Research Impact

Title of case study: Russia in Syria: The Unequivocal Return of Russia to the Middle East?

Summary

The Russian intervention in the Syria conflict in September 2015 marked an important step-change in Russian foreign policy and in the shape and form of Russian engagement with Middle East and North Africa (MENA) states. Dr Mason conducted research in New York and Moscow on Russian intervention in Syria and built on his research concerning the Iranian intervention in the Syria conflict and the international politics of/in the Middle East. He provides research-based evidence that has had an impact in the European and US think tank communities and through international media outlets.

Underpinning the research

The research that has underpinned the impact was based primarily on an AUC research award 2018.

The aim of the research was to investigate the background the main driving factors for Russian intervention in Syria, outline the state of Russian - NATO relations, and assess the prospects for (re)building longer-term bilateral relations with other states in the Middle East. The research drove issue specific insights, especially on energy interests, and updated the literature on Russia's relations with Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, the GCC States, Iran and Israel.

Addressing the deficiency of analysis on Russian intervention in Syria, this research shed new light on Russian - MENA relations as well as Russia - NATO relations.

The research determined that western-led interventions in Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011) as well as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action signed in 2015, (including more recent arms control issues) have played a role in shaping Russian policy. In more detail, Moscow believes that liberal interventionism undermines its political legitimacy: it has been defined in western capitals, it can be a threat to international security, and it might eventually be used as a justification for regime change in Russia. Its return to the Middle East can largely be justified along expanding lines of economic, energy, security and defence relations, whereby President Putin is attempting to return Russia to back to its position as an international power.

References to the research


Details of the impact

During the research, two kinds of impacts were generated: changing thinking and understanding and awareness.

1. During the project, Dr Mason was invited to contribute feedback to papers being presented at the "The role of Russia in the MENA region" workshop, organised by Instituto per gli studi di politica internazionale (ISPI) in the framework of the Euro-
Mediterranean Research, Dialogue and Advocacy (EuroMeSCo). Dr Mason discussed some of the key findings of his research.

2. Impacts were created in the U.S. by publishing the findings in *Middle East Policy*, an academic journal published by the Middle East Policy Council in Washington D.C. and promoted through its website. The findings also informed Dr Mason's book review of *Challenged Hegemony: The United States, China and Russia in the Persian Gulf*, published by the *Middle East Journal*.

3. Further impacts were created through an interview with Die Welt of Germany on the topic of Russia in the Middle East. An early research impact was recorded in an op-ed written for the *Globe Post*.

**Sources to corroborate the impact**


Participant in the dialogue workshop, "The role of Russia in the MENA region", organised by Instituto per gli studi di politica internazionale (ISPI) in the framework of the EuroMeSCo project, Milan, 12 October 2018.