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas. Russia has also been trying to develop tolerable relations with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which has played a prominent role in the country since the fall of former president Hosni Mubarak.

Moscow's attitude toward Islamists depends on the positions they take on issues of importance to Russia. The Kremlin shows respect for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, for example, but considers its Syrian counterpart—which is currently participating in a civil war to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, a Russian ally—a terrorist organization. Moscow also clashed with the Islamists in Libya who took part in overthrowing Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi, another Kremlin ally, in 2011. In addition, Moscow categorically opposes Islamist extremists linked to al-Qaeda, which has contributed to violent insurgencies in Russia's restive North Caucasus region.

Islamists and the architects of Russia's state ideology share one common feature: an identity built on a base of anti-Western sentiment. Islamists and the Russian Orthodox Church both stress that they each have their own understanding of democracy and human rights that is different from the Western interpretation. Islamist radicals, especially the Salafis, reject the principles of democracy and can be compared to Orthodox fundamentalists, who call for a return to an idealized communal spirit and want to revive "Orthodox Russia" as a state matrix. Here, there are unexpected similarities to the idea of an Islamic state.

Islamists and the architects of Russia's state ideology share one common feature: an identity built on a base of anti-Western sentiment.

But these similarities are unlikely to ever result in Russia and the Islamists joining forces. Indeed, Russia rejects the Salafis, many of whom constitute a leading force of Islamic opposition in the Caucasus. But mutual respect and understanding between them are perfectly possible. A number of books devoted to the idea of a merger between Russia and the Muslim world and Russia's Islamization have already been published in Russia.

The Faults in Moscow's Middle East Policy

Putin's strategy for pursuing a more influential role in the Middle East has involved emphasizing Russia's special position as a distinct civilizational entity that combines West and East and reminding the Arab world that Russia's population includes around 20 million Muslims.² The goal of this foreign policy is to present the country as a bridge between the West and the Muslim world.

But Putin's attempts have failed to increase the Kremlin's influence in the region. Moscow tried to play the part of mediator between the West and Iran, between the Arabs and Israel, and between the United States and Saddam Hussein's Iraq before Washington launched military operations against Baghdad in 2003, but these efforts did not produce political dividends of any real significance. The Muslim world did not accept Russia as one of its own, and the West had no need for Russian mediation in its relations with the Muslims. Putin's meetings with Arab heads of state and government in 2005–2007 also failed to produce the desired results. He was unable to conclude a number of proposed economic contracts, including an agreement with Saudi Arabia on a joint railway-construction project (although Russia signed a similar contract with Libya in 2008). Putin's proposal to create a regional security system was also rejected by Arab governments.³

The faults of Putin's policy—and the weakness of Russia's position in the region—became especially clear when Moscow proved unable to prevent the U.S. invasion of Iraq. The Kremlin spoke out repeatedly against a U.S. invasion of Iraq, and well-known Russian politicians such as Liberal Democratic Party leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov publicly expressed their support for Saddam Hussein, all to no avail. Moscow was incapable of playing the role of counterweight to the United States.

Failing to stop the U.S. invasion also cost Russia one of its last footholds in the region. Saddam Hussein was one of the few remaining “friends” who hoped to see in Russia the Soviet Union's successor in the Middle East. After his departure from the political stage, Russia's only remaining partners of any importance in the region were Syria's Assad and Libya's Qaddafi.

Over the next few years, Russia's influence in the Middle East continued to fade. Polling numbers from Egypt indicate that the number of respondents with a positive view of Russia fell from 50 percent in 2007 to 30 percent in 2012. Respect for Russia dropped in Libya and Tunisia. In Jordan, only 25 percent of respondents had a positive view of Russia, and in Turkey the figure was 16 percent. Only in Syria did Russia continue to get a fairly high assessment, with 50–55 percent viewing it positively.⁴ The Kremlin's influence decreased further with the outbreak of antigovernment uprisings in 2011 that came to be known as the Arab Spring.

The Arab Spring

With the start of the Arab Spring, Russia's influence in the Middle East waned even further and its chances for strengthening its position in the region looked increasingly slim. The Kremlin at first interpreted the Arab Spring's events as the result of planned Western intervention specifically designed to decrease Moscow's hold on the region. Many in Russia saw in the protests an echo of the “color revolutions” against the governments in former Soviet countries

that were believed to have been encouraged by Western powers. One Russian expert wrote that all the Arab revolutions “are very similar to the scenarios of the color revolutions.” Following this logic, he asked: “Who is really ordering and carrying out these revolutions?”²⁵ Countless Russian publications explained the Arab Spring in terms of conspiracy theories and the idea of a Western plot to further its own selfish interests—in particular, squeezing Russia out of the Middle East.

Eventually, Moscow moved away from the understanding of the events in the Middle East as a Western-orchestrated challenge to its place in the region. Russia’s Foreign Policy Concept, adopted in early 2013, describes the revolts as evidence that Arabs “desire to return to their civilizational roots” and says that “political and social-economic renewal of society is often taking place under the slogan of affirming Islamic values.”²⁶ But shifting the narrative surrounding the unrest did little to change the fact that the Arab Spring further reduced Moscow’s already-tenuous position in the Middle East.

According to Putin, Russia’s economic and political relations with countries in the Middle East have been negatively affected. He said that “in the countries that have gone through . . . [the Arab Spring,] Russian companies are losing the positions they built up over the decades on local markets. . . . Economic actors from the same countries that lent a hand to changing the ruling regimes are now stepping in to fill the niches that have been freed up.”²⁷

Political cooperation with many post–Arab Spring regimes is symbolic and limited to the statements issued after official visits. For example, political relations with Tunisia, which “never were a priority,”²⁸ have not improved with the ascension of the country’s new Islamist government. Ties are limited to diplomatic niceties.

Russia has also struggled in its political relations with postrevolutionary Egypt. In November 2012, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Moscow was ready to cooperate with the Muslim Brotherhood, which had come to power in Egypt. He delivered to Mohamed Morsi, winner of the Egyptian presidential election, Putin’s invitation to visit Moscow. At the same time, a 2003 Russian Supreme Court ruling declaring the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization and a threat to Russia’s security remained in force. Analysts have long been proposing that the Muslim Brotherhood be removed from the list of terrorist organizations, fearing that keeping it there will result in Russia “losing its relations with the entire Arab post-revolutionary world.” They argue that supporting the new Islamist elites now may help Moscow in the long term.⁹

As this issue remains unresolved, Russia and Egypt have no political contacts of any significance. Neither Moscow nor Cairo shows any real desire to expand them, especially because there is no pressing economic reason to do so (Egypt’s trade with Russia represented just 0.3–0.4 percent of its total foreign trade in 2008).¹⁰

Since Morsi was forced to step down in July 2013, Russia's relations with Egypt look even more uncertain. It seems a fairly safe bet that relatively more pro-Western politicians will come to power after the new parliamentary and presidential elections. This is a concern in other Middle Eastern countries as well; if the Islamists fail to keep hold of power in Tunisia and perhaps elsewhere, they might end up replaced by pro-Western elites. These forces are alien to Russia, and Russia is alien to them.

If the Islamists fail to keep hold of power in Tunisia and perhaps elsewhere, they might end up replaced by pro-Western elites. These forces are alien to Russia, and Russia is alien to them.

No matter who becomes the next president of Egypt, he will try to maintain strong ties with the Persian Gulf monarchies, which give Cairo financial aid worth several billion dollars and with which Moscow does not enjoy particularly close relations. In this situation, the Russian vector in Egypt's policy will inevitably be increasingly limited.

Indeed, Russia's post-Arab Spring relations with nearly every Middle Eastern regime are either unchanged or worse. Russia's relations with Saudi Arabia have been practically nonexistent since the Soviet period, when the two countries had virtually no contact. Neither country has made any serious effort to improve the situation, which suggests that neither side is particularly interested. Russia's relations with the other Gulf countries—including Bahrain, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar—remain low-key overall. Media reports that members of Bahrain's Shia opposition had visited Moscow did nothing to improve Russia's relations with these largely Sunni Gulf countries, most of which support the Bahraini government against this opposition.

Relations with some of the Arab nations that have been spared revolutionary upheaval—Algeria, Morocco, and Jordan, for example—remain unchanged. Russia does not have particularly strong relations with Morocco or Jordan, although it does enjoy some economic and political ties to Algeria that have not been significantly damaged by the regional upheaval.

The only exception to this rule of stagnant or deteriorating relationships is Yemen. Russia's relations with Yemen look to be doing quite well in the wake of the Arab Spring. Popular protests overthrew Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who stepped down in February 2012. But Yemen's regime change model suits Moscow, which likes the fact that the protests ousting Saleh did not take place under the banner of the fight for democracy and appreciates that the events bore no resemblance to any of the color revolutions.

Unlike in Libya, the Yemenis got by without outside help and avoided humanitarian intervention. When they did reach out to foreign powers, they included Russia in the conversation—Yemen's ambassador to Russia, Mohammed Saleh al-Hilali, suggested that then Russian president Dmitry Medvedev could send a special envoy to Yemen to persuade the opposing parties to resolve the conflict through peaceful means.¹¹ Ultimately, however, Moscow took no part in the country's peace process, leaving it instead to the

United States and Saudi Arabia. The Kremlin perhaps took the view that it was risky to intervene in Yemen's affairs because the situation there was so complicated and extremists had a lot of influence; as one Russian newspaper put it, "it would be easy to get involved in Yemen, but the consequences would be serious."¹²

Moscow did not take such a hands-off approach in other Arab countries. In those nations where Russia has become directly involved in the Arab Spring—Libya and Syria—the effects have been particularly problematic.

Direct Russian Involvement

During the Arab Spring, Russia has again attempted to act as mediator, both between antagonistic sides within the Arab countries as well as between outside actors—Americans and Europeans—and the regimes besieged by opposition forces in Libya and Syria.

Libya

As popular protests swept Libya in 2011, Moscow found itself caught between the desire to keep Qaddafi, a Russian ally, in power and Western pressure to allow international support to the rebels. The Kremlin tried to prevent European intervention in the Libyan internal conflict, blocking a number of United Nations (UN) Security Council resolutions that would have permitted intervention by using its veto. Eventually, however, Moscow gave in to growing international pressure to support the forces opposing Qaddafi. On February 26, 2011, Russia joined the embargo on arms exports to Libya, and it abstained in a March 2011 UN Security Council vote that imposed a no-fly zone over Libya, giving other countries the right to take necessary measures to protect the civilian population. This allowed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to carry out a military operation at the end of March.

In June 2011, Moscow attempted to persuade Qaddafi to step down, but it was already too late. Qaddafi's opponents no longer needed any compromise or voluntary resignation on the part of the Libyan leader. With U.S. and European backing, they pushed onward to victory through the force of arms.

Having lost to the West in the diplomatic intrigues over Libya, Russia was only the 73rd country to officially recognize the authority of the opposition National Transition Council, which had gained the upper hand in the fight against Qaddafi. Such belated recognition of the new government inevitably affected Moscow's relations with Libya.

The new Libyan regime quickly started showing signs that it was not happy with the Kremlin. In 2012, the Tripoli Military Tribunal sentenced Russian citizen Alexander Shadrov to life imprisonment for "abetting" Muammar Qaddafi. There is no longer any force in Libya that looks to Russia for support, and there is no sense of gratitude toward Moscow for forgiving Libya's

\$4.5 billion debt to Russia in April 2008. The view in Tripoli is that this act of debt forgiveness was directed not at Libya itself but at Qaddafi specifically. The new Libyan government did not honor the \$10 billion worth of contracts that Russia had concluded with Qaddafi and instead declared that these agreements would undergo a revision. Tatneft and Gazprom, two major Russian energy companies, ended up having to abandon their Libyan contracts. Alexei Kokin, an analyst from the leading Russian financial corporation Uralsib, said that “Russia has been left empty-handed; the Libyan oil market is going to Italy’s [multinational oil and gas company] ENI.”¹³ American and European companies have also stepped in to take the Russian companies’ place.

Syria

With Qaddafi gone and the new Libyan government displeased with the Kremlin, Moscow has only one remaining friend in the Middle East—Syria’s Assad. Many in Moscow see Syria as a chance—perhaps a final chance—for Russia to reclaim the influence of its Soviet past. But the Kremlin’s policy of supporting Assad has earned it international criticism and further eroded its influence in the Arab world.

Russia wants to prevent Assad’s fall for a number of reasons, including geopolitical and economic ones. Russian gas exports, for example, are one consideration. So long as Syria remains unstable, neither Qatar nor Iran can pursue plans they have in the works to build gas pipelines through Syria, giving Russia extra time to develop its own gas projects, Nord Stream and South Stream. Some experts contend that “it is entirely possible that these considerations could explain why Moscow’s assistance for its last remaining ally in the Middle East is limited to taking a categorical line in the UN Security Council and preventing the West from beginning legal intervention.”¹⁴ But that is only part of the story. As Carnegie’s Dmitri Trenin has noted, “in a deeper analysis, Russia’s stance on Syria is based, above all, on its leader’s largely traditional view of the global order.”¹⁵ Keeping Assad in power is Moscow’s way of ensuring that it maintains some influence in the Middle East.

Russia’s desire to maintain an image of a global power can be seen in its attempts to restore its military presence in the Mediterranean, which the Defense Ministry plans to do by 2015. Moscow has an interest in maintaining a military base in the region, and Tartus in Syria is rumored to be the preferred site. The move is likely to be more symbolic than functional. According to military expert Oleg Shvedkov, Moscow would be capable of sending a maximum of ten ships and two or three submarines.¹⁶ This force is not designed for military confrontation with a serious adversary. Its main task is political; it is there to demonstrate Russia’s presence in the region.

These considerations have led Moscow to throw its support behind the ruling Syrian regime. Early in the conflict, this stance was not entirely unpopular, even in the West, as Assad seemed to be ready to engage in dialogue. Many in

the United States shared the view that Assad was potentially willing and able to carry out reforms and even partially liberalize the regime. In March 2011, when the level of tension in Syria was still comparatively low, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that “Bashar Assad is a reformer” and gave this as the reason why “the United States has no interest in intervening in Syria.”¹⁷

But with the start of civil war in Syria, the United States and Europe became disappointed in Assad. He rejected dialogue and tried to rely on military force to settle the conflict, and his regional alliance with Iran made any dialogue between Damascus and outside actors extremely difficult. As the conflict began to have effects on Syria’s neighbors—Lebanon and Turkey—it took on an increasingly regional dimension.

Effects of Russia’s Syria Policy

As the situation deteriorated, Russia tried to assume the role of mediator, attempting to maintain its influence in the Middle East and the Arab world by insisting on the importance of its mediation efforts in settling the Syrian crisis. It offered to mediate in both the internal confrontation and the international intrigue surrounding Syria. To this end, it hosted the first Russian-Arab Forum in February 2013, during which Moscow and the Arab League held talks on the situation in Syria. Those invited to the forum included then Egyptian foreign minister Mohamed Amr; Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari; and members of the Arab League Council from Kuwait, Lebanon, and Libya. Secretary General of the Arab League Nabil al-Arabi said that Russia and the Arab League seek peaceful resolution of the Syrian conflict and expressed the hope that Moscow “will be able to convince the Syrian government on this.”¹⁸

In September 2013, Russia began an effort to broker a deal in which Assad would surrender his regime’s chemical weapons stockpile. Russia proposed the deal after U.S. President Barack Obama announced that Washington was considering launching a military strike against the Assad regime, which had reportedly used chemical weapons against Syrian civilians. This effort was an attempt by Moscow to accomplish what it failed to do in Libya—prevent the armed intervention of Western actors in the conflict and keep the regime of its ally intact.

Syrian opposition forces and their allies abroad have perceived Russia’s continued mediation as support for Assad’s regime. Russia’s position on Syria has made its relations with the Arab world even cooler. The Arab Middle East is firmly allied against the ruling Syrian regime. When the Arab League voted in 2012 to expel Damascus from its ranks, only Algeria and Syria itself voted against the decision, and Arab leaders vocally criticized Russia’s support of the Syrian regime. When then prime minister of Qatar Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber al-Thani added his voice to the criticism, Vitaly Churkin, Russia’s envoy to the UN, retorted, “If you speak to me in that kind of tone again, the place we call Qatar won’t be on the map any longer tomorrow.”¹⁹

The Arab world sees the Syrian conflict as not only a purely internal Syrian affair but also a confrontation between outside actors, above all the United States and its allies versus Russia and China. Dean of the Faculty of Economic and Business Administration at the Lebanese University Camille H. Habib said that “the struggle for Syria is a struggle for Eurasia with different characters.”²⁰ Syria, following this logic, is where global confrontations meet.

This understanding also indicates that the Arab world still has an interest, albeit not widely publicized, in retaining in the Middle East a Russian presence to partially balance the West’s activeness. This leaves Russia the chance to position itself as a restraining force standing in the way of foreign military intervention. It is also clear that Russia does not itself want to become directly involved in any military conflicts. “There are no indications currently that the Russians are sending troops to help the regime’s armed forces. There are also no signs that the Americans and concerned Europeans would get involved in Syria in a similar way to their involvement in Libya.”²¹

The Islamic community has joined Western and Arab actors in criticizing Russia’s support for Assad. One of the Muslim world’s most prominent theologians, Yusef al-Qaradawi, said Russia “has become enemy No. 1 for Islam and Muslims because it supports the Syrian regime.” He also declared that “the Arab and Muslim world must rise up against Russia. We should boycott Russia and count it amongst our main enemies.”²² The fourth conference of the Group of Friends of the Syrian People, held in Marrakech in December 2012, ended with the 70 member countries voting to recognize the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, an umbrella group for organizations opposed to Assad, as the sole legal representative of Syria’s people. This development undermined the chances that Russia, which still recognized the legitimacy of the Syrian president, could successfully act as a mediator in the conflict.

The conflict in Syria—and Russia’s role in it—is further complicated by sectarian concerns. As Sergei Lavrov said in March 2012, “Syria could become the start of very serious events. . . . Unfortunately, it is here that the growing crisis within the Islamic world between Sunnis and Shiites could burst into the open.”²³ Analysts noted the possibility of this turn of events right from the start of the Syrian crisis. French analyst Hosham Dawod predicted in 2011 the possible emergence of two “hostile crescents”; the first made up of Shia in Iran, Syria, and Lebanon, and the second composed of radical Sunnis from Egypt, Syria, and Palestine.²⁴ In reality, both crescents reach far wider and not only include radicals but also extend to the mostly moderate Muslims in the Arab countries.

Western actors, who see the increased Iranian influence that would accompany a triumphant Shia crescent as a threat, “back the Sunni side” by supporting the Syrian opposition.²⁵ Russia, by contrast, does not seek to play the card of Shia-Sunni differences. Its position is complicated by the fact that it shows

solidarity with Iran on the Syrian question, but on issues such as the Iranian nuclear program, it stands with the Arab countries—that is to say, it takes the side of Iran’s opponents.

Moscow is tied to Tehran not only by the closeness in their policies on the Syrian issue but also by the perception of interference by a common Western enemy. As one scholar notes, “People in both Tehran and Moscow interpret the protest movements through the light of conspiracy theories and see the West’s hand in them.”²⁶ The solidarity in their views has led some Western media to talk of a new “axis of evil” comprising Russia, Iran, and Assad’s Syria. This was the expression used, for example, by Fox News commentator Kathleen McFarland.²⁷ The result of this Western criticism has been to further isolate Russia on the Syrian issue.

Assad, who does not always listen to Russia’s advice, has also created big problems for Moscow. His reluctance to make concessions to the opposition has put the Kremlin in a difficult position. Russian diplomats have made numerous declarations that Assad is willing to soften his stance, only to have him fail to keep his word. In October 2012, for example, Assad declared his willingness to accept a ceasefire for the duration of the Eid al-Adha holiday but then refused to honor the agreement. Meanwhile, Western countries and their allies in the Persian Gulf continued supplying arms to the opposition.

Now, Moscow has grown tired of Assad and the way he has been compromising Russia’s peacemaking efforts. Seeing that the Syrian president has been unable to suppress the opposition, some Russian officials have come to believe that Assad will not hold on to power much longer and should perhaps be making arrangements for a transition.²⁸ Russia has cut back its military assistance to Assad as a sign of its disappointment in his regime and its fears of ending up completely isolated. Anatoly Isaykin, the head of Russian arms exporter Rosoboronexport, said that “there is no question of delivering fighter planes and helicopters, including repaired ones, to Syria. . . . Rosoboronexport has a contract to deliver Yak-130 training fighter planes, but not a single aircraft has been delivered yet.”²⁹

Moscow’s latest mediation effort indicates that it still sees an opportunity to contribute to a peaceful resolution of the Syrian crisis. So far, however, Russia’s support for Assad has cast it as an enemy of virtually all other Arab nations. More broadly, it has made Moscow the enemy of many Sunni Muslims, drawn Russia further into an uneasy alliance with Iran, and pitted against the West.

The Radicalization of Russian Islam

The Arab Spring has undoubtedly caused problems for Russia’s foreign policy. But the revolutions in the Middle East may also have consequences far closer to home. In their early interpretations, neither Moscow nor the Western capitals foresaw the religious dimension to the Arab revolutions. For Russia, this aspect

may prove crucially important on the domestic front. The triumph of Islamism in the Arab Spring has resonated with the Russian Muslim population and encouraged the development of opposition movements within this community.

When the Arab Spring began, Moscow was concerned it would energize Russia's political opposition. The Arab revolts occurred around the same time as demonstrations by Russian opposition forces protesting an allegedly fraudulent

legislative election. Recognizing that the Arab demonstrations opposed (and toppled) authoritarian regimes that had similar features to the current political system in Russia, leaders in Moscow were nervous about the effect the Arab Spring might have on the Russian protests. In February 2011, then president Medvedev said that revolution in the Arab countries would have a "direct impact" on the situation in Russia.³⁰ Shortly thereafter, then prime minister Putin said, "We are very concerned, despite palliative statements that it is unlikely that radical extremist groups can come to power in North Africa or become considerably stronger."³¹

The triumph of Islamism in the Arab Spring has resonated with the Russian Muslim population and encouraged the development of opposition movements among this community.

ments that it is unlikely that radical extremist groups can come to power in North Africa or become considerably stronger."³¹

But despite similarities in structure and strategy—both the Middle Eastern and Russian opposition forces made broad use of social networks, for example—the Arab opposition was considerably stronger than its Russian counterpart. Protests in Russia were sporadic and could not compare in numbers and scale to the Arab protests. The Kremlin swiftly recovered from the initial shock and found means to suppress discontent and manipulate public opinion. Fears generated by the Arab Spring and worries that Moscow had made the same mistakes as the authoritarian regimes in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya to some extent spurred the Kremlin into a new flurry of political public relations and manipulation. While the Arab Spring heated up the Middle East, Russia felt the cold breath of a new "Russian winter."

Moscow may have prevented the Russian political opposition from replicating the revolutions in Egypt or Tunisia, but it could not keep the Arab Spring from resonating with Russians—and especially with Russian Muslims. The victories of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Islamist Ennahda Party in Tunisia, as well as the participation of Islamists in Libya's new government and their growing activeness in general, gave some Russian Muslims the impression that these new Islamist elites could become Russia's allies. The "Islamic lobby," made up of politicians of Muslim origin who think that Russia has a new opportunity to bolster its position in the Middle East and the Muslim world in general, has become more active in Russia, especially in Moscow and the North Caucasus. These hopes were well put by Shamil Sultanov, a former State Duma deputy and head of the Center for Strategic Studies Russia—the Islamic World, who said that "Russia has a launching pad that . . . [Islamist governments] could use effectively to score points. If we are

talking about friendship, the [Muslim] Brotherhood is more likely to make friends with Russia than with the USA.”³²

The success of Islamists abroad, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, also raises the question of attitudes toward the Islamic opposition within Russia itself. This is especially important for authorities in the North Caucasus republics who are battling against the Brotherhood’s Russian followers and watching while the Kremlin attempts to strengthen its ties with the Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo.

Unrest in the North Caucasus

Solidarity with fellow Muslims in the Arab countries has become the leitmotiv of slogans at demonstrations organized by Islamists in the North Caucasus, historically a hotbed of violence and separatist activity. Protesters called for the overthrow of Russia’s government in the city of Kazan in August 2012. The participants, including quite a few supporters of the Hizb ut-Tahrir Islami Islamist movement, which operates in the North Caucasus, sent letters to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu in which they wrote of the “bloody political regime in Russia and Tatarstan.” The Islamists held a collective prayer of support for their “brothers” killed by “Assad’s bloody regime.”

In February 2013, in Dagestan’s capital, Makhachkala, two Islamic organizations held a demonstration to show solidarity with Assad’s opponents in which around 700 people took part. Magomed Kartashov, head of the Union of the Just, one of the organizing groups, asserted on behalf of Russian Muslims that this was a protest against Russia’s policy in Syria. According to Kartashov, the Syrian opposition is seeking “the law of Allah.”³³ In his view, this is in keeping with Islam’s ideals. Similar protests have occurred in other parts of Dagestan.

In an attempt to hold back the rising tide of radicalism, the Russian authorities, together with domestic Muslim clergy loyal to the Kremlin, have tried a number of different tactics. For example, they came up with the initiative to hold international conferences with the participation of prominent theologians from the Muslim world. The first in this series of conferences took place in Moscow in 2012. Among those invited to take part was Yusef al-Qaradawi, the chairman of the International Union for Muslim Scholars, an organization of Islamic theologians, who had been critical of Russia’s Syria policy.

In the same year, the authorities in Dagestan, together with the republic’s Spiritual Administration of Muslims, held a theological conference in Makhachkala to which they invited the secretary general of the union, Ali Muhiddin al-Qaradaghi, hoping he could help encourage dialogue with the local Islamic opposition. During this kind of dialogue, the authorities and the Muslim clergy close to them often attempt to get their opponents to admit their own mistakes and abandon their convictions. Al-Qaradaghi, however,

called for equal dialogue and did not support the official policy of suppressing the religious opposition. He advised Moscow to “appeal to the Islamists to reach agreement with the secularists on the nation’s enduring principles and then let each work in their own way, but . . . keep to the general course of serving the people.”³⁴ Al-Qaradaghi also noted that the Dagestani Salafis and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt have common goals and that they differ only in the methods for reaching them.³⁵

Al-Qaradaghi’s visit had mixed results for the local authorities in Dagestan. The conference adopted a fatwa that condemned extremism and called for moderation. At the same time, al-Qaradaghi affirmed the common nature underlying events in the Muslim world, of which Russia’s Muslims are a part, and also the influence of Arab Islam on them.

The initiative to have foreign theologians take part in international conferences of this kind did not go any further. It did nothing to help boost Russia’s international influence and did not dampen Islamic radicalism inside the country.

The Volga Region

The increase in extremism was not limited to the Caucasus. The previously relatively peaceful Volga Region, above all the Republic of Tatarstan, also saw an upsurge in Islamist activity. Terrorists seriously injured one prominent mufti, Ildus Faizov, in a car bomb attack in July 2012 and killed Valiulla Yakupov, traditional Islam’s main ideologue in the region, on the same day. The attacks resembled others perpetrated by extremists in the Caucasus, and the media even began to talk of the Volga Region’s “Caucasization.”

Internal disputes within Tatarstan’s Muslim community were clearly at the heart of these attacks, but the background of general increased Islamist activity cannot be ignored. Indeed, some analysts think that “events in Tatarstan today look very much like the scenario for ‘Arab revolutions’ of the kind that took place in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011.”³⁶ Radicals and Hizb ut-Tahrir Islami supporters organized several opposition meetings that brought hundreds of Muslims, mostly young people, into the street. In August 2012, they organized celebrations of a Muslim holiday in Kazan’s Victory Park and demanded that Russian flags be removed and replaced with Hizb ut-Tahrir symbols. Radically minded Muslim groups are operating in several towns in Tatarstan, particularly in Naberezhnye Chelny and Nizhnekamsk.

Radicals have also become more active in the neighboring Republic of Bashkortostan, where several Islamist groups already existed. Kuk Bure (“Gray Wolves”), an Islamic nationalist organization that emerged during the time of former Bashkortostan president Murtaza Rakhimov (who stepped down in 2010), operates underground. Islam is becoming more radical in the Southern Urals and Siberia too.³⁷

In its attempts to stem the rising extremism, government officials have tried appealing directly to the leaders of various Russian Muslim organizations. The authorities in Tatarstan, trying to offset the damage caused by local radicals' demonstrations, gave the head of the republic's 126-person-strong Syrian community, Ahmad Hamam, the chance to speak out. He gave his support to Assad and said that if the opposition wins in Syria, the country will follow the same fate as Libya.³⁸

The Influence of Central Asia

As radicalism increases in the North Caucasus and the Volga Region, Russia's southern borders are becoming ever more porous for Islamists from Central Asia. Migration of Muslims from this region—estimated at 700,000 to 2 million Uzbeks,³⁹ 800,000 to 2 million Tajiks, and 400,000 to 800,000 Kyrgyz—is leading to a rapid increase in the Muslim population in Russia. This Islamist penetration is especially notable in regions bordering or close to the Central Asian region—the Astrakhan, Kurgan, Omsk, Orenburg, Tomsk, Tyumen, and Chelyabinsk regions and Bashkortostan. The migrants include Hizb ut-Tahrir Islami members, who form small cells of three to five people into which they then try to draw local Muslims. According to Alexei Starostin, a scholar specializing in Islamic studies, “a sizeable number of Salafist associations and groups set up by the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami and other extremist organizations are active in the Urals Federal District.”⁴⁰ They are promoting the idea of creating a caliphate and disseminating pamphlets and other literature.

In Central Asia itself, the Arab Spring has not noticeably increased radical or antigovernment sentiment. This is partly because of the hardline nature of the region's authoritarian regimes. It may also be attributed to the local people's passivity, their lack of traditions and skills in political struggle, and the long isolation from the outside world that Central Asians went through during the Soviet decades. But the region's sense of removal from events elsewhere in the world is wearing thinner. As analyst and head of the Muslim Spiritual Board of the Nijegorodskaya Oblast Damir Muhetdinov put it, “the events in the Middle East cannot fail to have an impact on the situation in Central Asia, where the ruling regimes are attempting to maintain stability. . . . If we let other forces enter the region, how can we protect ourselves against the kind of scenarios now unfolding in the Arab world, and which do not make us optimistic?”⁴¹ James M. Dorsey of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore writes, “with countries like Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan ranked among the world's worst violators of basic freedoms, the region is feeling the impact of the revolts in the Arab world. . . . The experience of Turkey shows that giving Islamists space has produced what many see as a model for the Middle East and North Africa and perhaps for Central Asia too.”⁴²

In other words, it would be a mistake to ignore the possibility that Central Asia could become the grounds of a struggle between moderate and radical

It would be a mistake to ignore the possibility that Central Asia could become the grounds of a struggle between moderate and radical Islamists.

Islamists. This sort of a struggle would likely spill over into the North Caucasus, where radicals may well gain the upper hand in a number of regions.⁴³ In this context, one of the main reasons why Russia supports Assad's regime, in the view of Arab analyst Saad Mahyu, is the "threat of a Sunni fundamentalist movement headed by Saudi Arabia and looking particularly to expand into Central Asia."⁴⁴

Effects on Russian Muslims

The official line in Moscow is that the Arab Spring—and perhaps also those Western powers that have helped advance it—has stirred up dissent among Russia's own Muslim community. Farid Salman, head of the Council of Ulemas of the Russian Federation, which is loyal to the authorities, said that the "Arab revolutions are having a negative influence on Russia's Islamic community." In keeping with the official ideology, he said he considers religious Muslim dissidence something stirred up by "Russia's geopolitical adversaries and by agents of influence at work in the Muslim community under various masks."⁴⁵

According to some accounts, Middle Eastern Islamists are also providing tangible support to their coreligionists in Russia; the president of the Religion and Society Information and Analysis Center, Alexey Grishin, who previously worked in the Russian presidential administration, wrote that "religious extremists in Russia have not only financial support from their victorious fellows in the Middle East, but also political support through international diplomacy." Islamists in Arab countries also guarantee Russian radicals political asylum if they are persecuted. According to Grishin, "the Islamist radicals' ultimate aim is to turn the Muslims into the Russian opposition force."⁴⁶

Despite their influence on Russian Muslims, it is unlikely that these outside actors will trigger an Arab Spring–like uprising in Russia. Establishing a religious-based opposition across the whole of Russia is unrealistic, and in any case, Russian Muslims are wary of Moscow not because of influence from abroad but because of the authorities' systematic mistakes in the Muslim regions.

Even so, the Arab Spring may have lasting effects on Russian Muslims. Reports began appearing in mid-2012 that several dozen (some reports say hundreds or even thousands of) Russian Muslims—Tatars, Bashkirs, and people from the North Caucasus—were fighting in Syria on the side of the opposition.⁴⁷ Their involvement, like that of fighters from Syria's neighboring Arab countries, cannot decide the war's outcome, but it shows that they support and are putting into practice the idea of the kind of international Islamic solidarity that had already operated in Afghanistan, the North Caucasus, and Central Asia. An opposition victory in Syria would boost the influence and popularity of this idea among opposition-minded Russian Muslims. It is also possible that after the war in Syria ends, some of these fighters, still possessing

enough bellicose potential, will return to continue the struggle in the North Caucasus and perhaps even test their strength in other parts of Russia, including the Volga Region.

Crafting a Post-Arab Spring Policy

The Arab Spring marked a definitive end to the chapter of Russia's Soviet-era legacy in the Middle East. For the Kremlin, which still cannot bring itself to admit the ineffectiveness of a world order established more than fifty years ago and in need of transformation, this is a disaster for which it was unprepared. Moscow was too long held spellbound by the Middle East's familiar landscape of authoritarianism and stagnation and continued to count on Arab support in some instinctive hope that the friendly old regimes in Iraq, Libya, and Syria would stay in place forever. Russia's clinging to the past comes through particularly strongly in the Syrian conflict.

Now, Russia's foreign policy needs to focus on possible further change. Russia's diplomats will have to assess the shifting balance of power and make their conclusions based on post-Arab Spring realities. As Moscow reformulates its Middle East policy, it should not focus its attention on particular political groups or leaders (as is the case in Syria) but should instead base its policy on the most likely development of events in each particular country. Russia needs to develop an objective awareness of what it can do and what it wants in the Middle East—in other words, it needs to decide what its national interests are. These interests must be clearly formulated, and it would be logical to cleanse them of any ideological dimension. The Kremlin must be consistent in its declared course of pragmatism.

Russia has lost its influence in the region but still has opportunities for strengthening its position there, above all through bilateral relations between Moscow and some Arab countries. There is still interest in Russia in the Arab world and the wider Muslim world. In particular, Russia has real a chance to take part in developing and establishing a regional security system that would not only help to preserve stability in the Middle East but would also have a positive effect on the situation in Russia's neighboring countries. The Arab Spring made it all the more clear that any upheavals, especially if linked to active use of religious slogans and ideas, tend to spread geographically, crossing the borders into neighboring countries.

It is not in Russia's interest to put the emphasis on confrontation with outside actors. Joint efforts to develop a new security system in the Middle East could provide the foundation on which to build cooperation with other regional and international forces. Work on building this kind of cooperation should start now, including with Arab countries that do not agree with

Russia has real a chance to take part in developing and establishing a regional security system that would not only help to preserve stability in the Middle East but would also have a positive effect on the situation in Russia's neighboring countries.

Russia's policy in Syria. The Syrian crisis makes all the more clear the need to look for compromises in situations that at first glance seem impossible to resolve. If no compromise is found, the civil war in Syria not only will lead to that country's disintegration but could also trigger a new round of regional cataclysms.

As Moscow works out the details of its new policy in the Middle East, it is also important for Moscow to take into account the Arab Spring's impact on Russia's Muslim community, which is only now starting to show its reaction to the upheavals in the Middle East. Russian Muslims are following with interest and even admiration the successes of their radically minded coreligionists in the Arab world, and many think that Russia should seek a rapprochement with the victors. Of course, Moscow cannot shape its foreign policy to suit the wishes of Muslims in the North Caucasus or the Volga Region. At the same time, the Kremlin must take into account the possibility of an increasingly radicalized Islam in Russia, especially in the context of the Russian leadership's desire to maintain normal relations with the new elites in the Arab world.

With the Arab Spring, the issue of relations and dialogue with Islamists has acquired increased importance for the outside world, including the West, Russia, China, and India. Islamists' successes on the political scene can no longer be regarded as isolated episodes. Islamism—no matter how it is defined and which movements, parties, or groups are understood to be affiliated with it—will continue to be involved in politics on the national, regional, and global levels for several generations to come.

Notes

- 1 Georgy Mirsky, “Krizis, nabirayushchy silu” (A Growing Crisis), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, March 13, 2013.
- 2 The number of Muslims in Russia is somewhere between 17 and 20 million people. The lower figure covers Muslims who are Russian citizens, while the second figure includes migrants from Central Asia and Azerbaijan. Nobody knows the real number of migrants in Russia at any one time.
- 3 Alexey Malashenko, “Rossia i Musulmanski Mir” (Russia and the Muslim World), Carnegie Moscow Center Working Paper 3, 2008, 24.
- 4 Arthur Lukmanov, “Rossiyskie Musulmane i ‘Arabskaya Vesna’” (Russia’s Muslims and the “Arab Spring”), *Mejdunarodnaya Jizn*, Russian Foreign Ministry, 2012, 86–87.
- 5 A. Manoilo, “Revoljutsii na Blizhnem vostokey i v Severnoy Afrike: politicheskiy pragmatizm i tehnologii upravlyayemogo khaosa” (The Revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa: Political Pragmatism and the Technology of Managed Chaos), *Mir i Politika* 9 (2011): 59–69.
- 6 Russian Federation Foreign Policy Concept, Official Site of the Russian Foreign Ministry, www.mid.ru.
- 7 “Putin ob Arabskoy Vesne: ‘Ne mogu poniat, otkuda u stran NATO takoi voinstvennyi zud’” (Putin on the Arab Spring: “I Cannot Understand Why the NATO Countries Have Got Such a Military Itch”), nakanune.ru, February 27, 2012, www.nakanune.ru/news/2012/2/27/22264513.
- 8 “Rossia i noviye elity stran Arabskoy vesny: vozmozhnosti i perspektivy vzaimodeystviya” (Russia and the New Elites in the Arab Spring Countries: Prospects and Opportunities for Interaction), Russian Council for International Affairs Working Paper V, 2013.
- 9 Viktor Matynyuk, “Rossii pora perestat’ boyatsya Bratyev-musulman?” (Is It Time for Russia to Stop Being Afraid of the Muslim Brotherhood?), KM.Ru, June 25, 2012, www.km.ru/v-mire/2012/06/25/mezhdunarodnye-otnosheniya/rossii-pora-perestat-boyatsya-bratev-musulman.
- 10 Eldar Kasaev, “Rossiya i Egipet” (Russia and Egypt), Open Economy, Expert Portal of the Higher School of Economics, www.opec.ru/1297965.html.
- 11 “Narod Yemena—za peredachu vlasti mirnym i zakonnym putyom” (Yemen’s People Seeks a Peaceful and Lawful Transition of Power), interview with Yemen’s Ambassador to Russia Mohammed Saleh al-Hilali, Kommersant.ru, March 29, 2011.
- 12 “Prezident Yemena soglasilsya peredat vlast’ premiyeru” (Yemen’s President Agreed to Hand Power to the Prime Minister), Kommersant.ru, April 11, 2011.
- 13 “Al Ahram: Blizhnevostochnaya dilemma Rossii” (al Ahram: Russia’s Middle East Dilemma), *Nash Mir*, <http://nashmir.kz/news/al-ahram-blizhnevostochnaya-dilemma-rossii>.
- 14 Ernest Sultanov, “Eshchyo odin gaz” (One More Gas), *Kommersant Vlast*, January 28, 2013, 16.

- 15 Dmitri Trenin, "From Damascus to Kabul: Any Common Ground Between Turkey and Russia?" *Insight Turkey* 15, no. 1 (2013): 43.
- 16 Vladimir Mukhin, "Pyataya eskadra vernyotsya v sredizemnoye more" (The Fifth Squadron Will Return to the Mediterranean), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 26, 2013.
- 17 Bernard Gwertzman, "Syria's Stalled Revolution," interview with Joshua Landis, director, Center for Middle East Studies, University of Oklahoma, Council on Foreign Relations, March 29, 2011, www.cfr.org/syria/syrias-stalled-revolution/p24515.
- 18 Artur Blinov, "Nazrelo vremya dlya dialoga v Sirii" (The Time Is Ripe for Dialogue on Syria), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 21, 2013.
- 19 Editorial, *Expert*, July 30–August 12, 2012, 57.
- 20 Camille H. Habib, "The Struggle for Syria Is a Struggle for Eurasia With Different Characters," presentation at the third regional conference, "The Arab World 2013: Dynamics of Change; Security, Economical and Good Governance Challenges," organized by the Lebanese Armed Forces, Research and Strategic Studies Center, April 10–13, 2013.
- 21 Abdallah bou Habib, presentation distributed at the third regional conference, "The Arab World 2013: Dynamics of Change; Security, Economical and Good Governance Challenges."
- 22 Vladislav Maltsev, "Poslantsev Khalifata zovut v Moskvu" (The Caliphate's Envoys Called to Moscow), *NG-Religiya*, December 5, 2012.
- 23 "Lavrov: v islamskom mire nazrevayet krizis" (Lavrov: A Crisis Is Brewing in the Muslim World), *Oreanda-Economic News From Over the World*, March 17, 2012.
- 24 Hosham Dawod, "Quand le regime syrien tombera" (When the Syrian Regime Falls), *Le Monde*, July 12, 2011.
- 25 Barry Rubin, "The Sunni-Shia Conflict Will Be the Major Feature of Middle East Politics for Decades," Gloria Center, November 4, 2012, www.gloria-center.org/2012/11/the-sunni-shia-conflict-will-be-the-major-feature-of-middle-east-politics-for-decades.
- 26 Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Le Nouveau Moyen-Orient: Les peuples à l'heure de la révolution syrienne* (The New Middle East: The People at the Hour of the Syrian Revolution) (Paris: Librairie Artheme Fayard, 2013), 207–208.
- 27 Interview, Fox News, February 22, 2012.
- 28 "Syria Assails NATO Over Missiles," *International Herald Tribune*, December 7, 2012.
- 29 "Russia Supplying Arms to Syria Under Old Contracts: Lavrov," Reuters, November 5, 2012, www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/05/us-syria-crisis-russia-arms-idUSBRE8A40BE20121105.
- 30 "Dmitry Medvedev Held a Meeting of the National Antiterrorism Committee in Vladikavkaz," Official Website of the President of Russia, February 22, 2011, <http://kremlin.ru/news/10408>.
- 31 "Russian Government–European Commission Meeting," February 25, 2011, www.russianmission.eu/en/news/russian-government-%E2%80%93-european-commission-meeting.
- 32 "O Bratyakh-musulmanakh i lape Vashingtona" (On the Muslim Brotherhood and Washington's Hand), IslamRF.net, <http://islamrf.net/?p=28355>.
- 33 Vladislav Maltsev, "Islam zatchichshayut ot nelegalov" (Islam Is Being Cleansed of Illegal Immigrants), *NG-Religiya*, February 20, 2013.
- 34 "Sheikh Ali Muhiddin Al-Karadagi: 'The Holy Koran Clearly Explains That Allah Created Mankind for Creation and Development, Not for Killing,'" RIA Dagestan, November 17, 2012, www.riadagestan.ru/news/2012/11/17/146313.
- 35 Maltsev, "The Caliphate's Envoys Called to Moscow."
- 36 Rais Suleimanov, "Arabskaya revolyutsiya' v Tatarstane: islamskiye fundamentalisty v regionalnoy politike" ("Arab Revolution" in Tatarstan: Islamic Fundamentalists in Regional Politics), Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, Volga Region Center for Regional and Ethno-religious Studies, www.kazan-center.ru/osnovnye-razdely/14/302.

- 37 See Alexey Malashenko, “The Dynamics of Russian Islam,” Carnegie Moscow Center, February 1, 2013, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/02/01/dynamics-of-russian-islam/f88a>.
- 38 “Lider siriytsev v Tatarstane: ‘Esli ne budet Assada, Siriiu zhdet sudba Livii’” (Syrian Community Leader in Tatarstan: “Without Assad, Syria Will End Up Following the Same Fate as Libya”), Regnum, www.regnum.ru/news/fd-volga/tatarstan/1641017.html.
- 39 Quoted from Yelena Sadovskaya, *Demoscope Weekly, Naseleniye i obschestvo* (Population and Society), 415–16, March 22–April 4, 2010, 21.
- 40 Alexei Starostin, “Vliyaniye protestov i revolyutsii na uralskykh musulman” (Influence of Protests and Revolution on Muslims in the Urals), *Islam v SNG* 3 (2012): 37.
- 41 Damir Mukhetdinov, “Zharkoye leto perekhodit v spokoinuyu osen na prostranstvakh SNG” (Hot Summer Giving Way to Calm Autumn Over the Territory of the CIS), *Islam v SNG* 38 (2012): 6, 8.
- 42 James M. Dorsey, “The Arab Revolts: Impact on Central Asia,” S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) Commentary 161, August 27, 2012.
- 43 Vitaly Naumkin, “O politike Rossii na yuzhnom napravlenii” (Russia’s Policy Toward Its Southern Neighbors), *Otsenky i Idei* (Assessments and Ideas) 1, no. 1, Russian Academy of Sciences’ Institute of Oriental Studies, November 2011, 8.
- 44 Saad Mahyu, “Russia and the Arab Spring,” *Majalla al-Mustaqbal* 405 (November 2012): 130.
- 45 “‘Arabskiye revolyutsii’ negativno vliyayut na islamskuyu obshchinu Rossii” (The “Arab Revolutions” Are Having a Negative Impact on Russia’s Islamic Community), Interfax, March 4, 2013, www.interfax-religion.ru/islam/?act=interview&div=371&domain=3.
- 46 “Tsel’ islamistov—prevratit rossiiskikh musulman v pyatuyu kolonnu” (The Islamists’ Aim Is to Turn Russia’s Muslims Into a Fifth Column), Regnum, www.regnum.ru/news/1602899.html.
- 47 “V Povolzhye zarodilsya khalifat” (A Caliphate Has Emerged in the Volga Region), December 4, 2012, www.jacta.ru/russia/article/?id=1251.

Carnegie Moscow Center

Established in 1994 by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the **Carnegie Moscow Center** brings together senior researchers from across the Russian political spectrum and Carnegie's global centers to provide a free and open forum for the discussion and debate of critical national, regional, and global issues.

The **Carnegie Endowment for International Peace** is a unique global network of policy research centers in Russia, China, Europe, the Middle East, and the United States. Our mission, dating back more than a century, is to advance the cause of peace through analysis and development of fresh policy ideas and direct engagement and collaboration with decisionmakers in government, business, and civil society. Working together, our centers bring the inestimable benefit of multiple national viewpoints to bilateral, regional, and global issues.

BEIJING

BEIRUT

BRUSSELS

MOSCOW

WASHINGTON

THE GLOBAL THINK TANK



CARNEGIE
MOSCOW CENTER

Carnegie.ru