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Russia, Syria and the West: From the Aftermath of the Arab Spring in the Middle East to Radicalization and Immigration Issues in Europe

Edited by Vladimir Sazonov, Illimar Ploom and Andres Saumets

ESTONIAN MILITARY ACADEMY

SÕJATEADLANE

Estonian Journal of Military Studies



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VOLUME IX:

**RUSSIA, SYRIA AND THE WEST:
FROM THE AFTERMATH OF THE ARAB SPRING IN THE MIDDLE EAST
TO RADICALISATION AND IMMIGRATION ISSUES IN EUROPE**

EDITED BY
VLADIMIR SAZONOV, ILLIMAR PLOOM AND ANDRES SAUMETS

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SISUKORD / TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	7
<i>Illimar Ploom, Vladimir Sazonov</i>	
RUSSIA’S PURSUIT OF POWER IN THE MIDDLE EAST: CONTEXT, STRATEGY AND METHODS	11
<i>Illimar Ploom, Vladimir Sazonov, Viljar Veebel</i>	
THE POLITICO-MILITARY ASPECTS OF RUSSIAN ENGAGEMENT IN THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR	46
<i>Zdzisław Śliwa</i>	
THE SECOND “ARAB BELT” IN SYRIA IN THE MAKING?	72
<i>Hille Hanso</i>	
INSIGHTS INTO THE IDEOLOGICAL CORE AND POLITICAL PILLARS OF ISIS.....	87
<i>Vladimir Sazonov, Illimar Ploom</i>	
IS THE EUROPEAN MIGRANT CRISIS ANOTHER STAGE OF HYBRID WAR?	116
<i>Yurii Punda, Vitalii Shevchuk, Viljar Veebel</i>	
ASYLUM SEEKERS: VICTIMS OR A NOVEL WEAPON FOR THE 21 ST CENTURY?	136
<i>Yevhen Mahda, Valentine Bieljaiev, Artur Borsuk</i>	
OVERVIEW OF METHODS SUPPORTING THE DE-RADICALISATION AND DISENGAGEMENT OF ISLAMIC RADICALS	149
<i>Heidi Maiberg</i>	
VENEMAA FÖDERATSIOONI VÕIMALIK ROLL 2015. AASTA RÄNDEKRIISIS NING SEOS RADIKALISEERUMISE PÕHJUSTEGA EESTI MOSLEMITE LÕIMUMISEL	180
<i>Katrin Tammekun</i>	
SÕJALISED ERAETTEVÕTTED KAASAJAL	200
<i>Ants Laaneots</i>	
CONTRIBUTORS.....	225

INTRODUCTION

Illimar Ploom and Vladimir Sazonov



This special issue of the Estonian Journal of Military Studies titled **“Russia, Syria and the West: From the Aftermath of the Arab Spring in the Middle East to Radicalisation and Immigration Issues in Europe”** takes a closer look at Russia’s activities and its growing influence in Syria and in the wider region, focusing on its larger implications for the Middle East and for all the parties involved, including the West. As regards the latter, and specifically European security, the challenges and issues related to the Arab Spring and the Syrian Civil War include the 2015 migrant and refugee crisis, the multiple threats posed by ISIS (incl. the rise of terrorism), and finally, the radicalisation of sections of European societies. Furthermore, Russia’s involvement in the Middle East has added an extra twist to the situation. The resulting triangle involving implications for the West and Europe warrants more comprehensive analysis, and this collection of articles intends to offer some insights.

The truism that the world is growing increasingly interdependent has been applicable to developments in the Middle East for a long time. The position and impact of the region is such that any changes in its political or economic balance reverberate across the world. The past decade has once again made its influence particularly clear for the West, sometimes even in painful ways. However, it must be admitted that this is a reciprocal relationship, the Middle Eastern perspective often conveying the same about Western influence. In this context, the somewhat unexpected move by Russia to intervene directly in the Syrian Civil War has managed to reshuffle the pack of cards once more, posing many questions that require answers. While there have already been many engaging analyses of these issues, they have mostly concentrated on Syria itself or focused on Russia’s goals and actions in the region. However, there have not been many comprehensive attempts to tie together the Middle East, Russia’s strategy and Western efforts. This volume intends to do precisely that. Altogether, this special issue is intended to offer a wider perspective with several articles pursuing threads that more or less explicitly tie all the three elements together. In addition, we will also offer more detailed accounts of specific critical aspects of the conflict.

The focal point of this volume is Russia's intervention in Syria that calls for closer scrutiny, both from political and military vantage points. Of particular interest here is the use of private military companies, which deserves scrutiny, especially in the case of Russia. However, the situation in Syria is also a story of several peoples and many intersecting interests, and in that context, for example, the question of the Kurds and their efforts to achieve greater autonomy is also relevant, especially considering that the U.S. withdrawal and Russia's intervention may have opened a way for Turkey to make some critical moves. Speaking of Syria, one can hardly overlook the question of ISIS, especially its identity and ideology. What are its core elements and how has it developed? What is Russia's stance towards ISIS, and how does it manage its tightrope act of balancing the interests of the Shia and the Sunni communities in the Middle East? In addition, the prolonged conflict has had several side effects, one of the most critical being the issue of migration. Is it something that could be understood also in terms of hybrid war, in the context of Russia's strategic interests and the apparent vulnerability of European societies? Furthermore, in addition to the larger issue of migration, the overwhelming refugee crisis that hit Europe in 2015, warrants deeper exploration of weaponising large-scale forced migration. The changes in the Middle East have also had an impact on the radicalisation of societies, including in Europe, raising urgent questions of how to better understand that phenomenon, especially in the context of Russia's efforts, but also in terms of finding effective long-term solutions.

Of special interest for this volume is Russia, its objectives and interests. It bears noting that Russia's involvement in the region is hardly a novelty, despite the surprise effect it first generated when coming to Assad's rescue in 2015. Historically, Russia has had a long relationship with the Middle East and especially Syria, dating back to at least the 18th–19th centuries. However, it is also imperative to understand how this history relates to Islam, especially with regard to Russia's pursuits in the Caucasus and Central Asia. In this regard, the factors that have contributed to the shaping of Russia's experiences with Islam and radical Islamism deserve closer scrutiny. While Russia shares a long history with the Muslim peoples and countries in its immediate vicinity, another important perspective is provided by studying the patterns of its actions in the Middle East proper.

Overall, it seems that Moscow does not merely want to acquire a more important role in the Middle East; indeed, it is determinedly pursuing the status of the main power broker in the whole region. After the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq and Syria, Moscow has been eager to demonstrate that it

has assumed the mantle of the new ‘custodian’ of the Middle East. Among Russia’s closest allies in this region is the Shia axis, comprising Iran, Bashar al-Assad’s Syria, and such organizations as Hezbollah. However, in order to be a successful custodian of the peace in the Middle East, Russia cannot rely only on the Shia and has also, rather successfully tried to establish ties with the Kurds and the wider Sunni world as well.¹

Russia’s strategic interests in the Middle East can also be approached from the perspective of restoring the status that was enjoyed by the former Soviet Union. In the foreign policy sphere, it means disrupting the existing international order and security architecture, and curtailing the spheres of influence of the Euro-Atlantic alliance. For that purpose, Russia utilises asymmetric methods. Having become quite adept at it in recent years, the subtle art of hybrid warfare has become the main weapon used by Moscow in its attempts to change the existing world order. In that context, all of Russia’s old connections may prove extremely valuable. For one, in addition to Russia’s special relationship with Bashar al-Assad’s regime in Syria, it is also known that former Iraqi army officers and members of the Ba’ath party studied in Moscow during the Cold War and probably developed connections with the KGB.² Considering that many of those people now play a significant role in ISIS, an investigation into the continued existence of those connections in the present time is warranted. If this hypothesis turns out to be valid, there might be an exclusive line of communication available between the Kremlin and the leaders of ISIS, deserving careful attention and analysis.

As regards the content of this volume, the first article by Illimar Ploom, Vladimir Sazonov and Viljar Veebel outlines the positions of Russia and the West vis-à-vis the Middle East and their larger implications, among them the conditions surrounding the interventions by Russia and the West, Russia’s strategy for the Middle East and the methods it has used. The larger implications of Russia’s activities, and their impact on future relations with the West are also considered. The following article by Col. (Ret.) Zdzislaw Sliwa narrows the focus to Syria and considers in detail the political and military aspects of Russia’s intervention, with particular attention given to the analysis of Russia’s military campaign and the capabilities involved.

¹ Sazonov, V. 2015. Putin’s Game of Thrones in the Middle East. – *Diplomaatia*, December 18. <https://icds.ee/putins-game-of-thrones-in-the-middle-east/> (17.12.2019).

² **На стороне ИГИЛ воюют генералы с советской выучкой и образованием.** Зачем России присутствие в Сирии. – *Новый день*, 04.02.2016. <https://newdaynews.ru/ekb/interview/556654.html> (17.12.2019).

The article by Hille Hanso focuses on a specific but revealing aspect related to the Syrian Civil War and its development, by considering the fate of the Syrian Kurds in the context of Turkey's plans to divide this community by introducing a new version of 'the Arab Belt' for the purposes of ensuring its own security. The article on the ideological core of ISIS by Vladimir Sazonov and Illimar Ploom maintains the focus on the Middle East, shedding light on another prominent stakeholder in the conflict by analysing its radical ideas and their political meaning, with a special emphasis on outlining the Arab nationalist element alongside its Salafist-Wahhabist core.

Thereafter the volume attends to the broader and more indirect effects of the conflict and Russia's involvement. The article by Col. Yurii Punda, Lt.Col. Vitalii Shevchuk and Viljar Veebel takes the framework of hybrid war to inquire about the extent to which Russia takes advantage of migration issues. Then, Yevhen Mahda, Valentine Bieliaiev and Artur Borsuk discusses the same topic through the lens of weaponisation of migration. The following article by Heidi Maiberg considers the methods of de-radicalisation in Europe, an area of study that is gaining more and more prominence in the context of the prolonged conflicts in the Middle East that have attracted volunteer fighters from Europe. This, in turn, is complemented by research conducted by Katrin Tammekun whose article focuses on wider issues related to radicalisation in the context of Russia's hybrid campaigns, bringing together the European refugee crisis, Russia's activities and the root causes of radicalization in Estonia.

Finally, in the light of recent reports regarding the use of private paramilitary companies in conventional warfare, Gen. (Ret.) Ants Laaneots, former Commander of the Estonian Defence Forces, gives an in-depth overview of the establishment, development and utilisation of Russian private military companies, while also offering a comparative analysis with their Western counterparts. The main reasons behind the proliferation of such instruments appear to be similar, yet there are also significant cultural specificities that may play a decisive role in critical situations.

RUSSIA'S PURSUIT OF POWER IN THE MIDDLE EAST: CONTEXT, STRATEGY AND METHODS

Illimar Ploom, Vladimir Sazonov, Viljar Veebel



1. Introduction

The Russian Federation has managed to take the world by surprise: first, by conducting a successful rescue operation in support of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria, and second, by having become an indispensable power broker in the wider Middle Eastern region.¹ As far as Syria is concerned, by the end of 2019, Assad's regime had effectively been saved by Russia's political and military support in the form of its direct intervention in the Syrian Civil War². Russia's decisive action in this situation enhanced its status throughout the Middle East region. This article aims to ascertain to what extent has Russia's conduct merely taken advantage of the vacuum left by the U.S. and the West, and to what extent can it be considered a premeditated and carefully considered plan that fits within Russia's wider strategic objectives.

First, the authors will take a closer look at the strategic assumptions that have enabled Russia to enhance its status in the region, focusing in particular on those underlying aspects that have led to the West's failure and comparing them to those that have helped pave the way for Russia to succeed. To that end, the authors analyse strategic assumptions held by Russia and the West by comparing their long-term behavioural patterns in the international arena.

Subsequently, the article will focus on Russia's wider strategic objectives. It can be argued that in addition to its intervention in Syria, Russia seems to

¹ **Jones, S.** 2019. Russia's Battlefield Success in Syria: Will It Be a Pyrrhic Victory? – CTC Centinel, Vol. 12 (9), Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at U.S. Military Academy West Point. <https://ctc.usma.edu/russias-battlefield-success-syria-will-pyrrhic-victory>. [Jones 2019]

² **Bashar al-Assad thanks Putin for 'saving our country' as Russian leader prepares for talks on ending Syrian war.** 2017. – The Telegraph, November 21. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/11/21/bashar-al-assad-says-ready-syria-peace-talks-rare-meeting-vladimir>; **Russia saved Assad but Syria peace settlement elusive.** 2017. – Arab News, November 3. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1187796/middle-east>.

be also pursuing wider regional objectives in the Middle East. This article will examine the core elements of this strategy, in light of Russia's actual achievements in that regard, and the standards Russia relies on to measure its success. This section will focus on analysing the strategic concept of Eurasian power, as articulated by leading Russian experts and academics, as well as Russia's activities in the Middle East and the achieved results from that perspective.

In order to achieve its strategic objectives, Russia has developed and implemented a sophisticated foreign policy not only towards regional powers but also to address the question of Islamist tendencies and radical groups. Therefore, the third thread that this article pursues, attempts to understand the choice of methods that Russia has used to deal with Muslims in general and with Islamist radical groups in particular. The authors aim to gain a deeper understanding into what lessons Russia has learned from its policy towards Muslims and Islamism at home by looking at some historical examples.

Finally, the article will offer insights into the implications for the West with regard to Russia's new status in the Middle East in order to understand the potential consequences of this new situation for Russia and the West. To answer that question, the authors outline some potential trajectories of the relationship between Russia and the West in the Middle East and beyond. Additionally, the role of ISIS³ will be analysed in the context of the Syrian Civil War as well as in the wider regional framework.

Against this backdrop, this article puts forward the following research questions:

- What strategic assumptions underlie Russia's recent success in the Middle East and how should it be understood in the wider context of historical Western efforts to stabilise the region?
- What considerations have informed Russia's strategy in the Middle East and how to measure its success?
- How has Russia's past experience with Islam at home influenced its current conduct and its preferred methods in the Middle East?

³ **ISIS: Portrait of a Jihadi Terrorist Organization.** 2014. – The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Israeli Intelligence Heritage and Commemoration Center, November 26. <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/20733/> (11.12.2019).

Mölder, H.; Sazonov, V. 2016. Sõjateoloogia ilmingud Lähis-Idas Da'ishi näitel: kas religioosne liikumine või poliitilis-sõjaline organisatsioon? – Sõjateadlane nr 3, lk 208–231. [Sazonov, Mölder 2016]

- What implications does Russia's recent success in the Middle East have for the potential trajectories of Russian-Western relations in the region and elsewhere?

Taking guidance from the posited research questions, the next chapter will mostly concentrate on assessing the wider backdrop of Western and Russian ambitions in the Middle East, outlining the reasons behind Russia's success and the relative failure of the West in their respective pursuits. The third chapter delves deeper into Russia's strategy in the Middle East, whereas the fourth chapter outlines Russia's experience with Islam and fundamentalism at home, seeking to find similarities with Russia's behaviour in Syria. Finally, the fifth chapter will discuss the significance of Russia's actions and the success of its strategic ambitions in Syria, in the Middle East and beyond, primarily attempting to understand it from the Western perspective.

2. Contextualising Western and Russian Strategic Assumptions Regarding the Middle East: Outlining the Influence of the Historical and Current Context

In order to compare Western and Russian strategic assumptions regarding the Middle East, it is necessary to outline the relevant historical context and the resulting implications. This section will mostly focus on some critical factors and trends shaping the situation in the Middle East starting around the time of the Arab Spring and the Syrian Civil War,⁴ while also covering the relevant historical background.

It is the controversial nature of the Arab Spring⁵ that carries in itself perhaps the best indication of the hopes and disappointments the West has entertained and suffered with regard to the Middle East in particular and the Islamic world in general. The Arab Spring encompasses two distinct pursuits – a quest for more democracy in the respective countries and a quest for revitalising their religious and cultural legacy. This duality is also well reflected in the Western reception that hoped for the former but was often

⁴ **Peterson, Ü.** 2016. Süüria kodusõjani viinud sündmustest islamimaailmas ja eriti Süürias. – Akadeemia, nr 12, lk 2209–2233.

⁵ **Brownlee, J. N.; Masoud, T.; Reynolds, A.** 2013. *The Arab Spring: The Politics of Transformation in North Africa and the Middle East.* Oxford: Oxford University Press; **Sazonov, V.; Mölder, H.** 2014. Süüria – kas järjekordne ususõda Lähis-Idas? – Idakiri: Eesti Akadeemilise Orientaalseltsi aastaraamat 2014, lk 134–154.

shaken, if not shocked, by the outcomes that favoured the latter. These hopes reflect the Western conviction of the inevitability of democratic developments throughout the world. However, this conviction has been repeatedly challenged and the history of the Middle East has proved that the democratic seed is fragile, needing welcoming soil and appropriate care in order to take root and flourish⁶; or a specific idiom with its own particular supportive arrangements (e.g. in Turkey).⁷

In any case, the outcomes of the Arab Spring have been controversial. On the one hand, it saw the fall of autocratic leaders (e.g. in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya), but the ensuing chaos often paved the way not merely for a return to traditional roots but also, for the rise of Islamists (even if moderate, like the Muslim Brotherhood).⁸ Thus, from the perspective of the West, the outcomes of the Arab Spring have been varied. Only the Tunisian example supports the argument of democracy being clearly on the winning side⁹, whereas some countries have witnessed the return of autocratic regimes (e.g. Egypt, where the army has once again assumed control),¹⁰ while many others (e.g. Libya, Yemen, Syria) have devolved into civil war.¹¹

Such developments carry an implicitly discouraging message for the West. The Western approach entails two different aspects of legitimisation that both seem to be working against its success in the Middle East. First of all, in order to legitimise its activities in the Middle East, the West needs to

⁶ **Shackle, S.** 2014. Is Democracy Possible in the Middle East? – Middle East Monitor, January 24. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20140124-is-democracy-possible-in-the-middle-east/>.

⁷ See **Matos, A. P.** 2013. The Role of the Military in the Turkish Democracy: Are the Military the Guardians of or a Threat to the Turkish Democracy? – International Review of Turkish Studies, Vol. 3, Issue 1, pp. 8–27.

⁸ See **Rózsa, E. N. et al.** 2012. The Arab Spring – Its Impact on the Region and on the Middle East Conference. – Academic Peace Orchestra Middle East (APOME). Policy Brief for The Middle East Conference on a WMD/DVs Free Zone, No 9/10, August. <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/09609.pdf>.

⁹ In Tunisia, liberals and the moderate Islamic party cooperated in an emerging multi-party system. For more, see **Natil, I.** 2016. Civil State in the Post-Arab Spring Countries: Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. – The Arab Spring, Civil Society and Innovative Activism. Ed. by Cakmak, C. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 5–6.

¹⁰ **Abdelsalam, E.** 2015. The Arab Spring: Its Origins, Evolution and Consequences... four years on. – Intellectual Discourse, Vol. 23(1), pp. 136–139.

¹¹ For more, see e.g. **Mushtaq, A. Q.; Afzal, M.** 2017. Arab Spring: Its Causes and Consequences. – Journal of the Punjab University Historical Society, Vol. 30(1), pp. 7–8. http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/HistoryPStudies/PDF_Files/01_V-30-No1-Jun17.pdf.

justify these actions at home. With some notable exceptions¹², most of the Western measures have been geared towards supporting democratisation, from the direct export of democracy, to conditional aid, or to the general advocacy for human rights. Thus far, this has been the only argument for legitimating these policies in the West in order to secure public support as well as financial backing from the parliaments. However, as the above mentioned events have demonstrated, this particular goal may be both positively and negatively detrimental to Western aspirations in the Middle East: positively detrimental in the sense that the impulse to seek popular legitimacy in the region may lead to unexpected consequences as locals may opt for returning to their traditional values, and negatively detrimental, as democracy is perceived by the locals as part and parcel of the Western way of life imposed on the region.

Now, this latter aspect – the imposition of Western values and way of life – constitutes the second problematic aspect of legitimising the West's actions in the Middle East and has to do with the relatively long dominance of the Western civilisation over the Islamic World (i.e. the colonial past, effects of globalised capitalism, the legacies of the Cold War, etc.). The consequences of these historical and a myriad of internal developments paved the way for the ruling regimes and sometimes, in turn, for the counter-movements that emerged as a result (e.g. in post-revolutionary Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, etc.).¹³

In this context, it is not surprising that the West has gradually grown tired of sustaining its active efforts in the Middle East, especially considering that its interventions have not managed to bring peace to the region. In some cases, the outcomes may even seem antithetical and counterproductive.

In recent years, the Western response, especially on the part of the U.S., not only with regard to the results of these interventions, but also in response to more urgent calls, has been to turn from active involvement to gradual

¹² For more, see **Cohen-Almagor, R.** 2018. US-Saudi Arabia Relations: Business as Usual? – Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Diplomatist, Vol. 6(10), October. <http://www.diplomatist.com/globalcenterstage/article20181029.html>.

¹³ **Stern, J.** 2003. Al-Qaeda: the Protean Enemy. – Foreign Affairs, Vol. 82(4), pp 27–40; cf. **Sazonov, V.** 2017. Afghanistan as an Example of the Kremlin's Hybrid Warfare – Why Russia is Arming the Taliban? – *Diplomaatia*, June. <https://icds.ee/afghanistan-as-an-example-of-the-kremlins-hybrid-warfare-why-russia-is-arming-the-taliban/>. [**Sazonov 2017a**]; For a critique of the U.S. decision to launch 'The War on Terror', see also **Howard, M.** 2000. *The Invention of Peace: Reflections on War and International Order*. London: Profile Books.

withdrawal from the region.¹⁴ Although President Trump's policy choices may be seen as more ambivalent, his declared policy stance of 'Make America Great Again' carries strong isolationist connotations and seems to continue the trend ushered in by his predecessor, President Obama¹⁵, resulting in a power vacuum that Russia has been more than eager to occupy.

Strangely, the same conditions that have hampered Western ambitions have been conducive for Russia's ambitions. Furthermore, it can be argued that Russia has had the upper hand in both aspects of legitimisation, if not in moral, then at least in practical terms because the Kremlin does not have to justify its actions in the Middle East to the home audience by reverting to the narrative of contributing to the cause of democracy. On the contrary, Putin's regime has itself put forward the notion of 'managed democracy'¹⁶, and due to its general opposition to Western values, Russia seems to be perceived as much less dangerous to the culture of the Middle East countries.

The second aspect, which is also closely related to the previous one, is the fact that as a result of adopting this approach, Russia does not have to deal with the problems related to the introduction of democratic reforms in the Middle East. Moreover, the Kremlin appears to be rather satisfied when Middle Eastern countries choose to return to traditional (or perhaps even to more or less moderate Islamist) ways of life. This gives Russia a clear advantage since its reception does not rely on the pursuit of democracy but can be satisfied with merely a measured dose of stability. Although the culpability for colonisation and for developments that unfolded during the Cold War could easily be attributed to Russia as well, somehow it seems that by distancing itself from the West by *de facto* not sharing the same democratic aspirations, Russia appears to have freed itself from any recriminations as well.

In addition to the vacuum created in the Middle East by the U.S. withdrawal, Russia has also benefitted from another particular advantage. In Syria, the West has mostly supported the small democratic factions among

¹⁴ **Unger, D.** 2016. The Foreign Policy Legacy of Obama. – The International Spectator, Vol. 51(4), pp. 1–16. <http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/unger.pdf>.

¹⁵ **Wechsler, W. F.** 2019. US Withdrawal from the Middle East: Perceptions and Reality. – The MENA Region: a Great Power Competition. Ed. by Mezran, K.; Varvelli, A. Milano: Ledi Publishing, pp. 13–38. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/MENA-Chapter-one.pdf>.

¹⁶ **Liik, K.** 2013. Regime Change in Russia. – European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), Policy Memo, Issue 81, May. https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR81_PUTIN_MEMO_AW.pdf.

the larger anti-Assad opposition that also comprises radical groups.¹⁷ Thus, it is understandable that, at least for the U.S., such alliances have been questionable because some of those oppositional radical groups are also categorised as enemies just like Assad's regime¹⁸, further hampering U.S. efforts. Whereas Russia, in comparison, despite its officially stated priority of fighting ISIS, has aligned its operations to help Assad. According to Polyakova, the fact that Russia counts ISIS among its enemies has also worked as a facilitating factor, without distracting Russia from its main objectives.¹⁹ Altogether, this has made Russia's immediate strategic objectives much more straightforward and easier to pursue.

Moreover, there is another ISIS-related factor that may be working to Russia's benefit, and it is also one that has been hampering the West. By way of gross simplification, it could be argued that ISIS's emergence is itself partly a consequence of Western interventions in the Middle East and beyond. Furthermore, it is possible to draw a link between the 2003 Western intervention in Iraq, the consequent dismantling of Saddam Hussein's army and the rise of ISIS. While this does not mean that the West should assume responsibility for ISIS's actions, an indirect relationship can hardly be denied.²⁰ In comparison, for Russia, no such paradoxical relationships exist. Thus, without any moral burden or possible reservations, it is easier for Russia to fight ISIS, as compared to the West.

Despite high hopes, the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime did not bring about peace. On the contrary – Iraq descended into civil war (incl. against the U.S. and its allies) that lasted for eight years. When the U.S.

¹⁷ **Lang, H.; Awad, M.; Sofer, K.; Juul, P.; Katulis, B.** 2014. Supporting the Syrian Opposition: Lessons from the Field in the Fight against ISIS and Assad. – Center for American Progress, September. <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/IslamistsSyria-report.pdf>.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁹ **Polyakova, A.** 2018. Putin's true victory in Syria isn't over ISIS. – The Brookings Institute, February 26. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/putins-true-victory-in-syria-isnt-over-isis/>.

²⁰ See e.g. **Jones, S. G.; Dobbins, J.; Byman, D.; Chivvis, C. S.; Connable, B.; Martini, J.; Robinson, E.; Chandler, N.** 2017. Rolling Back the Islamic State. – RAND report, pp. x–xi. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1912.html.

Even this, otherwise critical account, admits that 'ISIL did grow out of chaos that sprung from the US invasion of Iraq'. **Hundal, S.** 2015. ISIL's terrorism is not a reaction to Western foreign policy. – Quartz, November 18. <https://qz.com/553733/isils-terrorism-is-not-a-reaction-to-western-foreign-policy/>. See also **Milne, S.** 2015. Now the truth emerges: how the US fuelled the rise of Isis in Syria and Iraq. – The Guardian, June 3. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jun/03/us-isis-syria-iraq>.

forces finally left Iraq in 2011, the situation in the country deteriorated, becoming even more unstable, eventually falling prey to another civil war. It was in this context that radical Islamists were successful in establishing a terrorist quasi-state – in the form of ‘the Caliphate’ under the name Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) – in the territories seized from Syria and Iraq in 2014.²¹ However, as will be shown later, Russia’s relations with ISIS have some additional facets due to some rather dubious connections. Specifically, many former officers of Saddam’s regime, which was ruled by the Ba’ath party, have played a significant role in ISIS, if not directly controlling it,²² giving grounds to the argument that there is a Ba’athist-Salafist nexus²³ within ISIS. This nexus, in turn, is a critical indicator, revealing potential ties that may have been established with the KGB in the Soviet era given the fact that several former officers of Saddam’s army and members of the Ba’ath party studied in Moscow during the Cold War.²⁴

Thus, provided that the alleged links with the KGB can be established, it is quite apparent that the same forces that have posed a challenge for the West, could ease the way for Russia to become the main power broker in the Middle East. Indeed, the ties with the KGB are not only difficult to sever, but they can, by the same token, come in rather handy by providing a line of communication for the Federal Security Service (FSB), Russia’s principal security agency and the main successor to the USSR’s KGB, and hence a convenient mechanism for deal-making.

²¹ **Bunzel, C.** 2015. From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State. – The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World. Analysis paper, No. 19, March. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-ideology-of-the-Islamic-State.pdf>.

²² **Sazonov, V.** 2017b. ISIS – kas Saddam Hussein režiimi produkt? – Islam.ee, April 15. <https://www.islam.ee/arvamus/178-vladimir-sazonov-isis-kas-saddam-hussein-reziimi-produkt/>.

²³ **Natali, D.** 2015. The Islamic State’s Baathist roots. – Al-Monitor, April 24. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/fa/originals/2015/04/baathists-behind-the-islamic-state.html>.

²⁴ During the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), Saddam Hussein’s security service, the Iraqi Directorate of General Military Intelligence (*al-Istikhbarat*), had ties with the Russian KGB. The KGB advised Saddam’s security services in techniques of concealing covert weapons production facilities. See **Al-Marashi, I.** 2002. Saddam’s Security and Intelligence Network and The Iraqi Security Apparatus. <https://www.nonproliferation.org/diagram-saddams-security-and-intelligence-network-the-iraqi-security-apparatus/>; **На стороне ИГИЛ воюют генералы с советской выучкой и образованием. Зачем России присутствие в Сирии.** – New Day News, 04.02.2016. <https://newdaynews.ru/ekb/interview/556654.html>.

3. Russia's Conduct in the Middle East in the Context of its Strategic Objectives

This chapter will look into the wider significance of Russia's pursuits in Syria and in the Middle East. The main elements and trends of Russia's conduct in the region will be briefly examined against some prominent interpretations of Russia's strategic concepts and goals, such as Russia positioning itself as the leading Eurasian power.

Looking at Russia's vicissitudes in Syria and in the wider Middle-East since 2015, one is faced with many paradoxes. Although Russia appears to have started out with a relatively modest aim of helping the Assad regime hold on to power in Syria, due to the success of that venture, Russia now enjoys the status of a major regional power broker in the Middle East. At first look, this status must seem somewhat surprising on at least two planes: regional and global. As to the regional plane, given the fact that Russia has thus far been considered primarily a supporter of Shia interests, this position should have posed insurmountable problems for establishing trust with the major Sunni countries in the region, begging the question: how did Russia manage to establish rapport with all major players in the Middle East?²⁵ As to the global plane, what could explain Russia's bold entrance into a second conflict (i.e. the Syrian Civil War) in addition to its on-going confrontation in neighbouring Ukraine?

As it will be argued, Russia has been pursuing this novel pragmatic policy for quite some time now, trying to gain the recognition of all major powers in the Middle East. In a way, Syria has become a welcome stepping stone on the road to achieving that goal. Russia's pursuits in the Middle East do not merely align with its regional goals, but also fit into the larger picture of its desired status as a global player. However, before going into the details of that policy, in order to gain an understanding of the complexity of Russia's past involvements and ties in the Middle East, it bears outlining some facts about Russia's history with the region. As will be seen, it has not been only about siding with the Shia interests.

Throughout history, Russia's biggest rival in the Middle East has been the Ottoman Empire with whom Russia has been in fierce competition, particularly for the area surrounding the Black Sea and the Balkans, as well as with a view to securing access to the Mediterranean through the Turkish

²⁵ This applies, for example, to Israel in the context of Russia's close ties with al-Assad and Hezbollah and Iran.

Straits.²⁶ In this context, it bears noting that Turkey and Russia have not clashed over their interests in Syria and in the wider region despite numerous opportunities to do that. Despite the freezing of relations between the two countries after Turkey downed a Russian aircraft in Northern Syria in 2015, their relationship was quickly mended, and in 2019, the world witnessed their close cooperation in managing the extremely complex situation in Northeast Syria, where one central question relates to the areas mainly populated by Kurds.

In the beginning of the 1950s, despite having first been a supporter of Israel, the Soviet Union established allied or equivalent relations with the enemies of Israel and its main supporter the U.S. Russia's new allies in the Middle East included Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, South Yemen and Syria²⁷, fitting nicely into the framework of the international communist revolution, one of the prevalent strands in international relations during the Cold War.

Despite the much heralded Russian support for the 'Shia axis', the relationship between Moscow and the Shia Islamic Republic of Iran has been and remains complex (e.g. clashing in the field of business interests as been the case in Syria).²⁸ Their relationship has also suffered due to the way Russia publicised its use of an Iranian air base for its first air strikes in Syria.²⁹ As Borshchevskaya argues, historically Russian and Iranian interests have been more on a course of collision than in harmony. After the 1979 Iranian revolution, the famous slogan propagated by the newly anointed ruler Ayatollah Homeini was "*Neither East nor West but Islamic Republic*", distancing Iran from both competing superpowers of the Cold War. Despite these

²⁶ **Trenin, D.** 2016. Russia in the Middle East: Moscow's Objectives, Priorities, and Policy Drivers. – Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Task Force on U.S. Policy toward Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia, p. 2. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/03-25-16_Trenin_Middle_East_Moscow_clean.pdf. [**Trenin** 2016] In addition to Turkey, Russia's other main competitor in the region has been the Persian Empire or modern Iran.

²⁷ **Karmon, E.** 2018. Russia in the Middle East – The Sunni Connection. – Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS) Publications. <https://www.idc.ac.il/he/research/ips/Documents/publication/5/ElyKarmonRussiaMiddleEastJuly2018.pdf>. [**Karmon** 2018]

²⁸ In this case, al-Assad can claim some sovereign decision-making authority while trying to balance the allocation of profitable deals between Russia and Iran. **Kotan, B. N.** 2019. How Assad balances competing interests of Russia and Iran in Syria. – TRTWorld, September 20. <https://www.trtworld.com/middle-east/how-assad-balances-competing-interests-of-russia-and-iran-in-syria-29976>.

²⁹ For more, see **Borshchevskaya, A.** 2016. Vladimir Putin and the Shiite Axis. – Foreign Policy, August 20. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/08/30/vladimir-putin-and-the-shiite-axis-russia-iran-syria/>. [**Borshchevskaya** 2016]

complexities, Iran and Russia have managed to maintain a close relationship rooted mostly in their shared anti-Western political objectives, but also based on mutually beneficial economic relations and concerns over the rise of Sunni extremism in the region.³⁰

Perhaps most remarkable is the way Russia has managed to retain those Shia connections, while at the same time cultivating close relations with the Sunni powers. It is not only that the success in Syria has played into Russia's hands, but a long-term Kremlin strategy can be observed here as well. From 2005 to 2007, President Putin visited Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Qatar, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, securing an observer status for Russia in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.³¹ In this regard, Russia's close cooperation with Saudi Arabia is especially noteworthy because even if their interests should clash in Syria, according to Trenin, there are many more areas where their interests align quite well (e.g. support for Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Egypt, manipulation of oil prices, etc.).³² In that respect, Russia's policy in the region diverges from that of the U.S. According to Trenin, Russia's strategy in the Middle East has been a careful tightrope act to avoid siding with any single party in a conflict, instead, constantly manoeuvring and engaging in trade-offs.³³

Nevertheless, Russia's connection with the Shia cannot be entirely overlooked.³⁴ In addition to its relations with the leading Shia nation, Iran, Russia's cooperation with other regional Shia groups includes close partnerships with Syria's ruling Shia clan, the Alawites, supporters of Bashar al-Assad³⁵, as well as with Azerbaijan where the majority of Muslims are Shia. It is worth noting that Russia also has interests in Iraq where the Shia

³⁰ **Borshchevskaya** 2016.

³¹ **Karmon** 2018.

³² **Trenin** 2016, p. 3.

³³ "... indeed to feel 'confident that it can navigate between Tehran and Riyadh.'" **Trenin** 2016, p. 4.

³⁴ For more, see e.g. **Baker, L.** 2016. Israeli Official: Russia has long-term ambitions in Middle East. – Reuters, November 15. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-russia-mideast/russia-has-long-term-ambitions-in-the-middle-east-israeli-official-idUSKB-N13A2CN>.

³⁵ **Peterson, Ü.** 2019. The Position of the Alawites in Islam. – Cultural Crossroads in the Middle East – Historical, Cultural and Political Legacy of Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict from Ancient Near East to Present Days. Ed. by Sazonov, V.; Mölder, H.; Espak, P. Tartu: University of Tartu Press, pp. 163–197.

make up more than 60% of the population, with strong indications that Russia is pursuing economic interests there, if not more.³⁶

As to relations with Syria, it remains Russia's longest unbroken alliance dating back to the Cold War when close cooperation was established in 1950 under the leadership of Hafez al-Assad, the father of Bashar, and Syria became a staunch ally of the Soviet Union.³⁷ Although their relationship seemed to cool during the 1990s and 2000s, the 2011 crisis reawakened this relationship in full force. In order to secure Assad's regime, the Kremlin has sent him weapons³⁸, military advisers and equipment (incl. aircraft and armoured vehicles),³⁹ while also increasing its military presence in the region.⁴⁰ These weapon shipments have reached Assad's forces through the Syrian port in Tartus, currently under Russian control. From a strategic point of view, the Tartus naval base is of great importance to Moscow, securing Russia's only access to the Mediterranean Sea. Also, this is the only base outside the territory of the former USSR which has a favourable location and enables Russia to control the Eastern Mediterranean region.⁴¹

At this juncture it is appropriate to inquire how this policy approach can be understood in terms of Russia's wider strategic interests. For example, it is evident that acquiring a wider recognition in the region is in alignment

³⁶ Russian oil companies such as Gazprom, Rosneft and Lukoil have been doing business in Iraq for many years; also, the first deliveries of Russian military exports to Iraq date back to the 1960s. **Ahmadbayl, A.** 2018. Russian presence in Iraq – a matter of time. – Trend News Agency, October 03. <https://en.trend.az/other/commentary/2960135.html>.

³⁷ **Trenin** 2016, p. 3.

³⁸ The majority of weapons used by Assad's forces in Syria originate from the former USSR or the Russian Federation. **Bennett, A. J.** 1985. Arms Transfer as an Instrument of Soviet Policy in the Middle East. – Middle East Journal, Vol. 39(4), pp. 745–774.

³⁹ The Syrian government has purchased weapons from the Russian Federation in the amount of several billion dollars. **Connolly, R.; Sendstad, C.** 2017. Russia's Role as an Arms Exporter. The Strategic and Economic Importance of Arms Exports for Russia. – The Chatham House, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, pp. 8, 18, 27. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2017-03-20-russia-arms-exporter-connolly-sendstad.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Among other things, the Russian forces also use it as a testing-ground for their weapons. **Enders, D.** 2018. Russian weapons in Syria. – The National, November 13. <https://www.thenational.ae/world/europe/russian-weapons-in-syria-1.712798>.

⁴¹ It is also notable for the fact that it reminds NATO of Russia's presence in the region as the Russian naval base in Tartus, Syria is located in close proximity to a NATO member state – Turkey is only ca. 150 km from Tartus. **Sazonov, V.** 2015. Putin's Game of Thrones in the Middle East. – Diplomaatia, December 18. <https://icds.ee/putins-game-of-thrones-in-the-middle-east/>.

with Russia's interests. First and foremost, Russia's widest strategic interests consider the Middle East region as vital to solidifying its strategic and political position in the world. According to Gvosdev, Russia does not pursue a Middle East policy specific to that region alone but coordinates its actions on a wider scale in accordance with its overall approach to international affairs. Gvosdev outlines what he calls the "twin challenges posed by Russia's geographic position: extensive and vulnerable land borders coupled with choke points." The significance of the latter lies in the fact that they could cut Russia off from the wider world. Traditionally, Russia's response to these problems has been to push the borders of its spheres of influence as far outward as possible and acquire control of the connecting nodes.⁴²

It is important to recognise that this interpretation of Russia's interests in the region relies on the good old logic of geopolitics and, in this context, it is relevant to highlight how Russia has harkened back to this notion while putting forward its new concept of 'Eurasian power'.⁴³ According to Karaganov, this term represents novel thinking that has emerged in the post-2000s Russia that is trying to distance itself from declining Europe while getting closer to rising China, India, Brazil etc. However, despite moving away from what it calls post-European values, Russia seems keen on re-establishing its relationship with the West as well. Karaganov argues that it is perhaps best explained by the fact that Russia's approach to security encompasses the whole Eurasian continent, and for the latter "the arc of territories and states from Afghanistan to North and Northeast Africa" is the key to the security of all, including Russia and Europe.⁴⁴

In that context, Russia's intervention in Syria, and especially the wider stabilising role that Russia has tried to assume in the Middle East, acquires a more serious meaning. This is confirmed by Gvosdev, stressing that Russia aims to influence other key international stakeholders (e.g. the EU and China) by "showing that a central Eurasian 'node' within the international

⁴² **Gvosdev, N. K.** 2019. Russian Strategic Goals in the Middle East. – **Laruelle, M.** (ed.) 2019. Russia's Policy in the Middle East. Central Asia Program (CAP) Paper No 212, January, p. 7. <https://centralasiaprogram.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/CAP-paper-212-Russia-in-the-Middle-East-Print.pdf>. [**Gvosdev** 2019]

⁴³ **Karaganov, S.** 2018. The new Cold War and the emerging Greater Eurasia. – *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 9(2), pp. 85–93.

⁴⁴ **Karaganov, S.** 2015. Eurasian Way Out of the European Crisis. – *Russia in Global Affairs*, June 08. <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/pubcol/Eurasian-Way-Out-of-the-European-Crisis-17505>.

system under Russian management contributes to the peace and prosperity of other major powers.’⁴⁵

Gvosdev argues that in addition to this geographical reality, it is also important to realise that, as the successor to the great power status enjoyed by the Soviet Union, Russia wants to remain one of the “agenda-setting, rather than agenda-taking nations” of the world, not letting the U.S., the EU or China assume they could be in a position to dictate Russia’s internal and external affairs.⁴⁶ Thus, when Russia needs to prove its suitability to serve as a trustworthy custodian of the region, the Muslim countries, in conflict with former colonial powers or dealing with local radicals, offer suitable theatres for Russia to demonstrate its capabilities. These faraway nations can offer potentially high gains for Russia when battle-testing its ‘escalate to de-escalate’ doctrine, while the concomitant social and political risks remain low in case its venture should fail.⁴⁷ This indicates that for Russia the risks involved in opening a second front are lower compared to possible benefits. What is more, while Russia is striving to shore up its international status and recognition, its forces have often been warmly welcomed by national leaders because they can offer a viable counterbalance to the Americans, the British and the French, whose efforts are often perceived as imperial in nature.⁴⁸ What is more, in the eyes of locals, the Russians are also able to provide immediate help and working solutions.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Gvosdev 2019, p. 8.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7. The sanctions imposed on Russia by the West are just one example of such pressure. For some of their effects, see Veebel, V.; Ploom, I. 2020. Is Moscow in trouble because of targeted sanctions? A deeper glance at the progress of the Russian military sector over the past decade. – Journal of Slavic Military Studies [upcoming].

⁴⁷ Adamsky, D. 2018. From Moscow with coercion: Russian deterrence theory and strategic culture. – Journal of Strategic Studies, Vol. 41(1–2), pp. 33–60. In the case of neighbouring nations, the situation is different. See e.g. Veebel, V.; Ploom, I. 2019. Are the Baltic States and NATO on the right path in deterring Russia in the Baltic? – Defense and Security Analysis, Vol. 35(4), pp. 406–422. In the case of Russia, it is interesting to note the difference in thinking between the West and Russia. The Russian discourse often uses the term struggle (*borba*) to refer to various forms of strategic interactions. For example, their military dictionary includes terms like informational struggle, radio-electronic struggle, diplomatic struggle, ideological struggle, economic struggle, or armed struggle. Thus, it seems that for Russians a desirable positive situation is a dynamic and agile struggle rather than a static comfort zone relying on a peaceful world.

⁴⁸ Karaganov, S.; Suslov, D. 2018. A new world order: A view from Russia. – Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development (CIRSD). <https://www.cirsd.org/en/horizons/horizons-winter-2019-issue-no-13/a-new-world-order-a-view-from-russia>.

⁴⁹ Markedonov, S. 2015. *De facto* statehood in Eurasia: a political and security phenomenon. – Caucasus Survey, Vol. 3(3), pp. 195–206.

From Russia's perspective, all of its more or less peaceful attempts to restore its former G8 status from 2015 to 2017, have been rejected referring its aggressive behaviour in the past. Interestingly, in those cases where Russia has visibly used military force (e.g. in Syria), it seems to have been 'taken back into the club' again by the international community. This speaks in favour of relying on the 'escalate to de-escalate' doctrine and considering that Russia has not been admonished for using that tactic,⁵⁰ it will most likely continue using it.

Finally, it is time to take a look at how Russia has managed to achieve the status of a major power broker in the Middle East. First of all, it has made the most of the opportunities that have come its way, the most salient being the vacuum created by the West, and especially the U.S., who have almost deserted the region. However, these opportunities might have come to naught had Russia not played its cards as boldly as it did.

Leaving aside the moral responsibility for its more than brutal methods, especially towards civilians,⁵¹ Stepanova argues that Russia has achieved this status by using its military might clearly beyond its economic means or even overall ambition. However, in addition to decisive action that seems to be the key to Russia's success, Stepanova argues that, compared to the U.S., Russia has managed better in adjusting to new and changing realities. Instead of restricting itself with conditionality, Russia has been relying on the trend of regionalisation of politics and security in the Middle East.⁵²

So what has Russia managed to achieve? First of all, it has secured Assad's hold on power in Syria, while also bolstering the stability of the whole Middle East region. This is a relatively uncontroversial statement in the Middle East, but it is also acknowledged by Western countries, although not directly. Thus, instead of staying within the confines of supporting only the Shia, Russia has

⁵⁰ **Veebel, V.** 2019. Why it would be strategically rational for Russia to escalate in Kalinin-grad and the Suwalki corridor. – *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 38(3), pp. 182–197.

⁵¹ It is important to also note that Russia has used asymmetric methods to achieve its goals. **Sazonov** 2017a; see also **Bērziņš, J.** 2015. Russian New Generation Warfare is not Hybrid Warfare. – *The War in Ukraine: Lessons for Europe*, Ed. by Pabriks, A.; Kudors, A. Rīga: The Centre for East European Policy Studies, University of Latvia Press, pp. 40–51. https://library.cimic-coe.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/20150101_UC_The-War-in-Ukraine-Lessons-for-Europe.pdf.

⁵² According to Stepanova, this trend manifests itself in the growing role of regional powers, factors, and dynamics. **Stepanova, E.** 2019. Regionalization as the Key Trend of Russia's Policy on Syria and in the Middle East. – **Laruelle, M.** (ed.) 2019. *Russia's Policy in the Middle East*. Central Asia Program (CAP) Paper No 212, January, pp. 11–12. <https://centralasiaprogram.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/CAP-paper-212-Russia-in-the-Middle-East-Print.pdf>.

managed to achieve the status of a power broker respected by all regional powers (incl. Saudi Arabia and Israel), enabling Russia to re-establish its status as a major power on the global scale.⁵³ And above all, it has unquestionably managed to successfully demonstrate its desired new identity as the Eurasian power.

4. Russia, Islam and Islamic Fundamentalism: Past Methods as Models for the Present

The previous chapter outlined some prominent Russian concepts for understanding its strategy in the Middle East from the geopolitical perspective, whereas this chapter will focus specifically on Russia's experience with Islam and Islamism⁵⁴ at home, while also looking for parallels between Russia's activities in the Middle East and its past experiences with Muslims in Russia and neighbouring countries. Thus, we will look into some major factors that have contributed to shaping Russia's experience with Islam to discern patterns for understanding Russia's conduct in Syria and beyond.

For many centuries, Russia has had a considerable Muslim population.⁵⁵ In addition, it has a long history with Muslims in Russia and Muslims living in neighbouring countries, as well as long-standing historical ties with Muslim communities and countries of the Middle East and Central Asia⁵⁶. As a result, Russia has had to develop a distinctive policy toward these different groups. Historically, Russia's first encounters with Islam date back to the 7th century, before the time of the founding of the Russian state itself,⁵⁷ and culminate with the Soviet era,⁵⁸ the reverberations of which are still present in the post-Soviet world.⁵⁹

⁵³ Jones 2019.

⁵⁴ Yemelianova, G. M. 2002. *Russia and Islam: A Historical Survey*. Palgrave MacMillan. [Yemelianova 2002]; Bobrovnikov, V. 1999. *Muslim Nationalism in the post-Soviet Caucasus: the Dagestan Case*. – *Caucasian Regional Studies*, Vol. 4(1), pp. 11–19.

⁵⁵ Малащенко, А. В. (Ред.) 2007. *Ислам в России: Взгляд из регионов*. Аспект Пресс; Малащенко, А. В. 2010. *Ислам в России: религия и политика*. – *Исламоведение*, № 3, ст. 69–85.

⁵⁶ Bacon, E. E. 1980. *Central Asia under Russian Rule: a Study in Culture Change*. London: Cornell University Press.

⁵⁷ Yemelianova 2002, pp. 1–27.

⁵⁸ As Yemelianova has correctly highlighted “overall, 70 years of Soviet rule had a major impact on the various Muslim people of the USSR”. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 99–136.

If there is one facet that demonstrates the pertinence of the Muslim question for Russia, it has to do with the demographics of today's Russia. From the Russian nationalist perspective the outlook is quite daunting, because the birth rates of the ethnic Russian population are in decline, whereas the Muslim population, provided that the current trends continue, is expected to make up the majority of the Russian population by 2050.⁶⁰ Based on these demographic estimates, no religious group will gain as much prominence in Russia in the near future as the Muslims.⁶¹

The first and most general argument this chapter wants to put forward about Russia and Muslims is that, despite some noteworthy tendencies during the Soviet era,⁶² and the exception of Chechnya,⁶³ Russia's Muslim communities have never neither seriously radicalised (i.e. fallen prey to Wahhabism, radical Jihadi Salafism, etc.)⁶⁴ nor pursued political independence.⁶⁵ This may seem paradoxical, especially considering that Russia has been notoriously heavy-handed in its treatment of Muslim communities.⁶⁶

For example, during the Soviet era, Russia forced the hierarchy of its Orthodox Church upon the Muslim community.⁶⁷ The current circumstances seem to raise similar questions, especially since the revived Russian Orthodox Church has been playing one of the leading roles in the informal

⁶⁰ The statistics are revealing, i.e. annually, there are 1,7 births per 100 women among ethnic Russians, which is below the replacement rate, and 4,5 births per 100 women among Muslims. **Akhmetova, E.** 2016. Islam in Russia: Past, Present and Future. – *Historiafactory*, July 02, p. 6 [Akhmetova 2016]; see also **Laruelle, M.** 2016. How Islam Will Change Russia. – The Jamestown Foundation, September 13. <http://jamestown.org/program/marlene-laruelle-how-islam-will-change-russia/>.

⁶¹ **Di Poppo, L.; Schmoller, J.** 2018. Islam and Ethnicity in Russia: An Introduction. – *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*, Vol. 27(1), pp. 84–87. [Di Poppo, Schmoller 2018]

⁶² **Benningsen, A. A.; Broxup, M.** 1983. *The Islamic Threat to the Soviet State*. London and Canberra: Croom Helm.

⁶³ **Yemelianova** 2002, pp. 166–193.

⁶⁴ **Malashko, A.** 2001. *Islamskie orientiry Severnogo Kavkaza*. – *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, pp. 137–164.

⁶⁵ **Yemelianova** 2002, pp. 177–185.

⁶⁶ **Медведко, Л. И.** 2003. *Россия, Запад, Ислам: «столкновение цивилизаций»? Жуковский-Москва: Кучково Поле.*

⁶⁷ **Goble, P. A.** 2005. *Demoniseerides Venemaa moslemeid: Moskva ohtlik gambiit ja Lääne nurjunud reaktsioon. (Demonizing Russia's Muslims: The Dangerous Gambit of Moscow and the Failed Reponse from the West)* – *ENDC Proceedings*, No 4, p. 167. [Goble 2005]

system of Russia's governance.⁶⁸ However, this new position assumed by the Orthodox Church is not so much religious as it is political, and Islam is also recognised as one of the official religions in Russia.⁶⁹ Hence, it could be tentatively argued that the Orthodox Church has not had much influence on the cultural identities of the Muslim community. Additionally, it seems that Russia's Soviet-era policy was not able to affect the widest section of popular Islam that comprised a syncretist mix of traditional customs and beliefs, where the Islamic element existed mostly in the form of rituals.⁷⁰ This offers one possible explanation why a relatively modest and traditional Muslim way of life has generally prevailed in Russia and the political aspect has not been able, or sometimes even willing, to seriously reshape the religious-cultural identities of these people.

This argument is also substantiated by Moscow's official policy of recognising Islam alongside other traditional religions.⁷¹ However, this should not be interpreted as a sincerely inclusive stance. According to Akhmetova, the Russian establishment has been rather reserved towards Islam: "The Kremlin wants a conformist Islam and reacts negatively to any deviations from conformism".⁷² Against this background, we can observe the emergence of the notion of a localised Islamic orthodoxy that represents, according to Di Puppo and Schmoller, an attempt to elevate the theological credentials of Islam in Russia.⁷³

The second argument that this paper puts forward concerns Russia's historical experience with subduing Muslim peoples, both at home and abroad. It has been posited that in its political efforts, Russia, as a rule, has constructively sought cooperation with the more moderate factions of Islam or generally moderate political factions. The history of Russian-Muslim relations is long and could hardly be discussed in this section in sufficient detail, let alone in its entirety. Therefore, it must suffice to outline some main

⁶⁸ **Di Puppo, Schmoller** 2018, p. 85.

⁶⁹ It must be mentioned that Russia is a multi-religious society. In 1997, in addition to Orthodox Christianity, also Islam, Judaism and Buddhism were given the status of traditional religions in Russia.

⁷⁰ **Goble** 2005, p. 167.

⁷¹ For example, in a speech delivered by then-President Medvedev during his visit to Ufa in November 2011. See **Akhmetova** 2016, p. 6.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ As they also point out, the Hanafi legal tradition figures prominently in this idea of 'orthodox traditional Islam'. **Di Puppo, Schmoller** 2018, p. 86.

elements from modern Russian history that can corroborate this hypothesis on the general level.

It could be argued that Russia's reliance on cooperation with moderate Muslims is a tradition that harks back to Tsarist Russia, and also the Soviet Union, in their pursuits to regain control over territories of the Crimean Tatars, the Emirate of Bukhara (Uzbek-Tajik state, 1785–1920), over Azerbaijan or northern Afghanistan. In more recent times, a similar approach can be observed in Russia's relations with Turkey, Syria and the Balkan states, especially in cases of mixed populations of Christians and Muslims. For example, it can be argued that although the Soviet Union helped establish the Marxist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) that later staged a coup d'état to overthrow the ruling monarchy, the Russians would have actually preferred Afghanistan to be ruled by more moderate forces.⁷⁴ Initially the Soviets supported King Mohammed Zahir Shah, but largely due to the inevitability of a regime change, they later switched their loyalties to his cousin Mohammed Daud Khan who, backed by the PDPA and the Soviets, declared himself the first President of the Republic of Afghanistan in 1973.⁷⁵ Thus the Soviet Union supported moderate factions against nationalist radicals (who would have liked to replace the King themselves), but most importantly, as long as possible, even against the PDPA. It could be argued that perhaps Moscow and the KGB saw that the Afghan society was not ready for such transformative change and that moderates would have offered greater stability also for the Soviet Union in the effort of controlling the country. Ultimately, it could be argued that the Soviets ended up using the PDPA mostly as an instrument for exerting influence.⁷⁶ But Afghanistan is just one example among many others. For example, in Azerbaijan the Kremlin put its support behind those moderate Muslim forces that opposed

⁷⁴ Khristoforov's research indicates that the 1978 coup d'état staged in Afghanistan by the Marxist PDPA was not actually in the direct interest of Moscow. Nevertheless, Communist party ideologists (S. A. Suslov, B.N. Ponomaryov) in Moscow deemed these events as positive developments, offering their support to the new government. For more, see **Христофоров, В. С.** 2019. Советские спецслужбы отрывают Восток. Москва: Российский государственный гуманитарный университет, сг. 188–189. [**Христофоров** 2019]

⁷⁵ See **Synovitz, R.** 2003. Afghanistan: History of 1973 Coup Sheds Light on Relations with Pakistan. – Radio Free Europe, July 20. <https://www.rferl.org/a/1103837.html>.

⁷⁶ For characteristic patterns of the Soviet Union's conduct in the Middle East, see **Христофоров** 2019. However, as regards the current situation, it should be acknowledged that Russia's current support goes to the Taliban. **Sazonov** 2017a.

rapprochement to either Turkey or Iran.⁷⁷ Similarly, Russia has historically supported the Kurds whose version of Islam has been generally relatively moderate.⁷⁸ Moreover, in Egypt, the Soviet Union supported the moderate Nasser.⁷⁹ However, there are also exceptions, such as Saddam Hussein, one of the cruellest despots the world has ever known,⁸⁰ but that seems to have been a pragmatic choice on the part of Russia; first, to counter U.S.-supported Iran, and later, during the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988), against Iran’s religious extremism. However, it did not prevent Russia from approaching Iran later.⁸¹ Today, Russia’s pragmatic policy is prominently outlined in the so-called Primakov doctrine⁸², largely drawing on the assumption that ordinary Muslim people are not particularly concerned with the purities of Islam. Instead, as long as they feel that their traditional way of life is not in danger, they seem to welcome modernisation (e.g. infrastructure, hospitals etc.).

Drawing on the examples above, with a few caveats (e.g. Assad’s use of chemical weapons and the despotic elements of his governance), Syria can also serve as an example of such a reliance on relatively moderate factions, be it the Alawites who support Assad or the Syrian Kurds. However, from a historical perspective, Russia has prioritised countries that are geographically closer, turning to Afghanistan, Turkey, the Balkans and Syria mostly when they can offer reputational gains for Russia in the eyes of the locals

⁷⁷ **Shiriyev, Z.** 2019. Azerbaijan’s Relations with Russia: Closer by Default? – The Chatham House, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, March. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2019-03-14-Azerbaijan2.pdf>.

⁷⁸ **Arraf, J.** 2019. Kurds In Syria Make A Deal With Russia. – NPR, December 02. <https://www.npr.org/2019/12/02/784225309/kurds-in-syria-make-a-deal-with-russia?t=1576234211037>.

Xalid, G. 2015. Russian Consulate: Russia could support Kurdish Independence. – Kurdistan 24, December 15. <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/interview/91a42133-9158-42f7-a7ea-412d3d2d-1fcb/russian-consulate--russia-could-support-kurdish-independence>.

⁷⁹ **Holbik, K.; Drachmann, E.** 1971. Egypt as Recipient of Soviet Aid, 1955–1970. – *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft / Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics*, Bd. 127, H. 1, pp. 137–165.

⁸⁰ See **de Vries, M. K.** 2003. Entering the Inner Theatre of a Despot: The Rise and Fall of Saddam Hussein. – INSEAD Working Paper. <https://sites.insead.edu/facultyresearch/research/doc.cfm?did=1281>.

⁸¹ However, this alliance has not improved much even today. See the discussion on Russia-Iran relations in Chapter 3 above.

⁸² **Tsygankov, A.** 2013. Russia’s Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefields Publishers, Inc., pp. 104–105. See also **Surovell, J.** 2005. Yevgenii Primakov: ‘Hard-Liner’ or Casualty of the Conventional Wisdom. – *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol. 21(2), pp. 223–247.

and other nations.⁸³ Still, we must be careful in relying on the argument that Russia, as a rule, tends to support moderate factions, because there are also several other aspects to Russia's policy that cannot be ignored (e.g. brutal military and other interventions).

This last intimation lays the foundation for the third argument that this paper wishes to put forward for evaluating Russia's campaign in Syria. Namely, Russia's military operations to subdue mostly Muslim-populated countries, dating back to the 17th century, have been extremely brutal. The prime example being the infamous Aleksey Ermolov, a Russian imperial general of the 19th century who commanded Tsarist troops in the Caucasian War and was directly responsible for subduing the local peoples under Russian rule.⁸⁴ The list of his gruesome methods included punitive raids, scorched earth policies, forced migration and exile, massacres of entire villages, etc.⁸⁵, taking their cue from methods employed by other European empires before.⁸⁶ It could be argued that his actions provided the model of operational and tactical methods that Russia has followed to this day. As recently, as during the Soviet period, Russia has employed mass terror, mass arrests, deportations (e.g. Chechens to Central Asia), religious persecution, sovietisation (e.g. forcing people to transfer from Arabic to Cyrillic alphabets), etc.⁸⁷

The Chechen wars of the 1990s, serve as one of the most recent examples of those methods being applied to subdue a defiant Muslim people. It has been

⁸³ **Istomin, I. A.; Bolgova, I. V.; Sokolov, A. P.; Avatkov, V. A.** 2019. A 'Badge of Honour' or a 'Stamp of Infamy'? NATO as a Marker of Status in International Politics. – MGIMO Review of International Relations, Vol. 2(65), pp. 57–85 (in Russian). <https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2019-2-65-57-85>.

⁸⁴ It was Ermolov who built Groznyi or Groznaia as his first fortress in the Caucasus, which literally means "terrible" or "menacing" in Russian, and was meant to inflict a feeling of terror among the locals. **King, C.** 2008. *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 47. King also notes the examples of targeted assassinations, kidnappings and the killing of entire families. *Ibid.*, p. 48. [**King** 2008]

⁸⁵ **Zürcher, C.** 2007. *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus*. New York: New York University Press, p. 72. [**Zürcher** 2007]
On Ermolov's role in Russia's relations with Iran and the Ottoman Empire, see **Keçeci, S.** 2016. *The Grand Strategy of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus against Its Southern Rivals (1821–1833)*. London: London School of Economics: an unpublished thesis. On his notorious cruelty with Caucasian peoples, see *ibid.*, pp. 188–189.

⁸⁶ **King** 2008, p. 47.

⁸⁷ **Zürcher** 2007, p. 73. As de Waal shows, under the pretext of not trusting the 'Turkish connected people' living near the border, many peoples were deported, including Chechens. **de Waal, T.** 2010. *The Caucasus: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 85. [**de Waal** 2010]

estimated that in the course of its two military campaigns Russia managed to kill approximately 50,000 civilians of Chechnya's already relatively small population (ca. 1 million, with ca 700,000 of them ethnic Chechens).⁸⁸ In this context, it is important to highlight Zürcher's assertion that the image portrayed by Russians of Chechens as Islamist fundamentalists using guerrilla warfare and sporadic terrorism is not accurate because it originally started as a secular political nation-state project.⁸⁹ However, although the conflict in Chechnya might have begun with a clear political agenda and fairly little religious aspects, over time, it became a magnet attracting Jihadist fighters from all over the Arab world. While it cannot be said that the Chechen nation as a whole fell prey to them, they had a significant impact on the nature of this war. Zürcher argues that Islamism provided an overarching identity to a tribal society enabling the unification of otherwise quarrelling clans⁹⁰, with the victory bringing about a feeling of religious euphoria.⁹¹ Thus, while it is hard to judge if Islamism was the cause and ensuing terror the effect, or if the first war itself could be seen as a direct or indirect reason for radicalising the Chechen society, it is true that Russia had to deal with the consequences of radical Islamism in Chechnya, including the numerous terrorist acts committed by Chechen groups.⁹² It also provided Russia an opportunity to portray the whole Chechen cause as one of radical Islamist terrorism. What is more, in the context of infighting among different factions, Russia, once again, partnered with the clan representing a moderate strand, that of Chief Mufti Ahmat Kadyrov.

On the whole, drawing on the patterns emerging from Russia's relations with its Muslim people, it can be argued that it has largely followed the same model in Syria. The chaos of the civil war and the rise of radical Islamism gave Russia a licence to intervene, even at the price of bringing back the much discredited Assad. While it is yet to be seen if Assad will maintain

⁸⁸ Zürcher 2007, p. 70.

⁸⁹ As Zürcher claims, Chechnya was one of Soviet Union's poorest regions and later served as a pool for recruiting rebels. It became a part of the Tsarist Empire after half a century of fighting. Chechens consider the beginning of Russian rule as the first of a series of genocidal attacks on their people. See *ibid.*, p 71–72.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 88–89.

⁹¹ See **Gammer, M.** 2006. 'The Lone Wolf and the Bear: Three Centuries of Chechen Defiance of Russian Rule'. London: C. Hurst & Co.

⁹² According to de Waal, one of the Jihadist centres connecting Chechnya to the outside world was the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia where terrorist training camps were located. See **de Waal** 2010, p. 190.

his hold on power, or whether Russia and the West can deliver a peaceful solution, Russia's conduct in Syria provides grounds for positing that Russia's experience with Muslims at home has had a significant influence on its policy in the Middle East.

Finally, it must be mentioned that Russia seems to have sophisticated its policy towards both domestic and foreign Muslims to a considerable degree. At the same time, the Donbass War in Ukraine and tensions with the West after the imposition of sanctions, have pushed Russia to retreat from the West's 'war on terrorism'. According to Akhmetova, Russia's foreign policy has instead turned towards the Muslim East, particularly Turkey, becoming more cautious with regard to Islam and Muslims.⁹³ As she sees it, what contributed to this new position was the fact that for a long period "the Islamic factor was used in the country's foreign policy ... to corroborate the claim about Russia's special place in global politics, about its 'intermediary' situation as a Eurasian state which enables it to play the part of a bridge between the Muslim world and the West".⁹⁴ In this context, it is only understandable that in June 2005 Russia was granted an observer status in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

5. The Role of the Middle East, Syria, and ISIS in Russia's Strategy: A Discussion

This chapter will examine Russia's strategy in Syria and in the wider Middle East, while also looking into the role of ISIS and speculating about the possible future trajectories of Russian-Western relations.

Previous chapters have analysed the basic assumptions informing Russian and Western activities in the Middle East. The authors have highlighted that despite its relatively limited economic resources, Russia has nevertheless managed to achieve considerable military and political success. Could this be attributed merely to the effective management of its activities in the region? Although that aspect cannot be discounted, our analysis has indicated that there are several basic assumptions that work against the success of the West while simultaneously favouring Russia. The pragmatic objectives associated with Russia's so-called regionalist doctrine, in its neutrality, are more acceptable for the regional powers, as compared to the Western conditionality,

⁹³ Akhmetova 2016, p 7.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

legitimated by democratic requirements. However, even if locals see Russia as different from the traditional culprits (i.e. former colonial rulers and importers of foreign values), this position remains debatable. Thus, it could be argued that the newly emergent confrontation between Russia and the West seems to have served Russia well. This is perhaps best visible in the fact that all regional powers now recognise Russia as a major power broker in the Middle East. At the same time, it would be quite difficult to imagine that any Western power would be able to achieve that status as easily as Russia. What is more, we should not discount the important role Russian diplomacy has played in acquiring this status. Thus, it can be argued that professionalism coupled with a conducive environment has led Russia to enjoy its current success in the Middle East.

This chapter analyses what all this success means with regard to Russia's strategic goals. Drawing on the previous chapters, the authors distinguish between three major objectives within Russia's strategy in the Middle East that align perfectly with its Eurasian Power concept. First, Russia will strive to maintain control in Syria, if not securing Assad's rule, then at least retaining its king-maker powers, enabling it to build up and sustain its strategic foothold, both political and military, both in Syria and in the Middle East. Second, Russia wants to become and remain a major, if not the primary, power broker in the region, requiring it to develop strong relations with major regional powers. Third, through its newly acquired status in Syria and in the Middle East, Russia strives to assert its great power status globally. According to the concept of 'Eurasian Power', Russia sees itself as moving away from the (once potentially close) partnership with the West, instead seeing itself as pushed away by the West (especially by the U.S.). At the same time, Russia views itself as making a new strategic choice of contributing to the multipolar world instead of the old unipolar one. The Middle East has proven to be the best arena to demonstrate the implications of that choice. Maintaining regional stability is not simply vital to Russia's own geopolitical interests in terms of controlling potentially dangerous choke points; it appears pre-eminently to align with the new idea of Eurasia as a single security area whose central relevance is understood by all major powers, from the U.S. and Europe to China. By being able to control one of the region's central nations (Syria), as well as being able to convene all major powers and balance their diverse interests, Russia has demonstrated both its

military and diplomatic capabilities and by contributing to the stability of the region, it is entitled to claim respect and support.⁹⁵

This is where relations between Russia and the West come under the spotlight, and in that regard, also the special role of ISIS. Russia's role in maintaining (relative) peace and stability in the region makes it a valuable partner for the West, especially with regard to countering ISIS. While the U.S. may consider reducing its presence in the region and not feel the consequences anytime soon, it must be borne in mind that ISIS has global power projection ability, particularly towards Europe. If Russia has proved and will continue to prove to be able to keep ISIS under (at least territorial) control, it will have earned practical support from the U.S. and the EU, perhaps also from China.

It has become clear that for Russia, ISIS is the only discernible adversary in the region. Though Russia's Sunni connections may have intimidated otherwise, its clash with the interests of the more or less moderate Sunni opposition, have not been detrimental in the eyes of the major Sunni powers such as Saudi Arabia or Turkey. Instead, these nations have, even if indirectly, also approved Russia's goal of securing Assad's regime. For the Sunni powers in the Middle East, the most important aim appears to be enhanced regional stability. However, the West's recognition of Russia's role is also very significant. Even if the methods used by Russia, and especially by Assad, have been met with strong disapproval, Russia's own 'grand mission' has not fallen under much scrutiny.

Controlling ISIS may yet become an ambivalent motive inasmuch as it would give Russia the key to poke at one of the West's biggest vulnerabilities, both in terms of migration and terrorism. This ambivalent position towards ISIS will make for interesting speculations about the possible future trajectories of Russia's behaviour. However, it is not a one-way road, especially considering that ISIS's role appears to be even more pivotal, since Russia's justifications for remaining in the region will depend on ISIS's staying power; while there is also a risk that ISIS could take Russia hostage. This is not necessarily the case with regional powers, even if some of them may be using ISIS for waging their own proxy wars. For the regional powers, it is much more important that Russia has assumed the role of an arbiter between Shia and Sunni interests.

Finally, Russia's status in the Middle East may also impact its role in its immediate neighbourhood. Interestingly, it can be posited that while

⁹⁵ **Разговор по прямому поводу. Россия и США стали больше обсуждать борьбу с терроризмом и будущее Сирии.** – Kommersant, 21.09.2015. kommersant.ru/doc/2814812.

providing Russia with more confidence in pursuing its interests in the near abroad, its newly acquired power broker status in the Middle East will not allow for too much risk taking elsewhere. This assertion is reinforced by the fact that the regional power broker role assumed by Russia is beyond its economic means. This does not mean that Russia's political interests in the 'near abroad' will not remain the same, rather they may even increase. Russia will not back down from its interests in Ukraine, Belarus or Georgia, however, the way of handling those interests may be pushed from the recently preferred hybrid⁹⁶ and military grounds to the political plane.

Indeed, on that political plane, Russia's interests may find solid ground if the West chooses not to disturb Russia's position. What is more, it will probably push both parties towards negotiating compromises, meaning that the relations between Russia and the West (e.g. in Ukraine) may acquire a more diplomatic form and they may strike a *de facto* deal that recognises their interests in this 'near abroad'. Although the West may have little inclination to accept such eventuality, if it is interested in a relatively peaceful and stable Russia, it may be forced to come to terms with the fact that not all former republics of the Soviet Union will have the opportunity to integrate with the West. At the same time, this deal may still allow for strong economic relations between Ukraine and the West. While far from an ideal solution, it may offer Ukraine a chance to build up its economy and stabilise its society.

This last thread may be helpful in returning to the wider plane of strategic interests and political goals. Namely, in addition to the immediate gains that can be reaped from the Middle East, Russia may see its success in the region as a way to accomplish a long-term peace deal with the West. If Russia decides to become the watchdog of ISIS, it will also entail maintaining balance in the Middle East, which, in turn, may be a welcome development because that is exactly what the West is primarily interested in. If Russia manages to secure and maintain peace in the Middle East, the West may, in turn, close its eyes to certain methods Russia may use on the ground. Also, tasking Russia with policing the region, may gradually relieve the West from that responsibility. Indeed, this may even lead the West to take interest in the stability of not only the Middle East but also of Russia itself.

⁹⁶ Šliwa, Z.; Veebel, V.; Lebrun, M. 2018. Russian Ambitions and Hybrid Modes of Warfare. – *Sõjateadlane* (Estonian Journal of Military Studies), Vol. 7, pp. 86–108.

6. Conclusion

This article analysed the general conditions that made it possible for Russia to reach the enhanced status it currently enjoys in the Middle East. The article highlighted some general underlying presuppositions that may be said to have led to the failure on the part of the West. Among them, democratic legitimisation both at home and in the region were shown to play out negatively for those pursuits. Similarly, problems in defining an enemy straightforwardly and forming a clear front was discovered as having hampered the West in its pursuits in the Middle East. Finally, due to their colonial legacy and the imputation of the effects of globalised capitalism to the West, the overall context for any direct intervention by the West has generally been unwelcoming. In comparison, those very same circumstances have favoured Russia to a remarkable degree. First of all, Russia does not expect Middle Eastern nations to become democracies. What is more, there is also no need for Russia to legitimise such interventions at home. Secondly, Russia has found an ally in Syria's Bashar al-Assad, giving it liberty to execute a brutal campaign, which has given it a morally questionable but pragmatically beneficial handicap. Finally, regional powers are not intimidated by Russia's actions in the region as has been the case with the West.

As to Russia's strategy, it was established that since its 2015 intervention in Syria, Russia has gradually assumed the role of a regional power broker, which has been recognised by all major stakeholders in the region. For a time, it was a difficult position to achieve, since Russia was mainly associated with the Shia axis in the Middle East. However, this time it has managed to cast this image aside and become an acceptable partner also to the Sunni powers, not to mention Israel. Thus, in parallel to its activities in Syria, Russia has also been pursuing wider regional strategic goals in the Middle East. As a result, it can be argued that Russia has effectuated a carefully planned and comprehensive strategy for the region as part of its wider global strategy. By focusing on the Middle East, Russia has not only come to the rescue of an old ally, but succeeded in securing one of the possible choke points that could restrict its access to the world's seas and markets. It was also established that by Russia's own standards, the campaigns in Syria and the power broker position in the Middle East contribute to its notion of being an Eurasian power.

The third thread of interest that the article pursued attempted to understand the manner in which Russia has approached and dealt with Muslim nations and the radical groups among them. Russia can be said to have

applied a sophisticated policy that, in addition to regional powers, is also able to address the Islamist tendencies and groups within. It was argued that Russia has most probably been applying the lessons it has learnt from its earlier policies towards Muslims and Islamism at home. While politically it seems to seek cooperation with moderate forces, then militarily it employs the kind of brutality that is characteristic of the heyday of the Tsarist Empire. In addition to its own long historical experience, of particular importance has been the conflict in Chechnya in the 1990s and 2000s. It could be argued that Russia allowed Chechens to develop internal divisions between radical and moderate Islamists in order to legitimise its brutal response and offer its own brand of stability. This pattern was found to be similar to the one Russia employed in Syria.

The fourth research question considered the potential future development of Russian-Western relations in the Middle East and beyond, focusing on the role of ISIS that has served as the primary justification for Russia's intervention in the eyes of the West. However, there is also the wider role of power broker and custodian that Russia has assumed in the region which the West has more or less explicitly acknowledged. Indeed, as was argued, this role makes the Russian Federation a rather useful, if still ambivalent, ally for the West in the regional and thereby also in global matters. Although the West does not always officially approve of Russia's conduct, it has nevertheless been tolerated. Considering that both parties share the aim of stabilising the Middle East, the West seems to be willing to turn a half-blind eye in some circumstances. In addition, it was speculated that it would be in the West's interest to forge a mutually acceptable peace agreement in Ukraine in order not to destabilise Russia.

In this context, Russia's regional, as well as global, position and prospects appear to present an interesting paradox. On the one hand, Russia has relied on brutal methods to achieve its goals in Syria, while at the same time, striving to become a power broker and guarantor of peace in the region. As such, Russia has been performing a precarious balancing act on the precipice of its economic means and stature. This role of a regional power broker, as much as it can be said to have obtained it, may also have a civilising effect on Russia. This enhanced status is not something that Russia would want to endanger carelessly, especially as it has finally brought it back to the league of major world powers. On the other hand, this new status is also something that Russia is still in danger of losing due to its limited economic prowess. What is more, considering the vital importance of this newly acquired status to Russia, both regionally and globally, it will have to tone down its bravado

to avoid losing it. Therefore, while Russia may still find it expedient to use the types of brutal methods it has demonstrated in Syria, the emphasis of its activities will presumably shift towards maintaining and bolstering the role of the custodian of peace in the Middle East. The significance of this position for Russia cannot be overestimated, especially considering how useful it makes Russia for the West. This, in turn, means that the West will become more interested in maintaining a stable Russia. On the whole, since Russia cannot afford to continue with provocations as it has been accustomed to before, this new role may encourage Russia to become a more stabilising, and hence also more civilising force on the global arena as well.

Finally, in the context of Russian-Western relations it was speculated that Russia, as ISIS's watchdog, may be tempted to use ISIS to put pressure on the West (e.g. through migration, etc.). However, considering Russia's enhanced status in the eyes of the West for having achieved something that the West itself has not been able to, it will mean that while Russia's position will not be challenged, it will not be apt to use ISIS to threaten the West.

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THE POLITICO-MILITARY ASPECTS OF RUSSIAN ENGAGEMENT IN THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

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Abstract: The Civil War that erupted in Syria in 2011 has become a critical conflict in the Middle East, leading to the political and military involvement of the Russian Federation, the U.S., Turkey and other regional powers. Russia's direct engagement against the opposition fighting the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has proved to be a game-changer, contributing to the fight against extremist movements, namely ISIS and other similar organizations. The conflict has highlighted the confrontation of interests among the nations involved (especially Russia and the U.S.) and the Russian desire to be recognized again as a global player. For the Russian armed forces, it has provided an opportunity to train its soldiers in combat and to test weapon systems in the conditions of real warfare. With its involvement in Syria, Russia has also gained access to the Mediterranean and the opportunity to extend the reach of its anti-access/area denial weapons systems and to verify the effectiveness of various war tactics and procedures still under development.

Keywords: Syria, Middle East, Russian armed forces, combat operations, international relations

1. Introduction

The instability in the Middle East, as demonstrated by the 'Arab Spring' and other democratically motivated revolutions, was an unexpected development for the West, and especially for Europe, causing significant concern among political and economic elites. Reliable former 'friends' and business partners, such as Muammar Gaddafi, disappeared in a relatively short time span, leaving behind only dust and rumours, which are still floating around the Middle East. Such regime changes also affect the ownership of natural resources and pipelines and the overall instability, which has fostered the emergence of radical movements. The latter has already proved to be a serious threat to Western democracies but also has the potential to impact security in a much broader region. The threat of expanding terrorism also affects the Russian Federation, and is one of the underlying motivating factors behind its attempts to stabilise the region by enhancing its influence over selected countries, while, at the same time, trying to curtail the influence of the U.S.

and other Western nations on regional leaders. As such, this seems to be a long-term vision and one of the most important aspects of Russian foreign policy, with Syria at its centre. Currently Russia is continuing the confrontation of interests, which is reminiscent of the Cold War, when ideology played a decisive role in the drive to achieve strategic dominance and control of natural resources. The Middle East (*Средний Восток* in Russian) is a very complex and extremely unstable region due to its divergent cultures, religions, ethnic groups, and nations ranging from poor to extremely wealthy, coupled with local leaders' ambitions and the internal struggle for regional dominance. Furthermore, its location at the crossroads of Eurasia and Africa, surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean, is an important factor related to land and sea lines of communications. What is more, the geographical location of the region is also important from the perspective of the locations of critical oil and gas pipelines, and gaining control over the distribution of strategic goods.

The 'colour revolutions' in the Middle East and the war in Syria have been borne out of harsh autocratic regimes, which were opposed, especially by younger generations, with the resulting social inequality and corruption causing unnecessary suffering for the civilian population in the form of war and also by activating radical and terrorist organizations. The side effect was an influx of immigrants looking for safety and security in neighbouring countries and in Europe. The competition among regional players proved once more that security is not guaranteed forever and there is always the potential of igniting a war that will impact all involved parties and many other entities as well.

The aim of this article is to present an overview of the political and economic interests of the Russian Federation along with its military involvement in the Middle East, based on Russia's national interests and desire for international recognition as an actor that is able to implement its own strategic priorities beyond its national borders. Although the focus is on the Russian military presence supporting Syria's governmental forces, there are some underlying political ambitions as well. Russia's pragmatic policy in relation to the assessment of the situation in Syria at the beginning of the war led to successful military deployment, enabling Russia to preserve its national interests both in Syria and also in the larger Middle East region. The operations conducted by the Russian military have proved to be very useful for further development of its armed forces, especially in terms of upgrading its capabilities, while also bolstering its recognition in the Middle East and worldwide. This has also created new markets for the Russian military

industry that can provide new weapon systems for battle-testing to see how they stack up against other suppliers. However, it seems that Russia's military involvement has mainly been a means for leaving a political and economic footprint in the region, along with regaining international recognition as a major player that is able to contribute effectively to ensuring security and stability in endangered regions. The first part of this article focuses on the political and strategic interests of the Russian Federation and the second part provides an overview and presents estimates of the utilization of respective services of the Russian armed forces in the Syrian Civil War.

2. Russia's Foreign Policy and its Strategic Goals

The Russian encyclopaedia defines the Middle East within the informal definition used by European nations describing the region stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to Pakistan, covering Southwest Asia and North Africa, including the Arabian Peninsula.¹ In the South, it is bordered by the Sahara desert and in the north by the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. Looking eastwards, it extends to the Indian subcontinent and in the west to the Aegean Sea. In terms of political geography, the Near and Middle East includes Egypt and the Arab countries lying east of it, along with Israel, Turkey and Iran. Sometimes Afghanistan, Pakistan, Cyprus and the countries of North Africa – Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya and Sudan are also considered Middle Eastern countries.²

The initial period of Russian post-Soviet foreign policy under the leadership of President Yeltsin was perceived by other nations quite favourably, even though Russia itself was embroiled in an internal power struggle while also suffering from economic problems. The perception of Russia as a security threat diminished markedly along with hopes for cooperation instead of competition. As a result of inner turmoil, Russia was forced to refocus on domestic issues, which temporarily led to regions such as the Middle East taking a back seat on the foreign policy agenda, although they were never totally forgotten. The change in Russia's top leadership, the transfer of power from Yeltsin to Putin, led to the revision of foreign policy

¹ **Средний Восток.** – Академик 2000–2019. https://world_countries.academic.ru/1273 (25.08.2019).

² **Ближний и Средний Восток.** – Универсальная научно-популярная энциклопедия Кругосвет. https://www.krugosvet.ru/enc/Earth_sciences/geografiya/BLIZHNI_I_SREDNI_VOSTOK.html (25.08.2019).

priorities, refocusing once again on rebuilding its ‘great power’ status both at the regional as well as global level, with a view to becoming one of the superpowers in the new multipolar balance of powers. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia’s foreign policy was struggling to find its footing, until the 2008 war with Georgia brought it back into prominence on the global stage; a more confrontational approach could clearly be seen, along with increasing investments in its military capabilities³.

In 2014, the annexation of Crimea and the war in Ukraine corroborated the revisionist outlook of Russia’s foreign policy, while also demonstrating the capabilities of its modernized armed forces as an integral part of Russia’s ‘new generation warfare’ concept⁴. Although the focus of Russia’s activities in the international arena was closely intertwined with its domestic policy and the concept of shared neighbourhood or the so-called ‘near abroad’, encompassing former Soviet republics, Moscow has not limited itself to that geographic area alone. One of its potential targets was the destabilized Middle East, which possesses numerous advantages such as its geo-strategic location and economic factors, as the potential playground to deny and challenge U.S. interests and the West’s influence. According to Dmitry Gorenburg, “Russia’s key goals in the region are to reduce instability while increasing its own influence and reducing that of the United States.”⁵ The limited U.S. footprint was one of the consequences of its difficult experience in Iraq after the regular war had ended yet continued in the form of confrontations with rebels. At the same time, the ‘Arab Spring’ was seen in Moscow with some trepidation as it was interpreted as a follow-up to the ‘colour revolutions’ that had led to the overthrow of autocratic regimes, followed by strengthened influence of the U.S. and Western European nations in

³ **Rywkin, M.** 2008. Russia: In Quest of Superpower Status. – American Foreign Policy Interests, Vol 30(1), p. 13; and **Jacques, J.** 2017. Russia’s Return to Superpower Status. – The Trumpet, September 14. <https://www.thetrumpet.com/15647-russias-return-to-superpower-status> (18.11.2019).

⁴ **Герасимов, В.** 2013. Ценность Науки в Предвидении. Новые вызовы требуют переосмыслить формы и способы ведения боевых действий. – Военно-промышленный курьер, No 8 (476), 27.02.2013, Москва. <http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632> (12.11.2019) [**Герасимов** 2013]; **Berzins, J.** 2019. Not ‘Hybrid’ but New Generation Warfare. – Howard, G. E. *et al.* (eds.). Russia’s Military Strategy and Doctrine. The Jamestown Foundation, February 2019, pp. 157–184; **Mattsson, P. A.** 2015. Russian Military Thinking – A New Generation of Warfare. – Journal on Baltic Security, Vol. 1, Issue 1, pp. 61–70.

⁵ **Gorenburg, D.** 2016. Russia’s Strategic Calculus: Threat Perceptions and Military Doctrine. Harvard University: Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, 15 November 2016. [**Gorenburg** 2016] <https://russiamil.wordpress.com/tag/russian-foreign-policy/> (12.10.2019).

the respective countries and in the whole region. The threats perceived by the current Russian leadership led to the emergence of the concept of “new generation warfare” developed under the auspices of General Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia. The so-called Gerasimov doctrine stipulates that there is already an on-going war against Russia, aimed at changing the government using ‘colour revolutions’ and utilising hybrid-type activities.⁶ This has also been pointed out by military analyst Aleksander Golts, referring to an announcement made by an official of the Russian Ministry of Defence that “‘colour revolutions’ were a new type of warfare that the West had developed” in the context of threats.⁷ Such ‘colour revolutions’ have already taken place in Central Asia and the Caucasus, which were seen in Moscow as being potentially dangerous due to their potential to “ignite Russia’s geopolitical ‘underbelly’.”⁸

Subsequently, interventions in Libya, and potentially in Syria, were also seen as an attempt to interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign states. Therefore, Russia, along with China, vetoed the UN Security Council resolutions to impose sanctions on Syria. At the same time, it strongly condemned the U.S. and NATO for actions taken in Syria. Historically, this is an interesting case, considering Russia’s decisive action in Kosovo in 1999 (seizing an airport), and subsequent wars in Georgia in 2008 (South Ossetia, Abkhazia) and in Ukraine in 2014 (Crimea, East Ukraine), using armed forces to violate the territorial integrity of sovereign nations. According to Dan Goure, these ventures were based on skilful use of propaganda, the cyber domain, fake news, bribery, paramilitary forces and also something called ‘*lawfare*’, which has been defined as “the strategy of using – or misusing – law as a substitute for traditional military means to achieve an operational objective”⁹ to undermine the adversary’s morale and its capacity to respond and resist.

Russia’s decision to intervene in Syria was based on the assessment that Assad’s chances of survival could be significant, but only if supported by

⁶ **Герасимов** 2013, *op. cit.*, and also in: **Thomas, T.** 2016. Thinking Like A Russian Officer: Basic Factors And Contemporary Thinking On The Nature of War. Fort Leavenworth: The Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO), April 2016, pp. 16–19.

⁷ **Golts, A.** 2018. Military Reform and Militarisation in Russia. – Washington D.C.: Jamestown Foundation, December 2018, p. 253.

⁸ **Trenin, D.** 2018. What is Russia up to in the Middle East? Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 42. [Trenin 2018]

⁹ **Goure, D.** 2019. This Is How Russia Commits “Lawfare” Around The World. – The National Interest, November 3. <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/how-russia-commits-lawfare-around-world-93261> (18.11. 2019).

external forces. It proved to be a valid assessment, in contrast to the inaccurate judgement made by the administration of President Obama, based on the assumption that Assad would “not last long.”¹⁰ What is more, Russia has been historically supplying Syria with weapons¹¹, while also educating its officers in the Soviet Union. In return, Russia was granted access to the Syrian port of Tartus in the Mediterranean (upgraded from 2008), used for technical support of the Russian Navy. In 2017, the lease of the Russian navy base in Tartus, Syria was extended for 49 years, enabling Russia to host 11 warships (including nuclear-powered warships) in the Mediterranean. It is a critical win for the Russian Navy since other alternatives in that region are no longer available due to NATO and EU expansion. Moreover, there is a listening post in Tel Al-Hara, Syria, enabling the monitoring of Israeli armed forces, a close U.S. ally in the region. Another example is “the recent establishment of SA21 radars and missile infrastructure in eastern Syria that helps extend the air defence coverage of the Russian Federation over sovereign Turkish (NATO) airspace, including the Incirlik Airbase from where U.S. aircraft operate against terrorists in Syria.”¹²

What proved to be important was that the two nations have been linked by the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation concluded in 1980 between the Soviet Union and the Syrian Arab Republic; the treaty is not a formal alliance but rather an avenue for military cooperation, with the treaty text stating that:

*in the occurrence of situations jeopardizing peace or security for either party, the two parties would promptly contact each other to coordinate positions and cooperate to eliminate emerging threats so that peace can be restored.*¹³

Referring to that document, the Syrian government formally asked for such assistance on 30 September 2015; the request was accepted by the Russian

¹⁰ **Trenin** 2018, p. 49.

¹¹ **Kuimova, A.** 2019. Russia’s Arms Exports to the MENA Region: Trends and Drivers. EUROMESCO Policy Brief, April 01, pp. 8–9.

¹² **Nicholson, J.** 2018. NATO’s Land Forces: Strength and Speed Matter. – PRISM, Vol. 6, No. 2. Washington, National Defence University, July 18, p. 36.

¹³ **Syria, USSR Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation Which Remains in Force.** 2015, quoted in Sputnik News, October 01. <https://sputniknews.com/middleeast/201510011027817141-Treaty-of-Friendship-Cooperation-Between-USSR-Syria-Which-Remains-in-Force/> (12.09.2019).

government and the Federation Council (i.e. the upper house of the Russian parliament) on the same day.

The Middle East is a special case in the Russian foreign policy framework, as it is closely linked with Russia's ambition to be recognized as a global player once again, as someone who is able to compete with the U.S. for recognition and influence. To that end, Russia has decided to pursue this new opportunity to normalise relations with Iran, taking advantage of the change of leadership in Turkey, the fragile situation in Iraq and the destabilization of the whole region due to changes in governments. The Russian interventions in the Middle East have been aiming to enhance its political footprint and international prestige, something that Moscow has been building up slowly. An important element of this approach is also its domestic aspect, i.e. to demonstrate to the Russian society the strength of the country's leadership which is able to reconstitute the desired image of Russia as a great nation. In that aspect, Russia has not only demonstrated power but has also at the same time proposed some peace-related initiatives together with the U.S., although with limited success. Striving to play an even more prominent role, Russia initiated a series of peace talks between the Syrian envoy in Turkey and the representatives of rebel factions, with Russia, Turkey and Iran serving as mediators. According to a report presented to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the secondary aim of Russia's intervention in Syria "was probably also to force NATO Allies and the West to talk with Russia and break its isolation since its aggression against Ukraine."¹⁴ The problem is that thus far, Russia's resources have been limited to influence the situation politically and economically, and therefore, initially, Russia's only option was to provide military support for President Bashar al-Assad. Such support offered to the Syrian government proved that "Russia has regained strength and is willing to act aggressively in international relations."¹⁵ However, in the course of the crisis, other political alternatives have opened up, due to the fact that the support from Moscow has allowed the current government to survive. What is more, Russia has even taken on the role of a mediator, assuming an increasingly important role in the region, thereby indicating to other nations as well that it is seeking to restore its status as an important geopolitical player. This stance was particularly visible during the Turkish offensive launched against

¹⁴ **Juknevičienė, R.** 2017. Russia: From Partner to Competitor. General Report. Brussels: NATO Parliamentary Assembly, October 07, p. 8. <https://www.nato-pa.int/document/2017-russia-juknevičienė-report-170-pc-17-e-rev1-fin>.

¹⁵ **Robinson, N.** 2018. Contemporary Russian Politics. Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 238.

the Kurds in North Syria, where Russia was in a position to negotiate the Turkish ‘safe zone’ in Syria after the withdrawal of U.S. troops. The agreement was recognized as “a ‘big success’ by Donald Trump, although his critics say it cements Russia’s role as the prime power broker in the Middle East after the U.S. president’s announcement that American special forces would withdraw from the area.”¹⁶ However, it could be argued that Russia’s foreign policy was eyeing more pragmatic gains, due to the threat created by terrorist movements linked to radicals in Central Asia. There has been strong indication that those groups could potentially also influence former Soviet republics in that region, posing a direct threat to Russia. Therefore, fighting those groups far away from national borders and on the territory of other nations was an important security factor for Russia. From a military point of view, it was important for Russia to test its new weapon systems in actual combat conditions and to demonstrate its capabilities, while also promoting its national military industry. According to a statement by Russian Minister of Defence Sergey Shoygu, “300 models of weapons have been updated, and 12 models of promising weapons have been withdrawn from production and service in the Russian forces”¹⁷ since testing their capabilities in combat in Syria. This practice has enhanced the prestige of Russian armed forces. Moreover, as stated by President Putin “there is no more efficient way of training than real combat”¹⁸ and for many prototypes, it was their first deployment in battle.

3. The Military Aspects of Russia’s Intervention in Syria

After Russia adopted its new approach to modern warfare – also known as ‘*new generation warfare*’ or ‘*hybrid warfare*’ – the conflict in Syria has proved to be an important asset in many aspects from the perspective of the

¹⁶ **McKernan, B.** 2019. Russia steps up its presence in north-east Syria after Turkey deal. – The Guardian, October 23. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/23/russia-steps-up-presence-north-east-syria-after-turkey-deal> (25.10.2019).

¹⁷ **Syria serves as a “military school” for Russian forces and a “testing ground” to test its weapons.** 2019. – The Levant News, September 27. <https://thelevantnews.com/en/2019/09/syria-serves-as-a-military-school-for-russian-forces-and-a-testing-ground-to-test-its-weapons/> (26.10.2019).

¹⁸ **Isachenkov, V.** 2016. President Vladimir Putin has signalled Russia’s intention to maintain a high-profile role in Syria despite its partial military withdrawal. – U.S. News & World Report, March 17. <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2016-03-17/putin-russia-can-rebuild-its-syria-forces-in-a-few-hours> (25.10.2019).

military. The tenets of Russia's new generation warfare were presented in theoretical literature, tactics for fighting irregular forces were implemented and tested in combat, troops were trained in actual conditions of war, and the effectiveness of new weapon platforms was also verified. For Russia, Syria offered a kind of laboratory for experimentation, and it continues to be very important for ensuring Russia's own national security as it is facing internal threats coming from radicalised groups and, as expressed in political rhetoric, fending off external aggression coming from NATO. At an estimated cost of 4 million USD per day¹⁹, it can be considered quite affordable. As pointed out by Stephen Covington:

This experimentation continues, informed further by the development of theory, execution of strategic exercises, and absorption of lessons learned from their military experiences notably in Ukraine and Syria. Moscow's military experimentation appears to center on building operational and strategic flexibility to create as many military options as possible for its security, while simultaneously denying its opponents the same flexibility.²⁰

In this context, a significant role was played by the newly formed Russian Aerospace Forces (*Воздушно-космические силы*), reorganised in 2015 by merging the Russian Air Force and its Aerospace Defence Forces. The Syrian intervention enabled Russia to test the new command and control structure, its effectiveness in joint operations and in terms of logistics, especially in ensuring the sustainment of operations. Additionally, these operations were supported by the Russian Navy with fire support. Concurrently, land forces were also used for various tasks but their combat deployment was not as intensive as in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989, recognizing that large-scale personnel and equipment losses in these types of situations are unavoidable. Furthermore, the Russian military also used large-scale exercises to train its units for future operations in Syria. For example, "Center 2015", the largest military exercise conducted that year, served as the dress rehearsal for Syria (e.g. the terrain was chosen based on characteristics of the future area of operations in Syria, and tactics used for fighting terrorists and irregular forces were based on experiences from Chechnya and Afghanistan). The exercise engaged all service branches, focusing on the testing of unmanned

¹⁹ **Trenin** 2018, p. 79.

²⁰ **Covington, S.** 2016. *The Culture of Strategic Thought Behind Russia's Modern Approaches to Warfare*. Cambridge: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, p. 40.

platforms and electronic warfare assets, with a special role given to close air support and long range artillery fire meant for attacking selected targets.²¹

The exercise proved to be extremely useful in preparing troops for a completely novel operational environment and returning back to tactics used in Afghanistan and Chechnya.

The Role of the Russian Air Force in the Syrian Conflict

The Russian air force deployed in Syria in 2015 comprised 32 multirole aircraft organized as a special purpose air brigade, including: Su-24M front-line bomber, Su-34 fighter-bomber/strike, Su-30SM multirole fighter, and Su-25SM ground attack. They were complemented by another 18 airframes, among them: Il-20M1 special mission electronic signals intelligence, Mi-24P attack helicopters and Mi-8AMTSh armoured assault helicopters. The Russian air component was based at the Khmeimim air base near the city of Latakia, Syria. Over the next couple of years, the exact number of deployed aircraft varied, reaching the lowest number in March 2016 when President Putin announced a partial troop withdrawal. Nevertheless, the overall role of the Russian air force proved to be quite significant in supporting Syrian governmental forces, especially as the adversary was not in possession of similar assets. In addition, the Russian air force also conducted long-range strikes using strategic bombers (Tu-22M3, Tu-160 and Tu-95MS) operating from the Olenya / Olenegorsk air base, in the Kola Peninsula, Russia. According to reports, it was a “mammoth 8,000-mile show of strength as they flew around the edge of Europe to fire missiles at Syria”²² to demonstrate strategic strike capabilities, especially considering that those aircraft also carry nuclear missiles. Those missions were also supported by A-50 AWACS aircraft. Overall, the war in Syria offered several important advantages to the Russian air force. Firstly, it offered an opportunity to test the newly-formed Russian Aerospace Forces in the new command and control structure, with the added opportunity to test the coordination of different types of aircraft both in a direct ground attack role but also in conducting long-range strikes.

²¹ **Buvaltsev, I.; Faliczew, O.** 2015. Ближний Восток на Южном Урале (The Middle East in Southern Ural). – Military-Industrial Courier, Issue No 608, November 24. <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/27827> (04.09.2019).

²² **Farmer, B.** 2015. Russian bombers fly around Europe to strike Syria in 8,000 mile show of strength. – The Telegraph, November 20. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/12009123/Russian-bombers-fly-around-Europe-to-strike-Syria-in-8000-mile-show-of-strength.html> (12.09.2019).

Secondly, another important element was the coordination of air attacks with local forces to assess its effectiveness in both attacking ISIS's military targets and destroying their supply routes and oil trade infrastructure. Concurrently, Russian presence in the Syrian airspace prevented other regional actors (especially Turkey and partially also Israel) from conducting air attacks against Syrian troops. The scale of the air strikes conducted by Russian aircraft and the ability to sustain their intensity demonstrated that Russian forces were largely up to the task, something that was under question before the war. Ultimately, Russia's intervention in Syria can be seen as a significant boost to Russia's self-confidence and, overall, the Russian armed forces can be said to have demonstrated reliable capabilities. Moreover, it has proved Russia's claims of being a modern and capable power with force projection capabilities. From a marketing perspective, it can also be considered a rather successful promotion of the national military industry.

Thus, Putin's decision to intervene in Syria in 2016 proved critical, managing to significantly shore up President Assad's forces as its "new fighter jets, military advisers and advanced weapons stopped the bleeding of the Syrian army and allowed it to shift from defence to offence."²³

In addition to testing novel airframes, the war also served as a testing ground for air defence systems, organized in three layers, protecting military bases operated by Russian units. For example, the air base in Khmeimim was protected in the following manner: Layer 1 – the S-400 and S-200VE long-range systems; Layer 2 – the S-300FM Fort-M and Buk-M2E medium-range systems; and Layer 3 – the Osa-AKM and S-125 Pechora-2M SHORAD systems.²⁴ Finally, the Pantsir-S1 close protection system and S-400 units also contributed to the protection of the air base in question. Such protective cover was aimed to prevent attacks against Russian aircraft and to disrupt air strikes by third parties against Syrian targets. However, their utilization proved challenging, as they were often not activated to avoid engaging U.S. or Israeli aircraft, focusing mainly on the protection of Russia's own assets, rather than the positions of Syrians or Iranians. However, U.S. air

²³ **Gerges, F. A.** 2016. Syria war: Tide turns Assad's way amid ceasefire push. – BBC News, February 13. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35562943> (24.10.2019).

²⁴ For more information: **Khodaryonok, M.** 2016. Three layers of Russian air defense at Hmeymim air base in Syria. – TASS News Agency, February 09. <https://tass.com/defense/855430> (24.10.2019), and **Näbig, R.** 2019. Russia's anti-air & air defense systems in Syria: more for show than substance? 2019. – Offiziere.ch, September 12. <https://www.offiziere.ch/?p=36518> (24.10. 2019). [**Näbig** 2019]

force operations and Israeli attacks, using aircraft and drones to saturate air defences, demonstrated the limitations of these Russian defensive assets.

What is more, these combat operations caused losses to the Russians, to the air force in particular, given the fact that air force assets were used most intensively. It is estimated that as of September 2018, Russia had lost 17 aircraft both in combat and also as a result of accidents.²⁵ In November 2018, a devastating incident that destroyed a Su-24M was linked to an attack by the Turkish air force. During these operations, Russia also lost one Il-20M1, which was mistakenly shot down in September 2018 by a Syrian S-200 medium-to-high altitude surface-to-air missile during an Israeli F-16 attack against targets in the Latakia province. This was interpreted by Russian authorities as a provocation considering that they received no prior warning from Israel with regard to Russian aircraft not being allowed to leave the planned area of attack, exposing it to Syrian S-200 system²⁶; as a result, in October 2018, Russia delivered “the long-promised three S-300 batteries to Syria.”²⁷ In addition, a few helicopters were damaged or destroyed by ground fire during search and rescue missions and due to technical problems. Russia also lost some UAV type Orlan-10 used for various missions (mainly reconnaissance, collecting aerial imagery or 3D-mapping) that were destroyed by rebels but also by the Turkish air force after violating their national airspace. Additionally, there were some non-combat losses due to crash landings or due to technical problems. It is important to note that some losses are attributable to ISIS and other rebel groups that possess only limited anti-air capabilities, not comparable to the modern armed forces of leading world powers. However, those losses were not always made public (e.g. those suffered by the private military company ‘Wagner’ during a battle near Deir ez-Zor, although it resulted in the deaths of several Russian citizens; in comparison to the public condemnation that followed after Turkey shot down Su-24M that resulted in the death of one of the pilots who was posthumously awarded the Hero of the Russian Federation, the country’s highest military honour). Thus, it could be surmised that compared to other nations, in Russia there is still relatively high acceptance that incurring casualties in war is just

²⁵ McCarthy, N. 2018. Aircraft Lost During The Syrian Civil War. – Statista, September 18. <https://www.statista.com/chart/15492/estimated-number-of-aircraft-shot-down-or-destroyed-in-accidents-in-syria/> (24.10. 2019).

²⁶ Rosyjski Il-20 zestrzelony u wybrzeży Syrii 2018. – Altair Agencja Lotnicza, September 18. https://www.altair.com.pl/news/view?news_id=26150 (24.10. 2019).

²⁷ Nābig 2019, *op. cit.*

par for the course; however, it is not something to be dismissed – it matters and is used strategically for publicity purposes.

The Role of the Russian Navy in the Syrian Conflict

In October 2015, the Russian Navy launched its operations in Syria, demonstrating its new capability by employing a new weapon system – the ‘*Kalibr*’ ship-launched cruise missiles. These missiles were launched using the *Buyan*-class missile corvettes from the “Caspian Sea and flew across Iran and northern Iraq to reach their targets”²⁸. As such, it constituted a test of a new weapon system that served the parallel function of demonstrating to other nations Russia’s ability to reach targets within the range of approximately 2,500 kilometres. This test was repeated later when Kilo-class submarines ‘*Veliky Novgorod*’ and ‘*Kolpino*’ launched ‘*Kalibr*’ missiles against ISIS targets from a submerged position. The fact that those missiles can be launched from coastal defence systems, long-range aircraft, and submarines using anti-ship, land-attack, and anti-submarine variants, poses a challenge for deploying U.S. troops to Europe in case of armed conflict. The actual results and effectiveness of those missiles is not yet clear, but such tests will enable the Russian navy to improve their accuracy, making those types of missiles even more dangerous. The presence of the Russian navy was also demonstrated by the guided missile cruiser ‘*Moskva*’, which was replaced in the spring of 2016 by its sister guided missile cruiser ‘*Varyag*’, a flagship of the Russian naval task force in the Mediterranean. Both types of cruisers contributed to the air defence of Russia’s naval facility in Tartus, Syria. Additionally, Russian armed forces also deployed the ‘*Bastion*’ anti-surface mobile coastal defence missile system for extended protection. However, the most notable deployment was that of the ‘*Admiral Kuznetsov*’ aircraft carrier, sailing from Kola Bay to the Mediterranean in October 2016, accompanied by the heavy nuclear missile cruiser ‘*Piotr Velikiy*’, two destroyers and several other vessels. It was escorted by the United Kingdom’s Royal Navy. Its operations in support of air strikes were discussed primarily in the context of aircraft losses (e.g. one of Russia’s MiG-29KUB crashed during take-off and Su-33S crashed during landing due to the malfunction of an arrestor cable).

²⁸ **Russian missiles ‘hit IS in Syria from Caspian Sea’**. 2015. – BBC News, October 07. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34465425> (04.09.2019).



Figure 1. Russian military bases in Syria²⁹

The deployment of the *'Admiral Kuznetsov'* aircraft carrier had a primarily symbolic meaning as those aircraft were later launched from an air field, not to mention that their deployment from Russia would have been less problematic by just flying them in. Thus, it could be surmised that the deployment of an aircraft carrier was motivated by Russia's desire to demonstrate stronger force projection abilities to distant regions. However this 'demonstration' did not succeed in that regard, revealing the shortcomings of the Russian Navy in this category of warships. Subsequently, the Russian navy has been constantly present in the region, reaching significant numbers in 2018, demonstrating force projection and the ability to conduct naval exercises with approximately 25 warships and 30 aircraft. In addition, the Russian Navy continued its mission related to the protection of sea lines of communication, essential for the sustainment of the military detachment in Syria using the seaports of Tartus and Latakia.

²⁹ Composed on the basis of information presented in: **Russia builds four new air bases in Syria, deploys another 6,000 troops.** 2018. – Algora Blog. https://www.algora.com/Algora_blog/2018/02/02/russia-builds-four-new-air-bases-in-syria-deploys-another-6000-troops (28.10.2019); the map is courtesy of the Library of the University of Texas at Austin: https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cia16/syria_sm_2016.gif (28.10.2019).

The Role of Russian Land Forces and Special Forces in the Syrian Conflict

The Russian land forces amounted to approximately 3,000–4,000 soldiers during different periods of the war in Syria; however, they were not used for combat operations but mainly for the protection of military installations. The overall objective was not to engage in costly ground combat. This approach was based on Russia's rather shocking experiences of engagement in irregular warfare in Afghanistan, as well as the example of the U.S. struggles with insurgents in the Middle East (i.e. in Iraq). To some extent, the West implemented a similar approach in Libya when NATO's "air power element was crucial"³⁰ during Operation Unified Protector as the facilitator of ground combat with Libyan rebel forces. Those were the lessons that Russia applied in Syria by deploying its air force in support of Syrian land forces. In addition, it was also due to the risk of heavy losses that could be incurred in direct combat and the related propaganda effect, especially videos of ISIS's treatment of captured military personnel. For Russia, the so-called CNN effect could have had negative reverberations both domestically and on the international arena. This fear was well-founded, as the al-Nusra Front, a Salafist jihadist organization seeking to establish an Islamic state and fighting against Syrian government forces, announced a reward of approximately 15,900 USD for capturing Russian soldiers, later specifying on social media that 5,300 USD of that sum would go directly to the fighter and 10,600 USD to their faction.³¹ For terrorists, it was a rather significant amount of money, encouraging them to go after it.

Russia also sent its advisers to the headquarters of the Syrian forces and also to individual units to support th

e planning and execution of operations. It was especially important with regard to the coordination of air strikes delivered by the Russian air force. The units of the Russian land forces were equipped with modern equipment, including T-90 main battle tanks, armoured personnel carriers BTR-82AM,

³⁰ **Gaub, F.** 2013. *The North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Libya: Reviewing Operation Unified Protector*. Carlisle: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, June 2013, pp. 6–8. <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=739913>.

³¹ **Al-Qaeda Affiliate Issues Bounty for Capture of Russian Soldiers in Syria.** 2015. – Newsweek, February 10. <https://www.newsweek.com/al-qaeda-affiliate-issues-bounty-capture-russian-soldiers-syria-334013> (02.10.2019).

armoured vehicles (*'Typhon'*, *'Tajfun'* and *'Rys'*), 152mm howitzers and other platforms.

Thus, for Russia, Syria was a critical testing ground to verify concepts of developing unmanned land and aerial platforms in support of operations, a very dynamic approach based on the capabilities of the national military industry complex and supported by Russian top leadership. As such, it supports the development of effective methods of warfare, as some could be used without involving manpower, enabling the utilization of unmanned platforms for combat operations. Additionally, it supports the concepts related to the 'hybrid' approach to conflicts and drives the widespread implementation of new generation warfare tools and tactics. During a meeting of the Military-Industrial Commission in January 2017, President Putin said, "autonomous robotic complexes are an important and promising direction. They are able to fundamentally change the whole system of the armament of armed forces, and we need to develop our own effective solutions in this area as well."³² Thus, emerging technologies facilitate the implementation of new tactical-technical characteristics and new ways of leading combat that are not available for manned platforms. According to some sources, during the Syrian war, Russia managed to test its unmanned ground vehicles (UGVs) in real combat conditions, providing valuable input for further development. For example, the *'Uran 6'* complex was tested in mine clearing operations in Palmyra and other locations³³. It is estimated that the Russian Mine Action Centre cleared some "6,500 hectares of land, 1,500 km of roads, more than 17,000 buildings and facilities, defused and eliminated more than 105,000 explosive devices (incl. more than 30,000 improvised ones)."³⁴ There is also unconfirmed information about the use of the armed UGVs *'Platforma-M'* and *'Argo'* in Syria. If true, it could be a major verification of the combat capabilities of such UGVs; however, their utilization is not clear or confirmed. Overall, all these tests are indicative of a trend towards developing multirole

³² The speech by President Putin during the meeting of the Military-Industrial Commission on 26 January 2017, see: **II-я военно-научная конференция и выставочная экспозиция 'Роботизация Вооруженных Сил Российской Федерации'**. 2017. – The Conference Website. <http://www.patriot-expo.ru/robotics/> (04.10.2019).

³³ **Warriors of Steel: Meet Russia's Robot Army**. 2016. – Sputnik News, May 29. <https://sputniknews.com/military/201605291040446567-russian-battle-robots-video/> (04.10.2019).

³⁴ **Equipment of Russian Mine Action Centre sealifted from Syria to Russia**. – Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation. <https://syria.mil.ru/en/index/syria/news/more.htm?id=12154863@egNews> (23.10.2019).

platforms, which could be used to mount a variety of weapon systems or be adapted to combat and non-combat functions, such as combat support and logistics.

As regards Russian special forces in Syria, they comprised troops from *Spetsnaz* and other specialised units focused mainly on two types of missions: reconnaissance and special security missions. They were also responsible for directing artillery fire and air strikes, as well as providing security for embassies and VIPs, along with training Syrian special units and troops. At their peak, some 250 Russian special troops were deployed in Syria, including from the GRU (the foreign military-intelligence agency of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation), and the Naval *Spetsnaz* from the 431st Naval Reconnaissance Point and Special Operations Forces Command.³⁵ According to official sources, some 120 Russian military personnel lost their lives and many were wounded (as of the end of 2018 that number stood at 112 soldiers).³⁶ The major single losses were from the An-26 transport aircraft catastrophe and the shooting down of Il-20. However, actual data on Russia's war casualties are unknown, with many losses incurred in the course of ground operations conducted by private military companies employing Russian citizens, but not accounted for by the armed forces. In this context, it also bears noting that the world-renowned Alexandrov Ensemble Choir lost some 60 members in a plane crash en route to Latakia in December 2016. In addition, the Russian Military Police were also deployed for a variety of tasks, incl. providing security in de-escalation zones, ensuring the security of humanitarian assistance, handling of prisoners and other tasks. Those activities became particularly visible especially after Turkey and Russia concluded an agreement regarding the border 'safe zone' and as Russian military police assumed control in select cities.

In the context of military operations, it is also important to mention that the Russian armed forces contingent in Syria was supplied by air, across Iran and Iraq, facing some challenges in the later stages of the conflict. This arrangement supported the relations between Moscow and the nations concerned, including Iraq, which is important for the U.S.. Later on, the so called 'Syrian Express' took advantage of the fact that the Black Sea and

³⁵ **Marsh, Ch.** 2017. *Developments in Russian Special Operations*. Ontario: Forces Command, Canadian Special Operations, pp. 26–27.

³⁶ **Сафронов, И.** 2019. В Сирии погибли трое российских военнослужащих. Минобороны опровергло эту информацию. – *Vedomosti*, 05.09.2019. <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2019/09/05/810570-v-voennosluzhaschih> (02.10.2019).

Bosporus Straits were not being interrupted by Turkey due to improved relations, regardless of attacks on Russian air force assets.³⁷ In Syria, the air base near Latakia and commercial ports in Latakia and Tartus were also used as supply hubs for the delivery of fuel and ammunition, playing a key role in the continued uninterrupted flow of supplies needed to sustain intensive operations of all the service branches of the Russian armed forces deployed in support of the Syrian Army.

As to Russian combat units, many of the operations in Syria were conducted or supported by private military companies (PMC), also in support of Syrian forces. The PMCs are still not legal in Russia, but they nonetheless continue to recruit Russian citizens. For example, Russian mercenaries from PMC *‘Wagner’* “have been fighting major battles in both Ukraine and Syria – including the battles of Palmyra”³⁸ enabling them to acquire useful combat experience. According to Pavel Felgenhauer, “the deployment of military contractors is consistent with the Russian take on ‘hybrid-war’”.³⁹ Moreover, it is estimated that “Russia is using large numbers of contractors in Syria because that allows Moscow to put more boots on the ground without risking regular soldiers whose deaths have to be accounted for”.⁴⁰ It seems to be a valid argument because when Syrian units attacked the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces that were accompanied by U.S. special forces near Deir ez-Zor in eastern Syria, the official statement by the Russian government only

³⁷ **Как изменился «Сирийский экспресс» за три года.** – News.ru, 08.10.2018. <https://news.rambler.ru/army/40978500-kak-izmenilsya-siriyskiy-ekspress-za-tri-goda/> (18.11.2019); **«Сирийский экспресс» под угрозой: США попытаются лишить Сирию снабжения.** – Topcor.ru, 12.07.2019. <https://topcor.ru/10112-sirijskij-jekspress-pougrozoi-ssha-popytajutsja-lishit-siriju-snabzhenija.html> (18.11.2019).

³⁸ **Miller, J.** 2016. Putin’s Attack Helicopters and Mercenaries Are Winning the War for Assad. – Foreign Policy, March 30. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/30/putins-attack-helicopters-and-mercenaries-are-winning-the-war-for-assad/> (12.09.2019). See also: **Они сражались за Пальмиру.** – Fontanka, 29.03.2016. <http://www.fontanka.ru/2016/03/28/171/> (12.09.2019).

³⁹ **Sparks, J.** 2016. Revealed: Russia’s ‘Secret Syria Mercenaries’ 2016. – Sky News, August 10. <http://news.sky.com/story/revealed-russias-secret-syria-mercenaries-10529248> (12.10.2019); **Russian Private Military Companies As Licensed Tool of Terror.** 2015. – InformNapalm, November 24, based on article by Vyacheslav Gusarov (‘Information Resistance’), translated by Stepan Grishin. <https://informnapalm.org/en/russian-private-military-companies-as-licensed-tool-of-terror/> (14.10.2019).

⁴⁰ **Tsvetkova, M.** 2018. Russian toll in Syria battle was 300 killed and wounded: sources. – Reuters, February 15. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-casualty/russian-toll-in-syria-battle-was-300-killed-and-wounded-sources-idUSKCN1FZ2DZ> (12.09.2019). [Tsvetkova 2018]

mentioned the deaths of five Russian citizens (not connected to the armed forces), whereas the private Russian paramilitary “*Wagner Group*” suffered great losses when some 100 mercenaries were killed and 200 wounded in that very same battle.⁴¹ The Russian mercenaries suffered losses particularly because of raids by U.S. fighters;⁴² and it is significant to note that neither the Russian air defence nor the Russian Air Force responded to protect them. However, in reality, there are close links between the Russian armed forces and the PMCs because the latter’s troops are trained in Molkino, a Special Forces base of the Russian armed forces. It is supported by the Russian leadership because the commander of PMC ‘*Wagner*’, Dmitri Utkin, used to serve as the commander of the GRU’s *Spetsnaz* brigade⁴³. Thus, it could be surmised that Russia is putting into practice the theory of ‘new generation warfare’ in Syria using military and non-military assets to acquire more experience on how to deal with any type of threat coming from inside and outside of the country. Such threats could be related to terrorist organizations inside Russia and the threat of internal ‘colour revolutions’, not to mention those that are active in the Middle East.

Already back in 2016, some experts estimated that “Russia has the interest and the resources to become a serious player in the region. The establishment of Russia’s permanent military presence in Syria over the course of the last year (2015) has further increased Russian influence in the Middle East, to the extent that some analysts argue that Russia now has a commanding position in Syria and perhaps in the region as a whole.”⁴⁴ The ongoing developments indicate that such estimates were not inaccurate or wrong. What is more, in the long term, “Russia’s economic interaction with the Middle East helps Moscow both escape the impact of Western economic sanctions and limit its economic dependence on China.”⁴⁵ Both factors are of vital interest for

⁴¹ Tsvetkova 2018.

⁴² Roblin, S. 2018. Did Russia and America Almost Go to War in Syria? – National Interest, June 16. <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/did-russia-america-almost-go-war-syria-26279?page=0%2C1> (12.09.2019).

⁴³ Read: Reynolds, N. 2019. Putin’s Not-So-Secret Mercenaries: Patronage, Geopolitics and the Wagner Group. – Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 08. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/07/08/putin-s-not-so-secret-mercenaries-patronage-geopolitics-and-wagner-group-pub-79442> (12.09.2019). The Moran Security Group is also managed by former military officers. See Website: **The Moran Security Group**. <http://moran-group.org/en/about/index> (12.09.2019).

⁴⁴ Gorenburg 2016, *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ Katz, M. 2019. Russian Activities in the Middle East. – Peterson, N. (ed.). Russian Strategic Intentions. A Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA). White Paper. Washington: the U.S. Department of Defence, May, p. 58.

Russian foreign policy and also from the perspective of its domestic situation as the Russian economy is facing some serious challenges amid ongoing sanctions imposed by the West.

4. Conclusions

The combination of Russia's military footprint in Syria coupled with diplomatic efforts in the wider region has serious ramifications for the whole Middle East and a potentially even broader impact by positioning Russia as a credible global actor. It is already visible in Russia's closer relations with Iran, Iraq and organizations such as Hezbollah, not to mention its diplomatic alliance with Turkey, a member of NATO. Russia's relations with Israel have also been very important, indicated by high-level meetings; however, it does not seem to be a strategic partnership, rather it seems to be based on pragmatic interests on both sides. However, those interests could be impacted by relations with Syria, given the fact that they are fighting on opposite sides, and as a result, their relationship could deteriorate quickly in case Israel should decide to go against pro-Iranian forces in Syria, not to mention their differences with regard to the role of the U.S. in the Middle East. Nevertheless, for now, both sides need for their relations to remain stable. It seems that Russia, having left the region and not playing a significant role during the Gulf Wars, has decided to return and has strategically taken advantage of the window of opportunity presented by the war in Syria. When taking into consideration the not so successful outcomes of the U.S. and the West's interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq or Libya, it could be said that for now Moscow has effectively supported the Syrian government in its struggle for survival against the opposition and radical organizations. The Russian advantage is that it is not questioning the type of regime in Syria and it is also not discussing democratic reforms nor is it concerned about human rights and the rule of law. All this has broader implications for the whole Middle East region and as such will help Russia cement its position there, especially as many Middle Eastern countries have governments that are in essence authoritarian, identifying more closely with Russian-type leadership as opposed to the narratives and values espoused by the U.S. and the West. Thus, Russia has taken on an important role and a mammoth responsibility in the region, which has become very problematic as of late. For example, Russia is still facing some very complex security problems and the situation could easily implode due to rivalry among nations, religious diversity and economic interests that are based on historical and geopolitical backgrounds.

In this context, Russia holds many cards but the situation also entails several risks that would not be so easy to handle in case of crisis. Additionally, Russia's position could be furthermore undermined by other out-of-region actors.

The military perspective provides some broader lessons related to the effectiveness and limitations of Russian capabilities. It is indicated by the discussions in Western Europe about Russian anti-access/area denial (AA/AD) 'bubbles' located in Kaliningrad, Crimea or in St. Petersburg, or the High North in Murmansk, in the Kola Peninsula. However, by intervening in Syria, Russia managed to extend those AA/AD bubbles on the West's borders and its own peripheral areas. The air defence assets are an important element of those AA/AD bubbles. With respect to the Baltic countries, the Kaliningrad oblast, bordering Lithuania and Poland, serves as a potential threat of denying the flow of NATO troops to the region in the case of conflict with Russia. Thus, the Syrian case demonstrates that the AA/AD umbrella is not completely impenetrable. However, new systems such as the S-400 with new missiles are already in development, although their effectiveness is not yet fully confirmed. What is more, NATO investments into fifth generation aircraft, guided ammunition and cruise missiles, drones, electronic warfare and the utilization of waves attack tactics to suppress enemy air defence could deny Russian assets the capabilities to effectively interrupt the deployment of Alliance troops and operations on its Eastern Flank. It is crucial for Western nations to maintain and further develop their technological advantage, ensuring their superiority over Russia's capabilities on the opposing side.

Russia's intervention in Syria also proved that limited operational force projection capabilities are present, and therefore Russia could conduct and sustain reasonable forces, something that was being questioned before the events in Syria. For Russian soldiers it has offered a unique opportunity to practice their professional skills in combat and to test modernized and novel equipment. It is estimated that as many as 63,000 soldiers and 25,700 officers⁴⁶ participated in operations in Syria, a significant number, undoubtedly leading to many future promotions. It has been especially useful for training pilots and ground crews that conduct intensive strikes; they have acquired many valuable lessons, considering the critical role played by the air force in modern conflicts. Russia's military power exhibited during the war in Syria was also effectively used for domestic propaganda purposes

⁴⁶ **Delanoë, I.** 2018. What Russia Gained From Its Military Intervention in Syria. – *Orient XXI*, October 09. <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/what-russia-gained-from-its-military-intervention-in-syria,2676> (30.10.2019).

to demonstrate national capabilities and the heroism of Russian soldiers in defending a sovereign nation against “terrorists” supported by the U.S. and West European nations. The operations Russia engaged in were quite intensive, especially those conducted by the air force, but they were not joint operations as coordination with other Russian armed forces services was limited. It was mainly in the form of support offered to the Syrian Army, in many cases coordinated by Russian military advisers or special forces units.

Another advantageous aspect for Russia is the much desired opportunity to export arms to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, enabling competition with France and the U.S. Russian weapons have been battle-tested and have thus proved their effectiveness in fighting non-conventional enemies, a serious concern for many nations in the Middle East, making Russian offerings even more attractive. For Russia, the sale of military equipment carries an important economic and foreign policy aspect and this is definitely one of the advantages gained from the war in Syria, and certainly Syria will remain open to such offerings. It is also important to note that the Tartus seaport in Syria is the only such facility outside of the Russian Federation that enables Russia to secure its constant presence in the region, the rotation of warships and their sustainment in the Mediterranean. It also enables Russia to deploy a variety of naval assets equipped with long-range missiles like ‘*Kalibr*’, which are able to reach targets across the whole region, including NATO air and navy bases. Therefore, Russia’s military presence in Syria, in conjunction with political and economic support, facilitates the increase of Russia’s influence in the whole Middle East and the wider Mediterranean region. In addition, it provides the opportunity for Russia to protect its wide-ranging economic interests related to energy resources and military exports, not to mention potential contracts for post-war reconstruction. Thus, other nations that might also want to partake in this will need to take Russia’s position as Syria’s strategic partner into serious consideration.

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THE SECOND “ARAB BELT” IN SYRIA IN THE MAKING?

Hille Hanso



Abstract: The war in Syria has reached a new phase, which has turned international focus towards the Kurdish minority and its ambitions to autonomously govern the Kurdish populated areas of Syria. The Kurdish empowerment and the rise of the PYD (Democratic Union Party), closely related to the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party), in the fight against the self-proclaimed Islamic State has resulted in the counter-mobilisation by Damascus and Ankara, the latter of which, in addition to its military incursion, is pushing to relocate millions of Syrian war refugees who have found shelter on Turkish soil back to Syria, more specifically to the envisioned “safe zone” in the border regions. Could this be a revival of the so-called Arab Belt plan of the 1960s and 70s, which aimed at dividing the Kurdish communities in the region?

Keywords: Syria, Kurds, Turkey, PKK, PYD, YPG, Arab Belt, demographic engineering

1. Introduction

The dust is settling after the beginning of yet another phase in the Syrian conflict which brought along entirely new dynamics – the announcement of US President Trump’s administration to withdraw US troops from Syria. The following Turkish invasion of parts of North Syria with the US and Russia’s blessing seems to be leaving the Kurdish community with only a weak leverage in Syria, causing a bitter outcry and accusations of betrayal. Yet, opinions are widely polarized on the Rojava issue (as it is referred to among the Kurds) in the first place: some find it a rightful claim for the Kurdish groups as a step towards independence or at least full autonomy, while others argue that Syrian territorial integrity should by no means be undermined and the area controlled by the Kurdish forces directly connected to the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party), with the help of the United States, far exceeds the territories historically populated by the Kurds. Now that the focus of the war has turned to the east of the Euphrates, it is clear that the Kurdish expansion and unification has resulted in counter-mobilisation,

including a plan by the Turkish government to populate border regions with millions of Arab refugees.

The history of the region on the east bank of the Euphrates has seen demographic engineering before and its recent past proves that it is a territory bound to be disputed, regardless of the fact that it has been a part of the territory today known as the Syrian Arab Republic since the French Mandatory period after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

However, in the current war that began in 2011, the opposing regimes in Turkey and Syria might find themselves sharing a common interest when it comes to the idea of forcefully inhabiting the regions in northern Syria with Arab refugees who found refuge in Turkey. Is there a new attempt to revive an old plan known in the region historically as the Arab Belt?

This article will take a look at the region's past, which is tightly connected to the current geopolitical situation, and consider some of the central questions that have triggered the recent military activities on the ground. Firstly, who are the Kurdish groups targeted on the ground and, secondly, what is the reason behind Turkey's recent intervention in Syria? This article will also draw the reader's attention to the parallel from the past: the fact that, in the recent high tide of Kurdish political and military empowerment in Syria, it might be in the short term interest of Ankara and Damascus to repopulate the northern areas of Syria with the war refugees, as was first done in the 1960s. The first attempt at demographic engineering called the Arab Belt, as this article will show, gave no consideration to human rights; and should it ever materialize again, will once again demonstrate the inability of both states to find democratic solutions to the issues concerning their minorities.

2. Historical Background

It has been estimated that the Kurds constitute up to 10% (approximately 2 million people) of the whole population of Syria. Inhabiting mainly the enclaves of the Syrian border regions with Turkey, they are settled in Afrin and Kurd Dagh in the North West, and the Jazira and Qamishli provinces in the North East. The Kurdish population in Syria has, however, different origins. The communities in the North West have inhabited the area for centuries, whereas the Kurds towards the East relocated there from the Turkish territories in two waves: in the 1920s and 1960s. Kurds in the Damascus Kurdish Quarter are descendants of Kurdish soldiers of the Middle Ages, for example, guardians of the pilgrims on their way to Mecca, later recruited by

the *janissaries* (elite fighting forces of the Sultan) during the Ottoman times. Although their tribal formation remained the same, by the time modern Syria was formed, their spoken language had become Arabic and many in the community had been Arabicized. The Kurdish community in Aleppo is mainly from the areas of Afrin and Kurd Dagh. Kurds in Syria are predominantly Sunni and speak mainly Kurmanji, a dialect spoken also in Turkey and Northern areas of Iraqi Kurdistan.¹

Kurdish rifts with other ethnic groups in the region started with the rise of nationalist movements in the Middle East. As the most powerful Kurdish tribes on the soil of modern Syria (just as in Turkey) had been benefitting from the Ottoman system with its patronage and kinship, the rising Arab nationalism and nascent nationalist elites caused concern over the fracturing of the existing power structures. The Kurds, therefore, naturally sided with the powers in Istanbul and later the ITF², passively or actively opposing the Arab revolts and the independence of Syria in 1919³. However, the Ottoman Empire, referred to as the “sick man of Europe”, was doomed to die and, as argued by Hakan Özoğlu, this is the period when Kurdish nationalism spread widely, as evidenced by the Kurmanji-language newspapers that were published and Kurdish societies that were established⁴ alongside the national movements of Turks, Arabs, Assyrians and others in the region. The diversity of the Kurdish identities, in the light of the territorial definition, is also demonstrated by Özoğlu, who shows that the boundaries that define Kurdistan and the perimeters of Kurdish identity have always been in flux, making it hard to establish a reliable link between the modern Kurdish identity and the ancient groups that inhabited Kurdistan.⁵

Five years after World War I ended, the League of Nations gave France a mandate over Syria and Lebanon⁶. The French (similarly to the British

¹ **McDowall, D.** 1996. *A Modern History of the Kurds*. London: I. B. Tauris, pp. 466–467. [McDowall 1996]

² *İttihad ve Terakki Fırkası* (Ottoman Turkish), Committee of Union and Progress, a revolutionary and reformist political movement at the late period of the Ottoman Empire. Please note: I will hence forward refer to the political parties by their names in the original languages and give their translation to English in the footnotes. – *Author’s comment*.

³ In July 1919, the Syrian Congress first passed a resolution on the formation of Syria as an independent constitutional monarchy ruled by King Faysal. – *Author’s comment*.

⁴ **Özoğlu, H.** 2004. *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, pp. 35–42.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ The League of Nations assigned France the mandate of Syria and today’s Lebanon in September 1923. – *Author’s comment*.

in Iraq) used and supported the minority groups by arming them when necessary to crush the military strength of populations perceived as a threat to the colonizers' political interests.⁷ The aim of this practice was to divide the groups in the region and divide the larger groups themselves as the recruiting often took place from the various rival factions within the larger identities.

As the newly formed Republic of Turkey emerged with its borders defined by the Lausanne Treaty in 1923, the Kurdish groups from Anatolia made their way across the border to Jazira, populating the areas with growing numbers of people. The influx grew significantly after the failed Sheikh Said rebellion in Palu (in present-day Elazığ) in 1925⁸, when those who feared Turkish revenge and opposed its secularism fled across the border. The existing Arab community naturally viewed the incomers as competition for land and natural resources. Alongside the Kurds, Armenians and other Christian minorities also left harshly nationalist Turkey, resulting in a region that developed into an ethnically and religiously diverse area, with strong communal and tribal rivalries. Yet, this ethnic and religious diversity also constituted a sort of balance between the communities, none of which at the time could dominate the others. The new borders also created new logistical and trade opportunities because of the railway lines, which created new urban settlements in North Syria. The rather remote region developed a form of local autonomy (or at least lesser domination by the central power), until the Syrian Arab nationalist movement started expressing the ambition to form a governing system that would include the state as a whole. Meanwhile, Kurdish intellectuals put their efforts into converging local Kurdish associations into the Xoybûn⁹, or Be Yourself movement, and in 1928, when the election of the constituent assembly and the drafting of the Syrian constitution took place, the first clearer expressions of Kurdish identity appeared. A petition was formed which demanded that the Kurdish language become one of the official languages of Syria, with usage both in the educational system and in the local governing offices of the three regions inhabited by the Kurds¹⁰.

⁷ **Bou-Nacklie, N.** 1993. Les Troupes Speciales: Religious and Ethnic Recruitment, 1916–46. – *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 25, No 4, pp. 645–660.

⁸ For further reading, please turn to: **Olson, R.** 1989. *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880–1925*. Austin: University of Texas Press. Note that the book is mainly based on British archival materials. – *Author's comment*.

⁹ Xoybûn (full name Xoybûn – Ciwata Serxwebuna Kurd) or Khoyboun translates as Be Yourself movement, which aspired to develop modern Kurdish nationalism.

¹⁰ **McDowall** 1996, p. 468.

These demands were declined – just as the proposal of the constitution was – by the French¹¹. The changes in the power structure brought along new dynamics in the Kurdish populated areas: clashes broke out first between the local groups against the central power, then among each other.

When the French finally fully disengaged from Syria in 1946, the central state under the Arab nationalist government took over and Arabization policies were initiated.¹² Some Kurdish groups in Aleppo readily cooperated with Damascus¹³; however, those in the North East remained unruly, this being somewhat supported by the geographical remoteness and the lack of strategic natural resources. Most notoriously, some of its members developed ties with Israel, whose interest was to weaken the Syrian central state, using cooperation with the members of its minority, a tactic common to the region.¹⁴ This and paranoia in the state structures of Kurds aligning with Western Powers became the reason for the growing Syrian distrust towards the Kurds in Jazira and caused an active opposition to the idea that the Syrian military should have high-ranking officers with a Kurdish background.

Overall, the idea of pan-Arabism and the idea of a homogenized population evolved into various suppressive methods against the minorities and envisioned no special place for them in the political system. In the 1950s, the repressions against the Kurds in Syria started. As a response, some Kurdish groups activated politically and the PDK-S¹⁵ was created, which at first cooperated with the PDK¹⁶ in Iraq. Later, however, as the splits between Barzani and Talabani clans in the Kurdish Region of Iraq took place, the PDK-S also fractioned into different competing parties similarly to Iraq,

¹¹ The Constituent Assembly elected in spring 1928 included the pro-independence National Bloc and proposed the project of a new constitution, but since they insisted on including articles that undermined French mandatory interests, the Assembly was annulled a few months later. – *Author's comment*.

¹² **Tejel, J.** 2008. Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society. New York, NY: Routledge Advances in Middle East and Islamic Studies, pp. 47–52. [**Tejel** 2008]

¹³ **McDowall** 1996, p. 471.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 471.

¹⁵ *Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistanê li Sûriyê* (Kurmanji language), Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria, founded in 1956, headquartered in Amuda, al Hasakah Governate, represented the rights of Kurds, demanded their inclusion in the governing of Syria, cultural rights and inclusive rule from Damascus, opposed the creation of the United Arab Republic. – *Author's comment*.

¹⁶ *Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistanê* (Kurmanji language), Kurdish Democratic Party in Iraq, founded in 1946 by Mustafa Barzani in Iran, in the short lived Republic of Mahabad, with the support of the Soviet Union. – *Author's comment*.

which were unable to unite. It is worth noting that while Arab nationalism prevailed in both Iraq and Syria, communism found fertile ground among the Kurds.¹⁷ Meanwhile, the Jazira region also became an increasingly attractive destination for the unemployed Kurds from Turkey who preferred to work in the agricultural sector but had become jobless due to the modernization efforts and increasing mechanization of the agricultural sector in Turkey in the 1950s and the 1960s. Damascus viewed the influx of tens of thousands of "new" Kurds to its territories with great suspicion.

The view that the Kurds in Iraq who were voicing national sentiments and rebelling against the central state¹⁸ were traitors that willingly cooperated with foreign powers against the central government – coupled with the Arab Nationalist Ba'ath party's seizure of power in 1963¹⁹ – resulted in a number of repressive plans such as the displacement of Kurds, expulsion of those originating from Turkey, discrimination in the labour market etc.

3. "The Arab Belt": First Attempt

The most significant of the plans to dissolve the mainly Kurdish populated areas in Northern Syria started in the 1960s. It was the plan to create the so-called "Arab Belt" on the border regions with Turkey and Iraq, with the aim of detaching the Kurdish communities that had rather porous borders between the countries they inhabited. The plan called for the displacement of more than a hundred thousand Kurds and their replacement with Arab tribes. The Arab Belt concept was developed into "A Plan to Establish Model State Farms in the Jazira Province" in 1965, which "envisaged the creation of a band 15 kilometres deep over a distance of 280 kilometres along the Turkish border. The plan anticipated the deportation of Kurds who were living in villages falling inside this band to areas in Syria's interior."²⁰

¹⁷ McDowall 1996, p. 472.

¹⁸ Hanso, H.; Özoglu, H. 2017. Creating an Independent Kurdistan: The History of a Hundred-Year-Long Dream. – Maydan, October 19. <https://www.themaydan.com/2017/10/creating-independent-kurdistan-history-hundred-year-long-dream/> (21.11.2019).

¹⁹ Roberts, D. 2013. *The Ba'ath and the Creation of Modern Syria*. London: Routledge, pp. 51–62.

²⁰ Human Rights Watch 2009. *Group Denial: Repression of Kurdish Political and Cultural Rights in Syria*. https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/syrial109webwcover_0.pdf (22.11.2019).

Lands were taken away from the Kurds who could not prove their citizenship and approximately 4000 Arab families were relocated to the region to run the “modern state farms” project. To de-homogenize the population, between every few Kurdish villages, an Arab village was built. As a reminder that some individual Kurds had cooperated with Israel, the new Arab villages were named after villages taken over from Palestinians by Israel²¹. Although the Arab Belt plan never fully materialized, thousands of Kurdish villagers were dislocated to the South regardless and the lands that were subsequently inhabited by the Arab families were never freed. Demographic engineering continued under President Hafez al-Assad in the 1970s, although the Kurdish national consciousness had formed, but did not clearly formulate separatist ideas.

The relationship between the Kurds and Arabs settled in the region and the central power remained suspicious and unconstructive, resulting in other highly oppressive practices and discrimination. Hundreds of thousands of Kurds remained or became stateless as they were stripped of their citizenship.²² Having no documents which could prove their belonging limited, therefore, any access to public services and also made it seem that the number of the Arabs in the region was more sizable. Kurdish regions were left out of the land reform, celebration of Kurdish festivities like Nowruz was prohibited, and any mention of the Kurdish population was removed from the school books. Speaking Kurdish in public or teaching in Kurdish languages at school was not allowed, although other minorities in the area, like Armenians and Assyrians, could do so. Regardless of all that, the Kurdish groups remained polarized politically. Furthermore, the deep dependency created by the state through its discriminatory methods, such as employment practices that excluded Kurds, encouraged many Kurdish men to choose the Syrian military as their career option. They became, thereby, loyal to the regime; for example, those in the Presidential Guard were commanded by the President directly. Those recruited to the special units played a significant part in the violent crushing of the Sunni Revolt in the 1980s in Aleppo and Hama, further deepening distrust with the Sunni Arab communities. Some Kurdish representatives made it to the Syrian Parliament, belonging to the Syrian

²¹ **Aktan, İ.** 2019. Seda Altuğ: Türkiye, Hafız Esad’ın Arap kemerini genişletiyor. – *Gazete Duvar*, October 17. <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/yazarlar/2019/10/27/seda-altug-turkiye-hafiz-esadin-arap-kemerini-genisletiyor/> (19.11.2019). [Aktan 2019]

²² **Baczko, A.; Dorrnsoro, G.; Quesnay, A.** 2018. *Civil War in Syria: Mobilization and Competing Social Orders*. Cambridge University Press, p. 59.

Communist Party, as the Ba'ath Party did not allow any expression of ethnic identity.

By the 1990s, at least 15 Kurdish political parties existed and they experienced constant schisms and re-unifications. Many of them represented local families or villages, not being able to achieve a broader support base or pose a serious competition to the Syrian authorities.²³

The 1990s was also a period when the Syrian government invited the PKK²⁴ to legitimately operate in Syria. Its leadership escaped from Turkey to Syria as a consequence of the *coup d'état* in 1980 when the Turkish authorities began actively fighting any sort of illicit networks. Undoubtedly, it was the Syrian regime that empowered the PKK by offering its fighters training amenities in Beqaa Valley in Lebanon, having given the organization permission to open offices in a number of cities and regions in Syria including Damascus, Afrin, al Hasakah and other cities in Jazira. With this it had two main goals: on the one hand, to monitor local Kurdish political parties in Syria, and on the other hand, to weaken and destabilize Turkey.

The PKK recruited thousands of fighters under the condition they operate outside Syria, with its leader, Abdullah Öcalan claiming in return that no Kurdistan existed in Syria, that the Syrian Kurds were refugees from Turkey and that they should return to Turkey one day²⁵, causing anger among those Kurds who had been residing in the area for generations by then. The PKK acted upon the opportunity intentionally provided by the Syrian regime and claimed to speak on behalf of the Kurdish community in Syria, which was not welcomed by all Kurds by the 1990s. Yet, it was only in 1998 when its leader, Abdullah Öcalan, was expelled from Syria and subsequently captured in Kenya in 1999 by Turkey, that the al Assad regime, under pressure, turned against the movement and arrested hundreds of its militants, significantly weakening the organization.

²³ McDowall 1996, p. 478.

²⁴ *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* (Kurmanji) Kurdistan Workers' Party, a militant political organisation, defined as a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the U.S. and the European Union. – *Author's comment*.

²⁵ Hosheng, O. 2015. The PKK-Assad regime story: harmony, discord and Ocalan. – Now, April 10. <http://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/commentary/565108-the-pkk-assad-regime-story-harmony-discord-and-ocalan> (24.11.2019).

The PKK resumed its activities under a new name, the PYD,²⁶ in 2003²⁷ and adopted its cult of Öcalan and his ideology.

The region saw spontaneous demonstrations (like in Qamishli) in the beginning of the millennium and demands by the Kurds for the recognition of their rights in the following year. Once again, those demands did not resonate with the Arab population and the demonstrations were brutally suppressed by Damascus. In the 2000s, the “Red Card” system was established, and Kurds with the *ajnabi*²⁸ status were formalized. They were denied the right to vote, own property, have a Syrian passport or manage businesses. However, political mobilization remained unsuccessful, partly due to the fact that the areas inhabited by Kurds remained inconsistent, which crippled the political cooperation. Allies in Iraq remained passive and pockets of Kurdish inhabited regions in Afrin, Kobanî, and Jazira were comparatively small, compared to the whole population, and located distantly. As mentioned before, Kurdish districts in Damascus and Aleppo were contained by the surrounding Arab communities.

This brief overview demonstrated how the regions east of the Euphrates became populated by the Kurds, and why and how the Syrian state with its exclusive Arab ethnocentrism and nationalism intended to “divide and rule” the Kurdish communities that had already been divided by the state borders, by implementing repressive methods, such as the Arab Belt plan. In addition to this, it described the rise of the PKK in Syria and its transformation into the PYD.

4. Daesh Onwards

As the previous section described, the Kurds mainly located in Afrin and the Jazira region of the Syrian Arab Republic are those with the strongest expressions of ethnic identity. Although arguably living under somewhat freer conditions than their kin in Turkey or Iran²⁹, they were for decades indeed a community in Syria with severely suppressed freedoms. However, a whole new dynamic was created in the region following the Arab uprisings that started in 2010 and reached Syria in 2011.

²⁶ *Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat* (Kurmanji), The Democratic Union Party, the Kurdish democratic confederalist political party. – *Author’s comment*.

²⁷ Tejel 2008, p. 79.

²⁸ Foreign, alien (in Arabic). – *Author’s comment*.

²⁹ McDowall 1996, p. 476.

Although the region had been under the tight fist of both Hafez and Bashar al Assad³⁰, the latter, in the fight for his regime's survival, was forced to withdraw from the North and South of Syria in 2012 in order to consolidate forces to protect Damascus. Bashar al Assad had also attempted to reconcile with the Kurds in the area the previous year, offering to reinstate their citizenship, which was, in the light of the revolutionary atmosphere, declined the Kurdish representatives³¹. In the summer of 2012, the PYD acted resolutely and claimed control over mainly Kurdish populated pockets of Syria: Afrin, Kobanî and Jazira. As the Syrian conflict turned into a bloody war with tens of stakeholders, a significant power vacuum in the region appeared, leaving the Kurdish and Christian minorities to face *Daesh*³², which was expanding its territories with fierce force. In 2015 Russia entered the Syrian conflict with boots on the ground, seemingly with the aim of backing the fight against terrorism, in reality aiming to aid the al Assad regime to sustain its power. In parallel, the US stepped up its fight against terrorism in late 2015.

The US initially cooperated with the Free Syrian Army, then chose the Kurdish groups³³, more precisely the military wing of the umbrella organisation Syrian Democratic Forces (officially established in 2015), in essence the YPG,³⁴ as its ally on the ground. The YPG consists mainly of ethnic Kurds (but also some foreign fighters and some Syrian Arabs and Assyrians) and was first formed in 2004, under the PYD.

³⁰ Hafez al Assad served as the President of Syria from 1971 to 2000, his son Bashar al-Assad has been serving as President since 2000. – *Author's comment.*

³¹ **Syria to Grant Citizenship to Some of its Stateless Kurds.** 2011. – Alliance for Kurdish Rights, April 07. <https://kurdishrights.org/2011/04/07/syria-to-grant-citizenship-to-some-of-its-stateless-kurds/> (22.11.2019).

³² Widely used demeaning name for the self-claimed Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, ISIS. – *Author's comment.*

³³ **A look at US involvement in Syria's civil war.** 2018. – The Associated Press, December 19. <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2018/12/19/a-look-at-us-involvement-in-syrias-civil-war/> (18.11.2019).

³⁴ *Yekîneyên Parastina Gel* (Kurmanji), The People's Protection Units, was formed when the PYD and Encûmena Nîştîmanî ya Kurdî li Sûriyê (ENKS) or the Kurdish National Council established the Kurdish Supreme Committee. Their combined militias became the YPG in 2011, which initially aimed at protecting the Kurdish dominated areas, but became an offensive power in 2012 when the radical groups affiliated with the al Nusra Front and al-Qaeda advanced to Ras al-Ayn. – *Author's comment.*

With the support of the USA and its allies, the YPG developed into a considerable “archetypal guerrilla army.”³⁵ Its size is estimated to be above 70,000 troops³⁶ and in recent years, supported by US training, supplies and Air Force, it has won decisive battles over radical groups such as the *Daesh*, for example breaking the almost five-month siege of Kobanî, overtaking Tel Abyad and recapturing ar-Raqa³⁷, the capital of the self-proclaimed caliphate.

Overall, the political hegemony rapidly achieved by the PYD³⁸ – grounded in the organisational skills honed in the framework of the PKK – coupled with the military and moral empowerment of its military wing YPG and supported by the cheering of the West, in turn, drove the Kurds towards their aspirations of autonomy. In 2014, after establishing the “Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria” in Western Kurdistan or the Rojava, they claimed to be no longer governed by the Syrian regime and adopted the Rojava Constitution. Subsequently, the PYD began to collect taxes from the local residents, established a welfare system, set up the educational system, the judiciary and other institutions. What is more, some of the legislation adopted there has been approved by the central government.³⁹

Turkey has been adamantly objecting to the cooperation between the USA and the PYD, as the latter was formed largely by the former members of the PKK in Syria⁴⁰, being therefore equal to a terror organisation according to Turkey. In the same light, Turkey pushed for the PKK, the PYD and the YPG to be designated as terrorist organisations in the declaration of the Islamic Cooperation Organisation in 2016, fearing the guerrilla fighters of Kurdish origin coming from Turkey who were becoming battle-hardened.

³⁵ **Stephens, M.** 2014. The YPG - the Islamic State’s worst enemy. – Jane’s Defence Weekly, September 12. <https://www.janes.com/article/43030/analysis-ypg-the-islamic-state-s-worst-enemy> (20.11.2019).

³⁶ **PYD.** – Habertürk. <https://www.haberturk.com/kurum/pyd> (22.11.2019).

³⁷ **About the People’s Defense Units (YPG).** – YPG Rojava Official Web Page. <https://www.ypgrojava.org/About-Us> (21.11.2019).

³⁸ **Tezcür, G. M., Yıldız, H.** 2019. Kurdish politics in post-2011 Syria: From fragmentation to hegemony. – Mediterranean Politics, October 25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2019.1671677>. (06.12.2019).

³⁹ **Aktan** 2019.

⁴⁰ **Bradley, M. J., Parkinson, J.** 2015. America’s Marxist Allies against ISIS. – The Wall Street Journal, July 24. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/americas-marxist-allies-against-isis-1437747949> (21.11.2019).

5. The "Safe Zone" in Syria or the Revival of the Arab Belt?

The recent history is well known. The Trump administration decided to withdraw US troops from Syria⁴¹. As expected, the power vacuum opened up a new opportunity for Turkey to enter Syria, which had taken the ethnically Kurdish Afrin region under its control in 2018. According to the following Sochi agreement with Russia and Iran in October 2019⁴², border regions with Turkey, reaching roughly the motorway M4 from al-Bab, Syria, to Rabiya on the Iraqi border, would be cleared from the Kurdish fighters. More specifically, the agreement says that the YPG will have to retreat to 30 kilometres from the Turkish border, including removing any sort of weaponry, and the Syrian army will move to the border regions (except Ras al-Ayn/Serêkanî and Tel Abyad).

Until then, the towns and regions of Deir Ez-Zor, Raqqa, Manbij, Tel Rifaat, Ras al-Ayn/Serêkanî, and Tel Abyad have been the responsibility of the SDF, altogether covering a territory of approximately one third of the Syrian territory east of the Euphrates. Although the consequent activities by Russia and Syria seem to have dwarfed the Turkish ambition (the Russian-Turkish combined patrols will start inspecting a distance of 10 kilometres east and west of Turkish-controlled areas) and the outcome is not yet quite clear, the withdrawal of the YPG will significantly diminish any political or administrative power of the Kurds. It is unclear at this stage if they might achieve some form of autonomy or enhanced cultural right in other areas. Regardless of the Turkish objections, the Syrian Government has been in talks with the SDF leaders and time will tell if the SDF will be engaged in the constitution talks in Syria, disregarding the Turkish opposition to the idea.

In this context, Turkey has recently been increasingly active in enforcing the consensus that the liberated area should become a home for millions of Syrian refugees, whose number amounts to approximately 4 million people in Turkey. Its representatives are vowing to build infrastructure such as housing, schools, and hospitals and to enable people to participate in agriculture, simultaneously pushing for the European Union to partly

⁴¹ **The White House** 2019. Remarks by President Trump on the Situation in Northern Syria, Washington D.C. October 23. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-situation-northern-syria/> (27.11.2019).

⁴² **Korsunskaya, D.; Gümrukü, T.** 2019. Russia, Turkey reach deal to remove Kurdish YPG from Syria border. – Reuters, October 22. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-security/russia-turkey-reach-deal-to-remove-kurdish-ypg-from-syria-border-idUSKB-N1X10ZE> (23.11.2019).

finance the project. Needless to say, the plan strongly resembles the 1960–1970s plan of the Arab Belt, this time possibly concerning two groups of people: refugees who feel obviously insecure about returning to Syria⁴³ and the Kurds who already populate the area. Yet, the belt would be in the interest of the Turkish and Syrian governments.

Turkey would rid itself of the population increasingly seen as a burden by the general public. This change of mind towards hosting the “Syrian brothers” can be partly explained by Turkish domestic politics, where nationalism is enflamed and the Syrians are extensively used by the opposition parties to agitate against the ruling AKP⁴⁴. This is part of the reason why the AKP lost its power to the biggest opposition party in Ankara and Istanbul during the 2019 local elections. By the same token, already separated by the border wall, Turkey is pushing to divide the Kurdish communities, making cross-border connections even more difficult.

Syria, on the other hand, would be taking back control of its Northern border, meanwhile having a leverage in the negotiation for the future of the Kurds who have had to live through a bitter disappointment since the backing of the US stopped. Once again, the Syrian regime has control over what kind of rights the Kurdish community will play in the Syrian future. What has changed this time for the Kurds is that they are politically more homogenised and have control over some water and oil sources. Only time will tell what will be the future of the PYD and the Rojava region in the years to come; however, judging by the areas the Syrian regime has managed to re-take, it is rather unlikely that any special rights will be granted to this minority.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the parallels with the past and current ambitions to populate the Kurdish regions in northern Syria with an Arabic population are striking. European countries who are reluctant to receive those displaced by the wars in the region face a difficult dilemma. One option is to passively observe another massive demographic engineering taking place in the North of Syria. The expulsion of those in need of protection and the rigid handling of their

⁴³ Hanso, H. 2018. Syrians Still Kicked Around – Diplomaatia, October 24. <https://icds.ee/syrians-still-kicked-around/> (23.11.2019).

⁴⁴ *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Turkish) Justice and Development Party, a conservative right wing party with Islamist roots in Turkey, led by the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. – *Author’s comment*.

minorities is a breach of human rights and causes a never-ending circle of violence. This is, however, a threat for the security in the region and against any long-term interest of Europe to have authoritarian states with deep social cleavages surrounding it from the East and South. European governments should use every leverage to cooperate with Turkey so that it would revive negotiations with its own Kurdish population in order to ease tensions. Meanwhile, in order to achieve lasting peace, Turkey would benefit from a political solution enabling more inclusive political participation, including more flexible forms of patriotism than the exclusive Turkishness. Unless this is achieved, and unless the central power of Syria starts engaging in a more inclusive governing, Kurdish regions will remain a disputed territory for the years to come, creating fluctuating alliances and new military conflicts and clashes that will destabilize the region in the future.

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INSIGHTS INTO THE IDEOLOGICAL CORE AND POLITICAL PILLARS OF ISIS

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1. Introduction

This article¹ focuses specifically on the ideological core² of ISIS³ and strives to explain it by showing that ISIS's ideological core is rooted not merely in

¹ The authors partially rely on content published in earlier articles by Sazonov, e.g. **Mölder, H., Sazonov, V.** 2019. The Development of Intercultural Dialogue in the Middle East: Contemporary Ideological-Religious Conflicts and their Historical Roots. – Sazonov, V.; Mölder, H.; Espak, P. (eds.). *Cultural Crossroads in the Middle East – Historical, Cultural and Political Legacy of Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict from Ancient Near East to Present Days*. Tartu: University of Tartu Press, pp. 10–35. [**Mölder, Sazonov** 2019]; **Sazonov, V.** 2014b. Outbreaks of Islamism in Iraq – the Rebirth of the Caliphate? – *Diplomaatia*, September 22. <https://icds.ee/outbreaks-of-islamism-in-iraqthe-rebirth-of-the-caliphate/> (9.12.2019). [**Sazonov** 2014b]

² **Fadel, M.** 2019. Ideas, Ideology, and the Roots of the Islamic State. – *Critical Review. A Journal of Politics and Society*, Vol. 31(1), pp. 83–94; **Bunzel, C.** 2015. From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State. – *The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World. Analysis paper, No. 19, March*. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-ideology-of-the-Islamic-State.pdf> (12.12.2019). [**Bunzel** 2015]

³ ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) or ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) or Daesh (its Arabic-language acronym) is a radical and an extremist Salafist and Jihadist movement whose founder is considered to be Jordanian Abu Musad al-Zarqawi (1966–2006). It is known that al-Zarqawi founded the movement in 2006, a few years after the 2003 invasion of Iraq by Western coalition forces. Initially the movement was called the Islamic State of Iraq (October 2006 – April 2013), and later renamed as the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (April 2013 – June 2014), and the Islamic State (June 2014 – present) (**Bunzel** 2015, p. 3). Bunzel has highlighted that “founded by al-Qaeda in Iraq, the Islamic State emerged at a time when Iraq’s Sunni insurgency was fast losing momentum. It is significant that al-Qaeda was involved in founding the movement, while it was later joined by several large and small Islamist groups, such as Islamic Jihad” (**Bunzel** 2015, p. 5). The first leader of the Islamic State of Iraq was Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, who was assassinated in 2010. The last known leader of ISIS was Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, killed in 2019. For more on ISIS, see also **Burke, J.** 2015. *The New Threat from Islamic Militancy*. London: The Bodley Head.

extreme Islamist views, such as radical Salafism and Jihadism⁴ or specifically Salafi Jihadism⁵ and Wahhabism, but they have also borrowed from certain elements of Arab nationalism. What is more, they have managed to skilfully design effective online information campaigns targeting different audiences. Finally, it must be borne in mind that there are also certain political facets in Islamic fundamentalism that cannot be overlooked. Those political facets, in turn, come with the inter-cultural historical dimension, whereby the changes within a specific religion should be seen in the context of wider cultural and socio-political changes and pressures.

The authors do not aim to conduct an ‘anatomic’ dissection of the ideological foundation of ISIS, instead the aim of this article to give a brief overview of certain central ideological elements and political pillars of ISIS. To that end, the authors analysed primary sources (e.g. the ISIS propaganda film “Flames of War”⁶ that relies heavily on religious narratives) as well as current literature on radical Jihadism and ISIS’s ideological base.

In today’s Middle East, dangerous extremist forces are becoming increasingly visible (especially after the Arab spring⁷ and with the escalating politics of chaos in the region⁸) and more powerful – especially Islamist⁹ religious fanatics and terrorists¹⁰, such as the more radical branches of Salafism.¹¹

⁴ **Kepel, G.** 2006. *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*. London: I. B. Tauris.

⁵ Salafi jihadism is a religious-political ideology, which is based on ideas of “physical” jihadism and the Salafi ideological base and pillars. The term “Salafist jihadist” was used by G. Kepel in 2002 with the aim of describing the hybrid nature of radical Islamist ideology that originated with international Islamist fighters and jihadists during the Soviet-Afghanistan war as the jihad waged against Soviet invasion. (**Livesey, B.** 2019. *The Salafist Movements*. Frontline. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/front/special/sala.html> (11.11.2019)). [**Livesey** 2019]

⁶ **ISIS Releases Propaganda Video: Flames of War.** 2014. – The Rubin Report, September 17. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAoH0Xr5a8c> (11.12.2019). [**ISIS Releases Propaganda Video: Flames of War** 2014]

⁷ **Danahar, P.** 2014. *The Middle East. The World after the Arab Spring*. London-New Delhi-New York-Sydney: Bloomsbury.

⁸ **Roy, O.** 2008. *The Politics of Chaos in the Middle East*. New York: Columbia University Press.

⁹ For more on Islamism, e.g. **Martin, R. C.; Barzegar, A.** (eds.) 2010. *Islamism, Contested Perspectives on Political Islam*. Stanford University Press. Stanford, California.

¹⁰ **Hübsch, H.** 2001. *Fanatische Krieger im Namen Allahs: die Wurzeln des islamischen Terrors*. Die Deutsche Bibliothek. München: Heinrich Hugendubel Verlag.

¹¹ For more see: **Mölder, Sazonov** 2019.

Several of these religious extremist groups¹² are very active in the Middle East and even in the West. This is especially true in Syria, a country enmeshed in a bloody civil war for the past eight years (since March 2011) and where in 2014, radical Islamists succeeded in establishing a terrorist quasi-state called “the Caliphate”¹³ or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)¹⁴ on the territories nominally belonging to Syria and Iraq. As Fraser *et al.* have stated:

*At the beginning of 2013, an emergent Sunni group, known as the Islamic State of Iraq, began a series of attacks in the country, while in April, the formation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL), drawing on support in both Iraq and Syria, was announced. Calling itself the Islamic State, in June the organisation declared the Caliphate.*¹⁵

By the end of 2019, ISIS had lost these previously controlled territories in Iraq and Syria. Nevertheless, although ISIS can be currently deemed mostly defeated from a military point of view, its ideological ideas, key leaders, and thousands of fighters sustain the threat of potential re-establishment of the Islamic State in the Middle East. Thus, ISIS as such has yet to truly be defeated.¹⁶

In addition, radical – and often also politically motivated – religious groups have become more and more visibly influential, especially by using information warfare.¹⁷ R. Zgryziewicz has highlighted the following with regard to ISIS’s information war tactics:

¹² **Rubin, B. M.** (ed.) 2009. *Guide to Islamist Movements*. New York, London: M. E. Sharpe, Amonk.

¹³ The Caliphate was declared by the leaders of ISIS in June 2014 and the title of Caliph was given to their leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (1971–2019), originally named Ibrahim Awad Ibrahim al-Badri.

¹⁴ **Bunzel** 2015.

¹⁵ **Fraser, T. G.; Mango, A.; McNamara, R.** 2017. *Making the Modern Middle East*. London: Gingko, p. 427.

¹⁶ **Ianes, E.** 2019. ISIS has been waiting for this very moment as Trump-fueled chaos in Syria helps it regroup. – *Business Insider*, October 15. <https://www.businessinsider.com/isis-could-regroup-amid-trump-fueled-chaos-in-syria-2019-10> (10.10.2019).

¹⁷ **Zgryziewicz, R.; Grzyb, T.; Fahmy, Sh.; Shaheen J.** 2015. *Daesh Information Campaign and its Influence. Results of the Study*. Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. <https://www.stratcomcoe.org/daesh-information-campaign-and-its-influence-1> (09.12.2019).

Visuals, words, and actions have been effectively used for shaping the information environment. Daesh has adopted the strategy of creating its own version of the symbols that internationally recognised countries use, i.e. the flag, anthem, emblems, and organizational structure. These are intrinsic to Daesh's communication strategy. The group advertises its good management practices, declarations of support from other organisations recognised within its community of support, as well as their operational successes. By highlighting its achievements and emphasizing its future plans, Daesh strives to inspire hope, excitement, and confidence in those people who are inclined to believe in them. To counter these 'legitimising narratives' it is important to observe how the group communicates, both internally and externally.¹⁸

In the past decades, religiously motivated fundamentalist¹⁹ political movements and extremist terrorist organizations (e.g. ISIS, Al-Qaeda, etc.) have become extremely influential in the Middle East. They have even been able to change both the regional and global security environment, making it more unstable, dangerous and explosive. To that end, they often use religion and religious narratives, phenomena and ideas, as tools for influencing their target audiences and, of course, as an instrument for achieving their political and ideological aims.²⁰

It must be borne in mind that in the Middle Eastern cultural space, religion is still very closely intertwined with politics, just as it was in ancient times.²¹ This enmeshment is prevalent to such an extent that they are often impossible to separate from one another. What is more, these theological systems can even be used by religious extremists to justify their crimes and violent²² methods (e.g. warfare, terrorism, deportations, intolerance towards

¹⁸ **Zgryziewicz, R.** 2016. Daesh Strategic Communications. – Kudors, A., Pabriks, A. (eds.). The War in Syria: Lessons for the West. The Centre for East European Policy Studies. Rīga: University of Latvia Press, p. 106. https://www.cimic-coe.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/20160101_UC_The-War-in-Syria-Lessons-for-the-West.pdf (10.10.2019). [Zgryziewicz 2016]

¹⁹ **New, D. S.** 2002. Holy War. The Rise of Militant Christian, Jewish and Islamic Fundamentalism. Jefferson, NC, London: McFarland & Company.

²⁰ For more see: **Mölder, Sazonov** 2019, p. 14.

²¹ **Mölder, H; Sazonov, V.** 2016. Sõjateoloogia ilmingud Lähis-Idas Da'ishi näitel: kas religioosne liikumine või poliitilis-sõjaline organisatsioon? – Sõjateadlane, nr 3, lk 208–231. [Mölder, Sazonov 2016].

²² **Selengut, C.** 2003. Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

other religious or ethnic groups), which they often utilise to achieve their political objectives.²³

This begs the question: what is the underlying foundation of ISIS's programme in the radical religious-ideological context? In broad terms, it is the same as that of all Islamists – the Quran and the Sharia law are all-encompassing, conveying a holistic framework to make sense of the world.²⁴ However, it must be borne in mind that ISIS is also a Jihadist and fundamentalist radical Salafi²⁵ movement that idealises the early medieval Muslim world of Prophet Muhammad, and strives to return to the early days of Islamism as their official credo. Essentially, ISIS's ideology comprises several universal and skilfully compiled narratives. Some of them are borrowed from the early Islamic traditions, others from modern extremism, radical Salafism (Qutbism), Wahhabism, as well as Arab nationalism, while also drawing on successful practices of Western PR campaigns.²⁶

Cole Bunzel, an American expert on Wahhabism, has analysed the ideology of ISIS by dividing its history into several clearly distinguishable periods or stages. According to Bunzel²⁷, the first stage was the genesis of the idea of ISIS “*in what is called the Zarqawi prelude (2002–2006), the period of jihadism's initial rise in Iraq under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (1966–2006)*”. The second stage of ISIS's ideological development was the period of the Islamic State of Iraq (2006–2013), which Bunzel describes as “*a largely failed attempt at state formation coinciding with jihadism's decline in the country*”. The next or third stage was the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (2013–2014), “*which saw the much-delayed success of the Islamic State idea in the group's expansion to Syria. The fourth is that of the Islamic State as the outright Caliphate (2014–present)*”.

What are ISIS's aims? ISIS wants to restore the Arab society to the early days of Islam, and as such, its main objective is to return to the roots of Islam, consequently rejecting all reforms and all innovation that have occurred within Islam and in Muslim religious customs and understandings. According to ISIS's views and understanding, all changes are bound to corrupt the original and pure nature of the Islam of Muhammad's era. Thus, their goal is to promote the Wahhabist ideological approach that aims to

²³ Mölder, Sazonov 2019, p. 14.

²⁴ Mölder, Sazonov 2016.

²⁵ Not all Salafists can be considered radical and violent.

²⁶ Sazonov, V. 2014b.

²⁷ Bunzel 2015, all subsequent quotes in this section from p. 5.

restore the Caliphate of the 7th century. ISIS's leaders believe that this new Caliphate should be governed in accordance with Salafist doctrine and Sharia law.²⁸ Of course this official vision needs to be corrected to reality, since no actual return is really feasible, and even the idea of choosing the purest form of Islam is itself primarily a political decision.

2. Salafism and Wahhabism as the Main Ideological Pillars of ISIS

What are Salafism and Wahhabism? The ultraconservative Sunni Muslims are known as Salafī and they idealize the person of the Prophet Muhammad and the first caliphs who lived in the 7th century. The official goal of the Salafī is to return to the roots and origins of Islam – to a society, to the concepts and values of the early 7th century. The term “Salafism” is defined as “*a school of thought which surfaced in the second half of the 19th century as a reaction to the spread of European ideas, seeking to expose the roots of modernity within Muslim civilization*”.²⁹

For ultraconservative Sunni Muslims, Prophet Muhammad's life and that of the first Caliphs, including all their words and deeds, constitute the fundamental basis for interpreting Islamic law and religious dogma. The ideologists of Salafī movements emphasize their desire to turn back the wheels of history, striving to establish a direct link with the life of Mohammad and his period. In this context, one of the most prevalent Salafī terms is *al-Wahhābiyya*, originated by Islamic preacher and a well-known scholar Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab who was pressured by his opponents to denounce his teachings as mere personal opinion.³⁰ The scholar al-Wahhab and his followers called themselves *al-Muwahhīdūn*, meaning “those who profess the unity of God”.³¹ In the 20th century this term has been appropriated by the followers of the Salafī, for example Sulaymān bin Saḥmān.³²

²⁸ **The ideology of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.** – Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ideology_of_the_Islamic_State_of_Iraq_and_the_Levant#cite_note-42 (12.12.2019).

²⁹ **Mölder, Sazonov** 2019, p. 21

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ **Pink, J.** 2010. Tradition and Ideology in Contemporary Sunnite Qur'ānic Exegesis: Qur'ānic Commentaries from the Arab World, Turkey and Indonesia and their Interpretation of Q 5:51. – *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 50(1), pp. 3–59.

³² **Mölder, Sazonov** 2019, p. 21.

ISIS, which has tried to build its ideological foundation on Salafism and Wahhabism, is itself also a branch of Salafism, specifically a radical branch called Qutbism or Jihadist Salafism. However, Salafism itself, as a movement and ideology, does not automatically refer to radical Islamism or terrorist ideology. Owing to that, it should also be noted that as an ideology, Salafism does not constitute one uniform, extremist authority as has been depicted in the media after the 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and other terrorist acts in Madrid, Paris, Berlin and London, etc.³³

Instead it is possible to distinguish between at least three to five distinct branches within the Salafi movement. First, there is the non-violent and peaceful Purist branch of Salafism, seeking to promote mainly religious goals, ideas and Islamic education. The second branch of Salafi movements is known as Madkhalist Salafism, which it is quite close to the Purists, mainly comprising the followers of Saudi Arabian Islamic scholar Rabee al-Madkhali³⁴. The Madkhalist Salafi support secular state-building in the Arab world, claiming that secular leaders have been granted a divine right to rule their countries.³⁵

The third Salafi branch is the most populous branch of the Salafi movement, usually referred to as mainstream Salafism or political Salafism. It condemns violence, but contrary to the Purist and Madkhalist branches, they are quite actively engaged in the political processes in their home countries and societies. Fourthly, the most infamous, but less popular branch of Salafism is Jihadism, a radical branch that is used by organizations such as ISIS and other Islamist terrorist organizations. This radical Salafi Jihadism has gathered strength, especially since the mid-1990s, using terrorism, sabotage, information war, cyber-attacks, violence, various means of hybrid warfare as their main instruments against secular regimes and governments, and also against non-Muslims, but also against Shia Muslims, who they consider apostates.³⁶

³³ Mölder, Sazonov 2019, p. 21.

³⁴ Born in 1931 in Saudi Arabia, Rabee' Ibn Haadee 'Umayr al-Madkhalee is the head of the Sunnah Studies Department at the Islamic University of Madinah in Medina, Saudi Arabia. He is a famous Salafist scholar, and is considered to be the leader and founder of the Madkhali-Salafi movement.

³⁵ Mölder, Sazonov 2019, pp. 21–22.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

2.1. ISIS and Qutbism

As mentioned above, Salafism has many different branches and movements, including some more or less moderate or radical movements, with different degrees of politicisation, etc. One of its radical branches is called Qutbism, and it has served as a major influence on the ideological foundations of the al-Qaeda organization, as well as ISIS and others.

Qutbism was named after its founder Sayyid Qutb³⁷ (1906–1966), one of the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in the 1950–60s. As highlighted by Kepel “*Qutb’s early inspiration had come from the Brothers – but at the end of his life, he was able to draw conclusions from their failures as well as their successes, and to confront the new situation created by the disappearance of colonialism and the rise of an independent state that was hostile to Islamist ideals*”.³⁸ According to Qutb, Islam is a comprehensive system of morality, law, and management, all governed by the principles of Sharia law. Qutb’s main contribution to Islam is his 30-volume edition of commentaries to the Quran called “*In the Shade of the Qur’ān*”. Originally known as a secular and progressive scholar, Qutb turned to fundamentalist Islamism in the course of his studies in the United States during the late 1940s. Interestingly, although Qutb welcomed the “Free Officers” movement led by Gamal Abdel Nasser and their coup to overthrow the ruling Egyptian king Farouk in 1952, he soon fell into deep conflict with the new rulers, ultimately spending ten years (1954–1964) in prison where he wrote his famous political manifesto of Islamism “*Milestones*” (*Ma’alim fi-l-Tariq*). Two years later, in 1966, Qutb was executed by hanging.³⁹

Sayyid Qutb’s younger brother Muhammad (1919–2014) was also a follower of Islamism and its ideological patterns, eventually moving to Saudi Arabia. He taught Islamic studies and his students included future radical terrorist al-Qaeda leaders such as Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. It is worth mentioning that Muhammad Qutb’s magnum opus “*Islam: The Misunderstood Religion*” (*Shubuhāt Hawla al-Islam*) is considered one of the foundational writings of the fundamentalist and radical path of Islamism that promotes Islamic moral superiority over the Western world as well as its ideas and values.⁴⁰

³⁷ **Kepel, G.** 2002. *Jihad. The Trail of Political Islam*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, pp. 30–32. [**Kepel** 2002]

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁹ **Mölder, Sazonov** 2019, p. 22.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Thus, in essence, ISIS draws heavily from the Qutbist branch of Salafism, using and promoting the ideas and views of such Islamist scholars and spokesmen as Sayyid Qutb, Abul A'la Maududi, Hassan al-Banna, etc. As described above, Qutbism is an extreme Islamist ideology “*that advocates violent jihad to establish governance according to sharia (Islamic law). It is believed to be the foundational ideology of today’s most dangerous violent Islamist groups, including al-Qaeda and ISIS*”.⁴¹

3. Jihadism as the Ideological Core of ISIS

We should begin by defining the term *jihad*⁴², one of the many central and strong narratives that correspond to the mind-set of certain Muslims, especially those who are radicalised. According to Middle Eastern understandings, the term *jihad* (now mostly used to denote terrorism, radical Islamists or suicide attacks) is more or less equivalent to the Western concept of *ius ad bellum*, defining the circumstances of a just war. The famous Islamic scholar Ibn Khaldun (1322–1402) has discussed the terms of ‘just’ and ‘unjust’ wars in his major work *Muqaddimah* (“Introduction”).⁴³

Asma Afsaruddin, Professor of Arabic and Islamic studies, defines *Jihad* in the following manner:

Jihad, (Arabic: “struggle” or “effort”) also spelled **jehad**, in Islam, a meritorious struggle or effort. The exact meaning of the term jihad depends on context; it has often been erroneously translated in the West as ‘holy war’. Jihad, particularly in the religious and ethical realm, primarily refers to the human struggle to promote what is right and to prevent what is wrong. In the Qur’ān jihad is a term with multiple meanings. During the Meccan period (c. 610–622 CE), when the Prophet Muhammad received revelations of the Qur’ān at Mecca, the emphasis was on the internal dimension of jihad, termed ṣabr, which refers to the practice of “patient forbearance” by Muslims in the face of life’s vicissitudes and toward those who wish them harm. The Qur’ān also speaks of carrying out jihad by means of the Qur’ān against the pagan Meccans during the Meccan period (25:52), implying a verbal and discursive struggle against those who reject the message of

⁴¹ **Qutbism** (*sine anno*). – Counter Extremist Project. <https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/qutbism> (12.12.2019).

⁴² **Kepel, G.** 2002. See more on jihad: **Peterson, Ü.** 2005. Džihaadi kontseptsioonid kujunemine Koraanis. Magistritöö, Tartu Ülikooli filosoofiateaduskond. Tartu: Tartu Ülikool.

⁴³ **Bahrani, Z.** 2008. Rituals of War. The Body of Violence in Mesopotamia. New York: Zone Books, p. 11; **Mölder, Sazonov** 2016, p. 223.

Islam. In the Medinan period (622–632), during which Muhammad received Qur’ānic revelations at Medina, a new dimension of jihad emerged: fighting in self-defense against the aggression of the Meccan persecutors, termed qitāl. In the later literature – comprising Hadith, the record of the sayings and actions of the Prophet; mystical commentaries on the Qur’ān; and more general mystical and edifying writings – these two main dimensions of jihad, ṣabr and qitāl, were renamed jihād al-naḥs (the internal, spiritual struggle against the lower self) and jihād al-sayf (the physical combat with the sword), respectively. They were also respectively called al-jihād al-akbar (the greater jihad) and al-jihād al-asghar (the lesser jihad).⁴⁴

Thus, Jihad⁴⁵ is a broad term and does not always denote violent deeds and holy war against non-Muslims. Secondly, embedded deep in the ideological foundation of ISIS is radical Salafi Jihadist ideology, itself, in turn, based on

the violent exploitation of Salafist tenets and the strict interpretation of Islamic law, which is manifest in Sharia. The ideologues of the Islamic State seek to govern every aspect of their follower’s life and base their actions on dogmas of the Quran and Hadiths that are shaped according to their understanding.⁴⁶

It has been argued that Salafi Jihadists have taken the most extreme passages from the Quran⁴⁷ and the Hadiths⁴⁸ to justify violent and radical actions, in essence, abusing Islam.⁴⁹ The jihadists call on their supporters to start a religious war and in this they rely on modern ideologists but also on the Quran. For example, the Quran (9:29–30) says:

The Jews say, “Ezra is the son of Allah”; and the Christians say, “The Messiah is the son of Allah.” That is their statement from their mouths; they

⁴⁴ **Afsaruddin, A.** (*sine anno*). Jihad. – Encyclopaedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/jihad> (13.12.2019). [**Afsaruddin s. a.**]

⁴⁵ For more on jihad, see **Rashid, A.** 2002. Jihad. The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia. A World Policy Institute Book. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

⁴⁶ **Mölder, Sazonov** 2016, p. 325.

⁴⁷ All quotes from the Quran used in this article are taken from **Holy Qur’an** 1993. Translated by M. H. Shakir. Qum, Islamic Republic of Iran: Ansariyan Publications P.O.B. 37185/187. [**Holy Qu’ran** 1993]

⁴⁸ **Бертон, Д.** 2006. Мусульманское предание: введение в хадисоведение. Москва-Санкт-Петербург: Диля.

⁴⁹ **Williams, J.** 2015. How ISIS uses and abuses Islam. – Vox, November 18. <https://www.vox.com/2015/11/18/9755478/isis-islam> (11.12.2019).

*imitate the saying of those who disbelieved [before them]. May Allah destroy them; how are they deluded?*⁵⁰

3.1. Salafi Jihadism

Salafi jihadism is a religious-political ideology which is based on the beliefs and ideas of jihadism and the ideological core of the Salafi movement. The term ‘Salafist jihadist’ was introduced by Gilles Kepel in 2002 with the aim of describing hybrid Islamist radical ideology which was developed in the 1980s by international Islamist fighters during the Soviet-Afghan War as jihad against the Soviet invasion.⁵¹

The ideology of the Islamic State propagated by ISIS, is based on Salafi jihadism, who consider jihad as its essential element. To illustrate their understanding of Jihad, the authors offer the following excerpt from a speech by one of the leaders of the Islamic State of Iraq, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi:

*We believe that jihad in God’s path is an individual obligation, from the fall of al-Andalus until the liberation of [all] Muslim lands, and [that it is an individual obligation] in the presence of a pious person or an impious person. And [we believe that] the greatest of sins after disbelief in God is barring from jihad in God’s path at the time when it is an individual obligation. Ibn Hazm said: “No sin after disbelief in God is greater than the sin of forbidding jihad against the unbelievers and commanding the surrender of the Muslim’s women to them on account of the sinfulness of a Muslim man whom others do not call to account for his sinfulness.”*⁵²

4. Fundamentalism as a Political Phenomenon

As indicated in the chapter on Salafism and Wahhabism, the Salafi ideology can be seen as a 19th century response to European influence on Islam. This idea deserves a more in-depth analysis as it provides an extra layer of backdrop for understanding the radical fundamentalist movements within Islam.

First of all, it would be expedient to outline in more detail the direct and indirect influence of European and Western culture on the emergence and development of Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism. The main pressures can be most explicitly seen in the form of European colonisation

⁵⁰ **Holy Qur’an** 1993.

⁵¹ **Livesey** 2019.

⁵² **Bunzel** 2015, pp. 39–40.

as the history of Western colonisation has hardly left any Muslim nation untouched.⁵³ While it is difficult to define Islamic fundamentalism as a straightforward response to the felt impacts of European pressure, this line of argument cannot be entirely cast aside either.⁵⁴

Indeed, this article approaches Islamic radicalism partly as a response of a traditional culture in danger of losing its roots and, in order to revitalize them, turning to its sources with the aim of establishing a strict set of rules. This strictness is meant to provide a feeling of security and thus, radicalisation can be seen as a way of overcoming the inner insecurity of a community or a people. As such, fundamentalism could hardly be seen as a purely religious phenomenon. In essence, and in existential terms, it is much more political, seeking to condition individual thought and behaviour into following the 'right path' as prescribed by religious doctrine. Although nowadays, fundamentalism is primarily associated with Islam, it originally acquired its name from Christian fundamentalists in America where certain groups of immigrants felt endangered by the changing interpretation of the Bible⁵⁵, with particularly strong opposition emerging against the German hermeneutical school of Bible interpretation. However, it is possible to pinpoint even earlier examples of Christian fundamentalism, such as early modern Calvinist regimes in Switzerland (e.g. in Geneva, Basel and Zürich).⁵⁶

In this context, the changes brought on by modernity could be said to have prompted a fundamentalist response which focused on the rules of the right way of life. While ostensibly focusing on Christian theology, its actual effect was the establishment a radical theocratic regime that issued strict

⁵³ **McDonnell, Th. M.** 2010. *The West's Colonization of Muslim Land and the Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism*. Chapter 1: The United States, International Law, and the Struggle against Terrorism. – DigitalCommons@Pace. Pace Law Faculty Publications. <http://digitalcommons.pace.edu/lawfaculty/833/> (13.12.2019). For consequences of the post-colonial choices in Sudan which may have side-lined moderate Islamic schools, see: **Mansoud, M. F.** 2018. How an Islamic State Rejected Islamic Law. – *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, Vol. 66, Issue 3, September, pp. 579–602. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcl/avy036>.

⁵⁴ **Emerson, M. O., Hartman, D.** 2006. *The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism*. – *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 32, pp. 127–144.

⁵⁵ For insights into how Darwin's ideas of evolution were perceived by the 19th century American Protestant fundamentalists, see **Trollinger, S. L.; Trollinger, W. V.** 2017. *The Bible and Creationism*. English Faculty Publications, p. 105. http://ecommons.udayton.edu/eng_fac_pub/105 (13.12.2019).

⁵⁶ **Mansbach, R.** 2006. Calvinism as a Precedent for Islamic Radicalism. – *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. 12(2), Winter/Spring, pp. 103–115.

prescriptions on everything from food and clothing to schooling. In short, by interpreting the Bible as a straightforward prescription of righteous living, these regimes can be deemed fundamentalist and, in 20th century parlance, totalitarian.

Several fundamental differences notwithstanding, a similar basic pattern can also be observed with Islamic fundamentalism. A perceived, either real or imaginary, threat to a traditional way of life prompts a radical fundamentalist response that digs deep into the spiritual scriptures of a people, yet exemplifies a political rather than religious move to save the traditional way of life. When speaking about Islamic radicalism, we should always keep that political aspect in mind, and although it cannot be expected to explain everything, it brings the otherwise self-restricted phenomenon out of isolation and opens it up for a more practical interpretation.

5. Religious Narratives as Propaganda Tools

ISIS has utilised religious ideas and narratives for propaganda purposes, for example, in their propaganda video “Flames of War”⁵⁷, where they speak about the Caliphate, disbelievers or non-believers (*kafir*), *Tawhid* (Arabic, ‘unification or oneness of Allah’), and *jihad*.

To begin, it is necessary to clarify a couple of things to truly understand the ideological foundations of Islamic religious fanaticism, and the concept of *jihad*⁵⁸ in the beginning of the 21st century and how it is used by ISIS from an ideological point of view. First of all, what constitutes the ideological basis? The most important cornerstone of Islamist movements is, naturally, the Quran.⁵⁹ In 1938, renowned Islamist theologian Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949)⁶⁰, founder of the movement Muslim Brotherhood⁶¹, declared: “*Allah is our ideal. Prophet is our leader. Qur’ān is our law*”.⁶²

⁵⁷ **ISIS Releases Propaganda Video: Flames of War** 2014.

⁵⁸ **Bukay, D.** 2007. Peace or Jihad? Abrogation of Islam. – Middle East Quarterly, Vol 14(4), pp. 3–11; **Mölder, Sazonov** 2016, lk 220–221.

⁵⁹ **Holy Qur’an** 1993.

⁶⁰ **Kepel** 2002, p. 27.

⁶¹ **Aboul-Encim, Y.** 2013. Al Ikhwan al Muslimism: The Muslim brotherhood. – Military Review, Vol. 3, pp 26–31; **Kepel** 2002, pp. 27–30.

⁶² **Hirsi Ali, A.** 2011. The Quran Is Our Law; Jihad Is Our Way. – The Wall Street Journal, Opinion, February 11. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704132204576136590964621006> (11.11.2019); **Mölder, Sazonov** 2016, lk 219.

Essentially, all Islamic fundamentalists⁶³ follow the same dogma. In 2014, the leaders of ISIS declared the Caliphate, headed by a Caliph, following the example of the medieval Islamist state established in the 7th century. The name – the Caliphate – was later appropriated by the Ottoman Empire, where the Sultans, rulers of that empire, also took the title of Caliphs. Today, this concept has been used once more, this time by ISIS. The Caliphate certainly seems to be a brand that is remarkably popular, while also being quite simple and easy to understand, and most importantly, readily available to use in propaganda videos⁶⁴, etc, not requiring a special public relations campaign. That seems to be the main reason why it has been appropriated by ISIS, very successful in conducting information warfare, as an influential propaganda weapon.⁶⁵

Thus, ISIS has actively used the historical narrative of the Arab Caliphate, which historically existed from 632 to 1258, as its foundational as well as aspirational pillar. According to Holger Mölder “*it claimed to have authority over the whole Muslim world, and through its affiliated organizations, as well as territories in the Middle East and North Africa controlled by the Islamic State.*”⁶⁶

Many of ISIS’s ideological leaders and spokesmen claim that their main goal is the establishment of a pure and undistorted Islam of Muhammad’s era and the original Caliphs (Salafi views). However, this seems to be simply a useful tool for influencing people and attracting potential supporters to their ranks. What is more, ISIS’s propaganda messages seem to be changing according to the situation in the Middle East.⁶⁷

⁶³ Davidson, L. 1998. *Islamic Fundamentalism*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

⁶⁴ **ISIS Releases Propaganda Video: Flames of War** 2014.

⁶⁵ Al-Tamimi, A. 2017. *The Myth of ISIS’s Strategic Brilliance*. – The Atlantic, July 20. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/07/isis-defeat-plan/534330/> (28.11.2019).

⁶⁶ Mölder, H. 2019. *The Islamic State, Clash of Civilizations and their Impact on the Development of Contemporary International Relations*. – Sazonov, V.; Mölder, H.; Espak, P. (eds.) 2019. *Cultural Crossroads in the Middle East: The Historical, Cultural and Political Legacy of Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict from the Ancient Near East to the Present Day* (Studia Orientalia Tartuensia, Series Nova; VIII). Tartu: University of Tartu Press, pp. 314–345.

⁶⁷ **Daesh propaganda, before and after its collapse. Countering violent extremism**. 2019. Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. <https://stratcomcoe.org/download/file/fid/80922> (10.12.2019).

ISIS has also used various controversial religious sayings, ideas and narratives from the Quran⁶⁸, often containing violent messages. H. Hassan⁶⁹ has pointed out that “*Isis depends heavily on what Muslim clerics consider isolated incidents described in sacred texts that it believes should not be followed as rules*”. The authors agree with Hassan who has correctly remarked that “*because Isis bases its teachings on religious texts that mainstream Muslim clerics do not want to deal with head on, new recruits leave the camp feeling that they have stumbled on the true message of Islam*”.

For example, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi⁷⁰, one of the original leaders of the Islamic State of Iraq, similarly to other leaders of this organization, often quoted the Quran⁷¹ in his speeches⁷², for example:

Whoso judges not according to what God has revealed—they are the unbelievers (Quran 5:44).

The Satans inspire their friends to dispute with you; if you obey them, you are idolaters (Quran 6:121).

In addition, the authors further offer a selection of passages from the Quran⁷³ which radical Islamists (e.g. ISIS, etc.) may use for their ideological and propaganda purposes, for justifying their actions and criminality (e.g. raping girls, etc.)⁷⁴

Quran (2:191) – “*Slay them wherever you find them and drive them out of the places whence they drove you out, for persecution is worse than slaughter.*”

⁶⁸ **ISIS Releases Propaganda Video: Flames of War** 2014.

⁶⁹ **Hassan, H.** 2015. The secret world of Isis training camps – ruled by sacred texts and the sword. – The Guardian, January 25. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/25/inside-isis-training-camps> (12.12.2019).

⁷⁰ Abu Omar al-Baghdadi (1959–2010), born Hamid Dawud Muhammad Khalil al-Zawi, was the leader of the militant group Mujahideen Shura Council, who fought against the U.S. forces in the Iraq War. From 2006 to 2010 he served as the first emir of the Islamic State of Iraq.

⁷¹ **Holy Qur’an** 1993.

⁷² **Bunzel** 2015, p. 39.

⁷³ **Holy Qur’an** 1993.

⁷⁴ **Khanna, T.** 2015. Islamic State militant rapes 12-year-old girl, uses Quran to justify it. – Zeenews, August 14. https://zeenews.india.com/news/world/islamic-state-militant-rapes-12-year-old-girl-uses-quran-to-justify-it_1647059.html (12.12.2019); **Esman, A. R.** 2015. ISIS Rapes Women toward Allah. – The Investigation Project on Terrorists, October 23. <https://www.investigativeproject.org/5013/isis-rapes-women-toward-allah> (12.12.2019); see also **ISIS Releases Propaganda Video: Flames of War** 2014.

Quran (3:56) – *“As to those who reject faith, I will punish them with terrible agony in this world and in the Hereafter, nor will they have anyone to help.”*

Quran (2:19) – *Kill them wherever you find them. Drive them out of the places from which they drove you.*

Quran (8:12) – *I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. Therefore strike off their heads and strike off every fingertip of them.*

Quran (3:151) – *“Soon shall we cast terror into the hearts of the Unbelievers, for that they joined companions with Allah, for which He had sent no authority.”*

Quran (48:29) – *“Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. And those with him are hard (ruthless) against the disbelievers and merciful among themselves.”*

These types of violent and extreme passages are often picked by ISIS from the Quran to justify their violent and radical actions.⁷⁵ This is supported by Afsaruddin’s argumentation, claiming that

Islamist extremists have used the rubric of jihad to justify violent attacks against Muslims whom they accuse of apostasy. In contrast to such extremists, a number of modern and contemporary Muslim thinkers insist on a holistic reading of the Qur’ān, assigning great importance to the Qur’ān’s restriction of military activity to self-defense in response to external aggression.⁷⁶

The jihadists, on the other hand, call on their supporters to wage a religious war, referring to both modern ideologists but also to the Quran:

Fight those who do not believe in Allah or in the Last Day and who do not consider unlawful what Allah and His Messenger have made unlawful and who do not adopt the religion of truth from those who were given the Scripture—[fight] until they give the jizyah willingly while they are humbled (Qur’ān, 9:29–30).⁷⁷

We know that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the Caliph of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) from 2013 to 2019, studied theology and Islamic studies, and therefore knew very well how to effectively use such religious narratives for these purposes. What is more, as his official title, he took the name – Abu Bakr – of the very first Caliph of the Arab Caliphate, Abu Bakr Abdullah ibn Uthman (632-634), the first legitimate successor of Prophet

⁷⁵ **ISIS Releases Propaganda Video: Flames of War** 2014.

⁷⁶ **Afsaruddin** *s. a.*

⁷⁷ **Holy Qur’an** 1993.

Muhammad and also Muhammad's father-in-law. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi purported himself as the leader of all Muslims and the vicar of Allah on Earth. Furthermore, as the Caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi also took the name Ibrahim, a common name among Muslims; however, it bears noting that Ibrahim is also the Arabic name of God's messenger, the prophet Abraham. ISIS and its leaders claimed that their chosen leader, Caliph Ibrahim, was the founder of the new Caliphate or the man leading the restoration of the Caliphate as it was in 7th century, at the time of Muhammad and the first Caliph Abu Bakr. Furthermore, they maintained that only Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is the legitimate successor of Prophet Muhammad and holds the true vision for the development and future of the Caliphate.⁷⁸

R. Zgryziewicz, an expert on ISIS's information warfare, has pointed out:

In his first speech, the self-claimed Caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, announced his plans to build a Muslim state and his expectations for re-establishing the Caliphate. The organization came up with a unique value proposition – the unification of the Muslim world in a newly declared state to experience the sacred benefits of as a part of the Ummah. By articulating these future benefits, Daesh was able to capture the attention and interest of specific target audiences. By June 2014, already 12,000 foreign fighters from 81 countries had joined in the fighting in Syria's civil war.⁷⁹

The idea of establishing a pan-Arabic Caliphate is not new, dating back to the first Caliphs who ruled in the 7th century. The territory of the ISIS Caliphate or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), whose establishment was declared by their newly chosen leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was located in eastern parts of Syria and in western Iraq. Subsequently, ISIS strove to expand the territory of its Caliphate by trying to conquer the rest of Syria and Iraq, with a long-term plan to take control over Lebanon, Israel and Palestinian territory as well as invading Egypt and eventually expanding the Caliphate across the whole of North Africa and the Middle East, the Caucasus, with even the Balkans and Spain ultimately foreseen to come under Islamic rule.⁸⁰ This idea, propagated by ISIS, of a 'Caliphate'

⁷⁸ **Stern, J.; Berger, J. M.** 2016. ISIS. Terrori riik. – Imeline Ajalugu, Imeline Teadus. Tallinn: AS Äripäev, lk 78. [Stern, Berger 2016]

⁷⁹ **Zgryziewicz** 2016, p. 90.

⁸⁰ **ISIS: Portrait of a Jihadi Terrorist Organization.** 2014. – The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, November 26, p. 3. <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/20733/> (11.12.2019).

to unify all Muslims, was of course a utopia, but it was successfully used as a narrative of an 'ideal state of god on Earth' mainly for propaganda purposes.

For propaganda purposes, ISIS also uses the name of God (Allah)⁸¹, which carries strong religious connotations. Their aim is to show that Allah supports them and that they are his loyal warriors. For the same reason, it was decided that the flag of ISIS would be black, carrying the following text in the Arabic language: *La 'ilaha 'illa-llah* – "There is no God but God".⁸² This flag also includes a *shahada* (Islamic statement of faith), which corresponds to all Muslims of the world to *Umma*. In addition, it has also been pointed out that

*around the edges is the white circle in the middle of the ISIS flag with three words inside it: "God Messenger Mohammed." It's an interesting choice of word order given that the second part of the shahada is "and Mohammed is God's messenger."*⁸³

The black colour of the flag and adding the word 'Allah' to this flag, "*merges two powerful narrative themes*".⁸⁴ Interestingly, Prophet Muhammed's war banner was also black and thus, the flag of ISIS "*refers to the origin of Islam and points to the future for believers by also representing the day of the final battle in Dabiq and resurrection*".⁸⁵

In addition, ISIS has also used Islamic eschatology, the idea of the Day of Judgment, very forcefully, even naming their online propaganda magazine "Dabiq".⁸⁶ According to Islamic eschatology, Dabiq⁸⁷ is the settlement where 'the Final Battle' between believers and non-believers is to take place. And when the rule of Caliphate has been established globally, peace will come

⁸¹ For an example of how ISIS has used Allah's name in their propaganda, see **ISIS Releases Propaganda Video: Flames of War** 2014.

⁸² Prusher, I. 2014. What the ISIS Flag Says About the Militant Group. – Time, September 9. <http://time.com/3311665/isis-flag-iraq-syria> (12.12.2019).

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Zgryziewicz 2016, p. 99.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ **ISIS's online magazine Dabiq**. <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/isis-fighters-have-been-run-out-of-dabiq-forcing-them-to-rename-their-magazine> (11.12.2019).

⁸⁷ Dabiq is a town in northern Syria, about 40 kilometres (25 mi) northeast of Aleppo and around 10 km (6.2 mi) south of Syria's border with Turkey. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dabiq,_Syria (13.12.2019).

to all people in the world. As Zgryziewicz has correctly stated “*The ‘Dabiq prophecy’ is end-of-days story that pits the forces of Islam against the Christian West*”.⁸⁸ In Islamic eschatology, as found in the Hadith, the area of Dabiq is mentioned as the place of some of the events of the Muslim *Malahim* (equivalent to the Christian idea of an apocalypse). Abu Hurayrah, a companion of Prophet Muhammad and one of the most prolific narrators of Hadith, reported that Muhammad once said:

*The Last Hour would not come until the Romans land at al-A'maq or in Dabiq. An army consisting of the best of the people of the earth at that time will come from Medina [to defeat them].*⁸⁹

It should be noted that ISIS’s online magazine “Dabiq” promoted Jihadism, religious and political violence and genocide by using the name of God.⁹⁰ In addition, referring to the Day of Judgment was also an important and crucial element of ISIS’s communication strategy.⁹¹

6. Elements of Arab Nationalism and Xenophobia

The emergence of ISIS was also influenced by Saddam Hussein’s foreign policy⁹² of militant plans and military ventures that had negative consequences for Iraq, with the Iran–Iraq war of the 1980s as just one example.⁹³ The Iran–Iraq war lasted for eight years and devastated the whole region, being one of the bloodiest episodes in the long opposition and conflict

⁸⁸ **Patrikarakos, D.** 2016. Apocalypse or Bust: The Battle for Dabiq. – Radio Free Europe, October 9. <https://www.rferl.org/a/tracking-islamic-state-dabiq-battle-apocalypticism/28040703.html> (13.12.2019).

⁸⁹ **Zgryziewicz** 2016, pp. 97, 99.

⁹⁰ **Alhayat Media Center** ‘Islam is the religion of sword, not pacifism’. 2015. – Daesh Online Magazine ‘Dabiq’, January/February 2015, No 7, p. 20; **Alhayat Media Center** ‘Prisoners for sale’. 2015. – Daesh Online Magazine ‘Dabiq’, August/September, No 11, pp. 64–65. See also **Inside the ISIS propaganda machine**. 2019. – CBS News, November 25. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2rOVBTqN9XI> (13.12.2019).

⁹¹ **Zgryziewicz** 2016, p. 99.

⁹² **Sazonov** 2014b.

⁹³ For more on the Iran–Iraq war cf. **Fawcett, L.** 2005. International relations of the Middle East. Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 266–268; also cf. **Karsh, E.** 2010. Iraani–Iraagi sõda 1980–1988. Tallinn: Koolibri.

between the Arabs and Persians that dates back to as early as the 7th century Arab conquests in the Middle East.⁹⁴

This lengthy and bloody war brought the relatively economically stable and quite wealthy Iraq to its knees. Its adversary, Iran, several times larger and economically stronger, ultimately managed to weaken and demoralise the Iraqi army. The Arab nationalism that was at the time strongly promoted by Saddam Hussein and his followers (some of them later joining ISIS), who promoted xenophobia against the Kurds (specifically targeted by Saddam Hussein's genocidal policies), Jews, Persians, and religious groups such as Yazidis, Christians and the Shia, was taken by ISIS as one of its foundational ideological tenets.⁹⁵

Similarly to ISIS, Saddam's policies were largely founded on xenophobia and included the spreading of fear and threatening with deportation and terror, actively used against the citizens of Iraq. These kinds of nationalistic roots are clearly visible also in the case of ISIS. The hatred targeting Kurds or Yazidis, widespread among ISIS fighters, reflects partly the Arab nationalist views of Saddam Hussein and his xenophobic policy towards the Kurds, Yazidis etc.⁹⁶

However, it must be borne in mind that the 'nationalism' of ISIS is not the same as was prevalent during Saddam Hussein's reign, mainly because this strand of Arab nationalism is heavily influenced by Salafism and other Islamist ideas. What is more, ISIS fighters come from all over world and as a result, this organisation is also very international.

Saddam Hussein was also interested in ancient kings – for example, King Hammurabi (1792–1750 BC), the great conqueror and creator of the Babylonian Empire; the extremely brutal Assyrian king Sennacherib⁹⁷

⁹⁴ **Sazonov, V.** 2012. Vanad rivaalid. – Postimees, February 06, lk 6–7. <https://arvamus.postimees.ee/729494/vladimir-sazonov-vanad-rivaalid> (9.12.2019).

⁹⁵ **Sazonov, V.** 2014a. Nebukadnetsarit järgides: Saddam Hussein ja muistsed Lāhis-Ida despooidid. – Idakiri. Eesti Akadeemilise Orientaalseltsi aastaraamat, lk 129–130. [**Sazonov** 2014a]; **Spencer, W. J.** 2007. *The Middle East. Global Studies*. Dubuque: A Division of the McGraw-Hill Companies, pp. 74–75. [**Spencer** 2007] For more about genocide against Yazidis, see **Stern, Berger** 2016, lk 78–79.

⁹⁶ **Cheterian, V.** 2019. ISIS genocide against the Yazidis and mass violence in the Middle East. – *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 46, pp. 1–13.

⁹⁷ **Frahm, E.** 1997. Einleitung in Sanherib-Inschriften. – *Archiv für Orientforschung, Internationale Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft vom Vorderen Orient*, begründet von Ernst Weidner in Zusammenarbeit mit Hermann Hunger, herausgegeben von Hans Hirsch. Selbstverlag des Instituts für Orientalistik der Universität Wien. Horn: F. Berger & Söhne G.m.b.H.

(704–681 BC), and Nebuchadnezzar II⁹⁸ (605–562 BC), the most famous ruler of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, who deported Jews from Jerusalem in 587 BC – whose life experiences held plenty of lessons about regimes and establishing empires, and by using this historical knowledge, Saddam hoped to legitimize his power with their help.⁹⁹ In a political biography of Saddam Hussein, author R. J. Updike highlights the following issues regarding Saddam's imperialistic views and his anti-Semitism:

*The rulers of Mesopotamia were especially attractive for Saddam not only because of their remarkable position in the region but also because of their military advances in Palestine. Sennacherib ... the successor of Sargon II, invaded Palestine and, although he did not manage to conquer Jerusalem, he defeated some important cities in Judea and received a large impost from the king of Judah, Hezekiah. Where Sennacherib did not succeed, Nebuchadnezzar was a success: in 587 BC, after the uprising of the Jews in Palestine, he destroyed the kingdom of Judah and Jerusalem, including the Temple of Judah, and sent thousands of Jews to Babylon. Saddam often talked of this historic event and admitted that he would very much like to follow the example of the great Babylonian king.*¹⁰⁰

In 2007, the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* published an article about the legendary Middle Eastern rulers Saladin and Nebuchadnezzar as role models, noting that Saddam's year of birth (1937) coincided with the estimated 800th anniversary of the birth of Saladin, the first sultan of Egypt and Syria, one of the most famous medieval rulers of the Arab world.¹⁰¹ When Saddam Hussein learned this, he undoubtedly used it to his advantage. It was also important for Saddam that he and Saladin both originated from Tikrit and, just like Saladin, Saddam wanted to unite the Arabs under his rule and to ultimately become as powerful and revered as Saladin once was.

⁹⁸ On Nebuchadnezzar II see **da Riva, R.** 2008. The Neo-Babylonian Royal Inscriptions. An Introduction. Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record. Volume 4. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag; **da Riva, R.** 2013. Nebuchadnezzar II's Prism (EK 7834): A New Edition. – *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, Vol 103(2), pp. 196–229; **Sazonov** 2014a, lk 115.

⁹⁹ **Sazonov** 2014b.

¹⁰⁰ **Андайк, Дж.** 1999. Садам Хусейн. Политическая биография. Ростов-на-Дону: Феникс, pp 225–226; **Spencer** 2007, pp 73–74; **Sazonov** 2014b.

¹⁰¹ Cf. **Hermann, R.** 2007. Saladin und Nebukadnezar als Vorbild. [Saladin and Nebukadnezar as Role Models]. – *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 02, S. 3. <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/saddam-hussein-saladin-und-nebukadnezar-als-vorbild-1385362.html> (10.10.2019); **Sazonov** 2014b.

Similarly, the leaders of ISIS strive to unite all Arabs under their rule, using the concept of the Caliphate, as well as Arab nationalist narratives and the nationalist sentiments of local people. It is reported that Saddam Hussein hated Jews and Iranians and he disliked the Kurds. When he was young, Saddam Hussein was strongly influenced by his uncle Khairallah Talfah, an extreme Arab nationalist and an official of the Iraqi Ba'ath Party, who took Saddam into politics and later became Saddam's father-in-law.¹⁰² In addition, Saddam and the Ba'ath party were also heavily influenced by the ideas of Pan-Arabism and the Arab nationalism of Gamal Abdel Nasser, long-time President of Egypt (1954–1970).¹⁰³ Writing about former officers of Saddam's regime, Isabel Coles and Ned Parker have reported the following:

*Saddam-era officers have been a powerful factor in the rise of Islamic State, in particular in the Sunni militant group's victories in Iraq last year. Islamic State then out-muscled the Sunni-dominated Ba'ath Party and absorbed thousands of its followers. The new recruits joined Saddam-era officers who already held key posts in Islamic State. The Ba'athists have strengthened the group's spy networks and battlefield tactics and are instrumental in the survival of its self-proclaimed Caliphate, according to interviews with dozens of people, including Ba'ath leaders, former intelligence and military officers.*¹⁰⁴

According to some sources, at least over 100 former members of Saddam's military and intelligence officers are now actively involved in ISIS.¹⁰⁵ What role have they played in ISIS? It has been reported that former officers of Saddam's regime helped to devise ISIS's military strategies, establishing its organization and discipline, while also integrating military operations with such terror tactics as suicide bombings, i.e. utilising the methods of hybrid warfare. It is also known that several of ISIS's leadership positions have been occupied by former members of the Ba'ath Party.¹⁰⁶ In 2003, the last year

¹⁰² Sazonov 2014a, lk 121–122.

¹⁰³ Jilani, A. 1991. Nasser, Saddam and Pan-Arabism. – Pakistan Horizon, Vol. 44, No. 2, pp. 75–88.

¹⁰⁴ Cole, I.; Parker, N. 2015. How Saddam's men help Islamic State rule – Reuters, December 11. <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/mideast-crisis-iraq-islamicstate/> (9.12.2019). [Cole, Parker 2015]

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Sly, L. 2015. How Saddam Hussein's former military officers and spies are controlling Isis. – Independent, April 05. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/how-saddam-husseins-former-military-officers-and-spies-are-controlling-isis-10156610.html> (9.12.2019).

of Saddam Hussein's reign, Iraq's security structures were already strongly influenced by Salafism, with many members of its intelligence services reported to have ties with radical Salafists (e.g. Samir Abd Muhammad al-Khlifawi aka Haji Bakr, previously a colonel in the Iraqi Intelligence Service, and later a senior leader of ISIL, heading its Military Council and leading its operations in Syria until being killed by Syrian rebels in January 2014).¹⁰⁷ Before 2003, when the U.S. invaded Iraq, al-Khlifawi had been a colonel in the Iraqi Army, and had experience in working on weapons development and in the intelligence services of Saddam Hussein's Air Defence Corps at Habbaniya Air Base in Iraq. According to the same sources (i.e. Iraqi journalist Hisham al-Hashimi), Haji Bakr was "*a nationalist, not an Islamist*".¹⁰⁸ Thus, one of the creators and leaders of ISIS was an Arab nationalist and a colonel in Saddam's army.

In conclusion, it can be surmised that ISIS has some connections with the Arab nationalist legacy of Saddam's regime and we know that many former high-ranking officers of Saddam's army, prominent members of Iraq's ruling Ba'ath Party, have later played quite significant and in some cases even key roles in ISIS. We also know that many of them were Arab nationalists, at least during the period of Saddam Hussein's reign. Did their views change? It could be argued that in ISIS, there seems to exist some kind of mixture, a hybrid ideology and a Ba'athist-Salafist nexus. Undoubtedly, the so-called Islamic State is effectively trying to introduce radical Salafist doctrine to mobilize its followers and also to recruit fighters from outside of Iraq and Levant. However, it is important to stress that ISIS does not rely only on the Salafi Jihadist doctrine, because ISIS is also at least partly controlled by former Ba'athist Iraqi officers that are mostly represented ideologically by Saddam era Arab nationalists who played a critical role in the establishment and leadership of ISIS.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ **Reuters, Ch.** 2015. Secret Files Reveal the Structure of Islamic State. – Spiegel Online, April 18. <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/islamic-state-files-show-structure-of-islamist-terror-group-a-1029274.html> (11.12.2019).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ **Natali, D.** 2015. The Islamic State's Baathist roots. – Al-Monitor, April 24. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/fa/originals/2015/04/baathists-behind-the-islamic-state.html> (09.12.2019).

7. Conclusion

As can be seen from the discussion above, ISIS's ideological core or foundational tenets are not based on purely religious narratives and motives. The Quran and Hadiths, Sharia law as well as radical and conservative Islamic views and understandings (e.g. radical Salafism, Wahhabism, and Salafi Jihadism) are not the only ideological pillars of ISIS; instead, their leaders, spokesmen and propagandists have used violent and radical interpretations of sacred Islamic texts to justify their crimes, violence and genocide conducted against religious and ethnic minorities in Syria and Iraq.

This is related to another essential core element of ISIS's ideology – Arab nationalism. However, although it is not strongly promoted by ISIS, it is still discernible in their approach via xenophobia and genocide. What is more, some prominent founders and leaders of ISIS, such as Haji Bakr, formerly served in the Iraq armed forces under Saddam Hussein, whose underlying ideology was primarily nationalist, not Islamist. Although we did not research the issue and roots of the elements of Arab nationalism in ISIS' ideology, it seems that this variation of Arab nationalism is partially a legacy of Saddam Hussein's regime whose despotic and brutal rule was extremely xenophobic towards many religious and ethnic groups in Iraq and beyond (e.g. Iranians, Yazidis, Kurds, Jews, etc.). As reported, a large number of former members of the Iraqi Ba'ath Party and high-ranking army officers later joined ISIS, not to mention the fact that they participated in creating and in leading this terrorist organization. Therefore, it should not be a surprise that they incorporated, at least partially, their Arab nationalist and xenophobic views, ideas and understandings in the core ideology of ISIS.

Finally, the historical inter-cultural dimension bears emphasising as well because Islamic radicalism and fundamentalism cannot be properly understood without looking at these developments in the wider context of social, political and cultural pressures. In that regard, although it takes quite grotesque forms, Islamic radicalism also carries an element of political protection of their traditional way of life.

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IS THE EUROPEAN MIGRANT CRISIS ANOTHER STAGE OF HYBRID WAR?

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Abstract: This article provides an overview of the roots of large-scale migration flows to the European Union (EU) during the past ten years. In addition, the article also explores the potential link between such migration flows and modern hybrid warfare, characterised by the coordination of various types of warfare (i.e. military and non-military means, conventional and non-conventional capabilities, state and non-state actors, etc.), all employed with an aim to cause instability and disorder. In the 2010s, the migration flows to EU countries increased significantly, particularly from the conflict areas in Syria, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, as well as from Albania, Kosovo and Ukraine. The analysis focuses on the question of whether the increase in migration flows could be linked to the ongoing confrontation between Russia and the West. Specifically, the article focuses on two particular cases: Syria and Ukraine. The article explores the commonalities of the resulting migration flows to the EU and proposes policy recommendations for reducing the negative impact of such events in the future.

Keywords: migration, hybrid warfare, security, European Union, Ukraine, Syria

1. Introduction

During the 2015 European migration crisis, an unusually large number of refugees flowed into the European Union. During the past decade, the number of first-time asylum applications submitted by non-EU citizens has increased exponentially, peaking in 2015–2016 when more than a million people from non-EU countries applied for asylum in the EU over the course of just one year (Figure 1(a)). A large number of first-time asylum applications were submitted by people originating from conflict areas in Syria, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan in the Middle East or in the South Asian region (Figure 1(b)), as well as from Kosovo, Albania and Ukraine, to name some European countries (Figure 1(c)). In some cases, those past or current conflicts have been linked to Russia's activities in the international arena (e.g. the Donbass War in Ukraine or its military interference in Syria), raising the question whether these migration flows to the EU could potentially be part of Russia's hybrid warfare strategy, aimed at stirring up regional instability

and weakening the authority, credibility and unity of the European Union in the international arena.

Figure 1. The number of first-time asylum applications submitted to EU countries from 2010 to 2018 [persons per year]¹

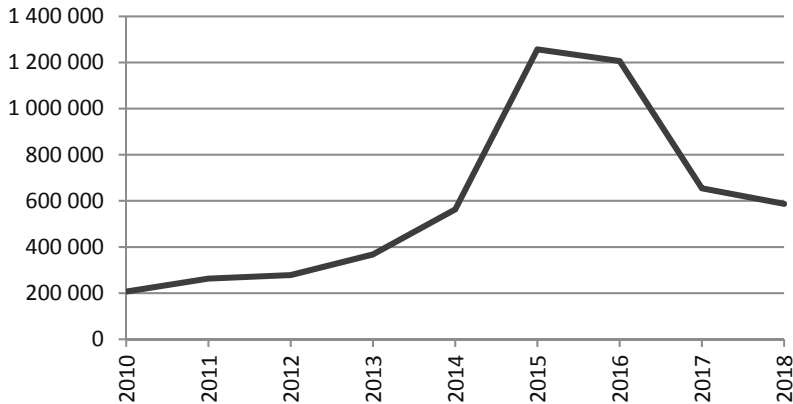


Figure 1 (a). The number of first-time asylum applications submitted from 2010 to 2018 to EU countries by non-EU citizens [persons per year]

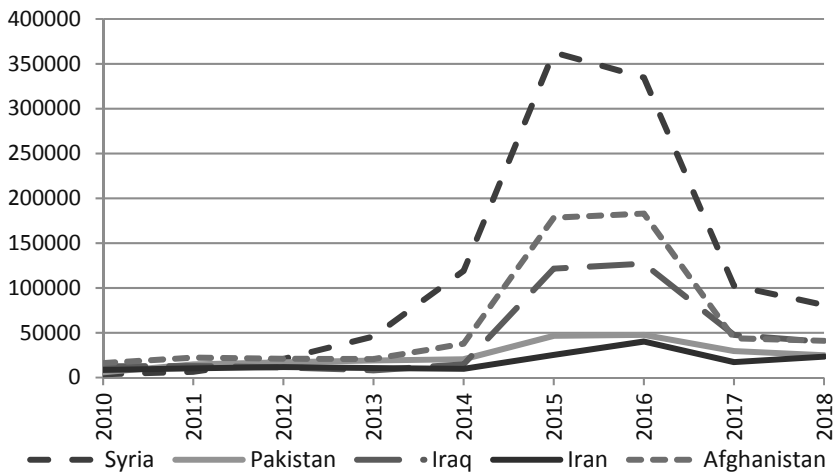


Figure 1 (b). The number of first-time asylum applications submitted from 2010 to 2018 to EU countries by the citizens of Syria, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan [persons per year]

¹ Source: Eurostat 2019. Eurostat Database. Categories: Demography and migration – Asylum and managed migration – Applications. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>. [Eurostat 2019]

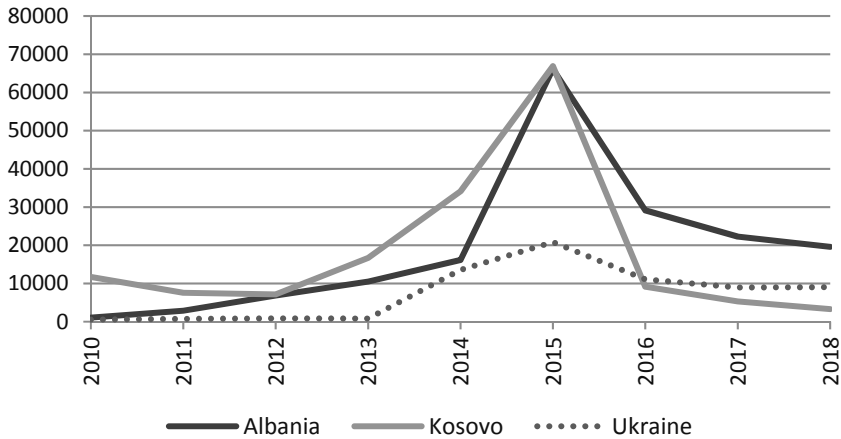


Figure 1 [c]. The number of first-time asylum applications submitted from 2010 to 2018 to EU countries by the citizens of Albania, Kosovo and Ukraine [persons per year]

This article focuses on the discussion of the roots of migration flows to the European Union over the past decade, exploring the potential link between migration flows and the tools of modern hybrid warfare as utilised by the Russian Federation. The concept of *hybrid warfare* has been previously discussed in the context of recent events in Ukraine and also in Syria by several other authors (e.g. Michael Kofman², Nicu Popescu³, etc); however, to the knowledge of the authors, none of them have previously undertaken an in-depth analysis of migration flows from the perspective of modern hybrid warfare, and this article purports to take the first step in that direction. The analysis focuses on two specific cases – Syria and Ukraine – looking to establish commonalities between migration patterns originating from Syria and Ukraine to EU countries, as well as offering policy recommendations aimed at reducing the negative impact of such events.

This research bears much importance also for the security of the Baltic states, taking into consideration that on the one hand, hybrid threats emanating from Russia are seen as critical national security concerns⁴ and on

² **Kofman, M.** 2016. Russian Hybrid Warfare and Other Dark Arts. – War on the Rocks, March 11. <https://warontherocks.com/2016/03/russian-hybrid-warfare-and-other-dark-arts/> [Kofman 2016]

³ **Popescu, N.** 2015. Hybrid Tactics: neither new nor only Russian. – European Union Institute for Security Studies, Alert Issue 46, October. https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Alert_4_hybrid_warfare.pdf.

⁴ **Veebel, V.; Ploom, I.** 2016. Estonian perceptions of security: Not only about Russia and the refugees. – Journal on Baltic Security, Vol. 2(2), pp. 35–70. <https://www.baltdefcol.org/files/files/publications/EstonianPerceptions.pdf>.

the other hand, the social tensions caused by the refugee crisis and the fears that have been triggered by these developments, are among the main factors of political instability and social fragmentation in the Baltic countries⁵.

The next section of the article provides a brief overview of the concept of *hybrid warfare* and analyses Russia's understanding of contemporary conflicts from that perspective. The following section outlines Russia's most recent interventions in Syria and Ukraine, linking them to the dynamics of migration flows to the EU, and discusses the dynamics of migration flows in the framework of hybrid warfare. The authors also acknowledge that in addition to Russia's influence, the recent large-scale migration flows to the EU are affected by other factors as well (e.g. changes in behavioural patterns, political instability, economic reasons, push-and-pull factors, climate conditions, etc.). The final section concludes the research by posing a hypothetical question about the possible consequences of large-scale migration flows as a new form of hybrid warfare, both at the national level and globally.

2. Varying Concepts of Hybrid Warfare

Conceptualising *hybrid warfare* is a challenging task mainly for two reasons. First of all, the term's connotation is 'the intangible', referring to the wide variety of measures or tools of hybrid warfare as well as the elusive nature of associated activities, actors and objectives. To quote Frank G. Hoffman:

*hybrid threats incorporate a full range of modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts that include indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder. These multi-modal activities can be conducted by separate units, or even by the same unit, but are generally operationally and tactically directed and coordinated within the main battlespace to achieve synergistic effects in the physical and psychological dimensions of conflict*⁶.

In this respect, the 'attractiveness' of hybridity lies especially in its asymmetrical nature and in the opportunity to remain just below the legal threshold at which the target state would be compelled to respond militarily.

⁵ **Veibel, V.; Markus, R.** 2015. Europe's Refugee Crisis in 2015 and Security Threats from the Baltic Perspective. – Journal of Politics and Law, Vol. 8(4), pp. 254–262. <http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/jpl/article/view/54524>.

⁶ **Hoffman, F.** 2009. Hybrid Warfare and Challenges. – The Joint Forces Quarterly, 1st quarter, Issue 52. Washington: National Defense University Press, p. 36. <https://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/jfqhoffman.pdf>.

Furthermore, the main ‘advantage’ of using hybrid modes of warfare lies in the potential to simultaneously utilise multiple measures/tools to pursue certain goals, while managing to avoid the costs of retaliation from the target⁷. What is more, Ukrainian security expert Volodymyr Horbulin also highlights the absence of clearly defined time horizons as an inherent feature of hybrid war⁸. Thus, it is clearly very difficult to define what specifically constitutes *hybrid warfare* or where it starts and ends.

On the other hand, the concept of the term *hybrid*, as in *hybrid war*, *hybrid warfare*, *hybrid threats*, *hybrid world order* etc., is in essence dynamic and thus, changing all the time. For example, Michael Kofman argues that

*in two short years, the word [hybrid warfare] has mutated from describing how Moscow was fighting its war in Ukraine to incorporating all the various elements of Russian influence and national power. The term continues to evolve, spawning iterations like ‘multi-vector hybrid warfare’ in Europe. Hybrid warfare has become the Frankenstein of the field of Russia military analysis; it has taken on a life of its own and there is no obvious way to contain it*⁹.

Consequently, in a discussion of *hybrid warfare*, all of its possible forms of should be carefully considered, including when referring to migration flows as a potential tool of hybrid warfare used to simultaneously pursue certain goals while also trying to avoid the costs of retaliation from the target.

While the term *hybrid warfare* was used for the first time in the early 2000s, the strategies of hybrid warfare are much older, seeming to date back to ancient times.¹⁰ What is more, the use of the term seems to vary slightly across individual countries and even institutions. For example, Andersson and Tardy have pointed out that the 2015 National Military Strategy of the United States refers to *hybrid conflicts*¹¹, while the United Nations mostly

⁷ Śliwa, Z.; Veebel, V.; Lebrun, M. 2018. Russian Ambitions and Hybrid Modes of Warfare. – Sõjateadlane (Estonian Journal of Military Studies), Vol. 7, pp. 86–108.

⁸ Horbulin, V. 2018. Ukrainian Front of the Hybrid World. – Strategic Panorama, Vol. 1, pp. 3–6.

⁹ Kofman 2016, p. 1.

¹⁰ For further discussion, see, e.g. Yenidünya, A.; Atalay, M. 2016. Comparative Analysis of Russian Hybrid Methods in Ukraine and Syria Crisis. – American Scientific Research Journal for Engineering, Technology, and Sciences (ASRJETS), Vol 26, No 4, pp. 1–13. https://asrjetsjournal.org/index.php/American_Scientific_Journal/article/view/2407.

¹¹ The strategy states that “such ‘hybrid’ conflicts may consist of military forces assuming a non-state identity, as Russia did in the Crimea, or involving a violent extremist organisation (VEO) fielding rudimentary combined arms capabilities, as ISIL has demonstrated in Iraq

talks about *asymmetric threats* without using the term *hybrid*¹². At the same time, NATO seems to use the term *hybrid* relatively often, referring to *hybrid attacks*, *hybrid threats*, *hybrid challenges*, *hybrid actions*, *hybrid campaigns*, *hybrid warfare*, etc. For example, the 2018 NATO Brussels Summit Declaration stresses the existence of a “*dangerous, unpredictable, and fluid security environment, with enduring challenges and threats from all strategic directions; from state and non-state actors; from military forces; and from terrorist, cyber, and hybrid attacks*”, pointing to several specific threats, such as Russia’s aggressive actions, the instability and continuing crises across the Middle East and North Africa, terrorism, irregular migration, human trafficking, the crisis in Syria, disinformation campaigns, malicious cyber activities, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and advanced missile technology, etc.¹³.

What is more, NATO has also indicated that in the case of *hybrid warfare*, it could decide to invoke Article 5, as it would in case of a traditional armed attack¹⁴. Furthermore, the declaration stresses that the Alliance is ready to assist its member states at any stage of a *hybrid campaign*, although the primary responsibility for responding to *hybrid threats* would remain with the targeted nation.

From this perspective, *hybrid warfare* may also not be the right term to accurately portray Russia’s understanding of contemporary conflicts/warfare. Discussions on hybrid conflicts intensified in Russia in the early 2010s, when the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, General Valery Gerasimov, presented his understanding of contemporary warfare for which Russian armed forces should prepare themselves in the future. According to Gerasimov, “*frontal engagement of large formations of force /.../ is becoming a thing of the past*” and will be effectively replaced

and Syria”. The strategy also stresses that “*hybrid conflicts may be comprised of state and non-state actors working together toward shared objectives, employing a wide range of weapons such as we have witnessed in eastern Ukraine*”. **The National Military Strategy of the United States of America**. 2015. Washington D.C., June. https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/2015_National_Military_Strategy.pdf.

¹² Andersson, J. J.; Tardy, T. 2015. Hybrid: What’s in a Name? – European Union Institute for Security Studies, October, pp. 2–4. https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISS-Files/Brief_32_Hybrid_warfare.pdf.

¹³ NATO 2018. The Brussels Summit Declaration. NATO Press Release 074, July 11. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2018_07/20180713_180711-summit-declaration-eng.pdf.

¹⁴ NATO Parliamentary Assembly 2018. Countering Russia’s Hybrid Threats: An Update. Special Report by Special Rapporteur Lord Jopling [NATO Parliamentary Assembly 2018]

by “*the use of special forces, exploitation of internal opposition*” and “*informational actions, devices and means*”. Interestingly, Russians seem to prefer using the term *non-linear war*, instead of *hybrid war*.¹⁵

At the same time, both Russia’s political and military leaders have clearly stated that external threats to Russia are primarily of a hybrid nature, referring, for example, to increased global and regional instability, the use of ICT, territorial claims against Russia, the violation of international agreements, etc.¹⁶ Furthermore, Russian leaders seem to constantly reiterate that the West uses hybrid warfare in Russia’s near-abroad in the form of promoting and supporting ‘colour revolutions’ in those countries (e.g. Ukraine). In 2016, to counter the potential threat of ‘colour revolutions’, General Gerasimov called for the development of a ‘soft power’ strategy, referring to the toolkit of soft measures (i.e. political, diplomatic, economic, informational, cybernetic, psychological and other non-military means) to complement conventional ‘hard power’ measures¹⁷.

Thus, the concept of *hybrid warfare* has not only changed the way we define and understand modern wars and conflicts, but it also poses serious threats to modern societies. According to Kersten Knipp, one dangerous trend that is associated with hybrid warfare and hybrid conflicts, is the undermining of democratic values¹⁸. In a wider context, this could also lead to the undermining of democratic values, which, in turn, could result in undesirable consequences. In this respect, subjective and targeted ‘advocacy campaigns’ on social media or other so-called ‘free media platforms’ aiming to promote the ideas of certain parties or politicians under the guise of simply ‘sharing information’ could also be interpreted as a potential tool of hybrid warfare. The same applies to the emergence of large migration waves headed to democratic countries that could pose a threat to democratic values. Last but not least, the incitement (?) of (military) conflicts in neighbouring countries clearly undermines democratic values, the current rules-based global

¹⁵ **Kaldor, M.; Chinkin, C.** 2017. *International Law and New Wars*. Cambridge University Press, p. 6.

¹⁶ **President of Russia** 2014. Address by the President of the Russian Federation. Presidential Executive Office, March 18. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>. [**President of Russia** 2014]

¹⁷ **McDermott, R.** 2016. Gerasimov Calls for New Strategy to Counter Color Revolution. – *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 13, Issue 46. <https://jamestown.org/program/gerasimov-calls-for-new-strategy-to-counter-color-revolution/>.

¹⁸ **Knipp, K.** 2016. Extremist views on the rise – *Deutsche Welle*, June 16. <https://www.dw.com/en/opinion-extremist-views-on-the-rise/a-19335946>. [**Knipp** 2016]

order and international law, and should, therefore, be considered as another form of hybrid warfare.

3. Possible Connections between Migration from Syria and Ukraine to the EU and Russia's Interventions in those Countries

3.1. Russia's Intervention in Syria

The conflict that erupted in Syria back in 2011 has lasted for almost a decade, drawing in many countries like Russia, the United States, Iran, the United Kingdom, France, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Israel throughout the different stages of this conflict. The Syrian conflict began with pro-democracy demonstrations and a civil uprising in 2011, rapidly devolving into a full-scale civil war from 2012 to 2013. Although Syrian presidential elections took place in June 2014, the situation did not normalise and fighting continued. The conflict was further fuelled by the rise of the terrorist formation ISIL with its own ambitions to rule the region. The U.S. actively intervened in the Syrian conflict from September 2014 to September 2015 by supporting the opposition to President al-Assad and targeting ISIL fighters¹⁹.

In September 2015, Russia intervened in the conflict at the request of the Syrian government headed by President al-Assad, relying on the long-term cooperation between the two countries. In the following months, Russia carried out extensive air strikes in Syria against both ISIL and the anti-government opposition²⁰. It has been argued that Russia's air campaigns in support of President Bashar al-Assad in 2015 and early 2016 were crucial in turning the war in al-Assad's favour²¹. From February to July 2016, a partial ceasefire was introduced under the aegis of the UN Security Council; however, after its expiration, intensive fighting resumed. In 2017, an agreement was signed to establish de-escalation zones and to introduce a ceasefire, with Russia announcing in late 2017 that Syria had been liberated from

¹⁹ **Bannelier-Christakis, K.** 2016. Military interventions against ISIL in Iraq, Syria and Libya, and the Legal Basis of Consent. – *Leiden Journal of International Law*, Vol. 29(3), pp. 745–748.

²⁰ **Segall, M.** 2019. The Rocky Marriage of Convenience between Russia and Iran in Syria. – Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, January 29. <https://jcpa.org/the-rocky-marriage-of-convenience-between-russia-and-iran-in-syria/>.

²¹ **Why is there a War in Syria?** 2019. – BBC News, February 25. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229>. [**Why is there a War in Syria?** 2019]

ISIL. In 2018, the conflict escalated once more, after a reported chemical attack, triggering missile strikes from Western countries on multiple targets in Syria. In addition to that, ISIL attacks have also continued. Currently, the conflict in Syria is still ongoing.

The conflict in Syria has resulted in unprecedented migration flows from Syria to other countries. Based on Eurostat data regarding first-time asylum applications submitted to EU countries, the situation seemed to be mostly under control during the initial phase of the conflict in 2011. However, as of May 2012, the number of first-time asylum applications to the EU started to increase drastically after the initial confrontations devolved into full-scale civil war. The first peak was reached in September 2014, when more than 16,000 asylum applications from Syria were submitted to EU countries within one month (Figure 2). Another peak came in September 2015, with the submission of more than 60,000 first-time asylum applications. The migration flow from Syria to the EU started to significantly decline starting from October 2016 and have currently dipped back to the levels of 2013.

To sum up, migration waves from Syria to EU countries started to significantly increase from September 2014, after the conflict gained an international dimension following the U.S. intervention. Although migration to the EU peaked in September 2015, overlapping with Russia’s direct intervention and air strikes, a clear cause-and-effect relationship cannot be drawn between Russia’s actions in Syria and the migration wave from Syria to the EU.

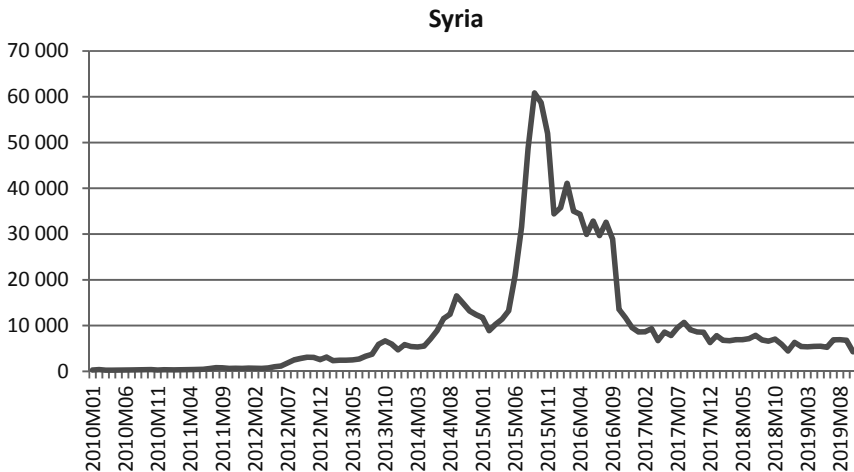


Figure 2. The number of first-time asylum applications submitted from 2010 to 2018 to EU countries from Syria [persons per month]²²

²² Source: Eurostat 2019.

On the one hand, migration from Syria began already in 2011–2012, but at that time the pressure was mostly on Turkey, not the EU. On the other hand, there are many other factors that have contributed to the massive migration from Syria (e.g. high unemployment, corruption, lack of political freedom and poor economic conditions)²³. It has also been posited that in 2015 the Syrian refugees discovered a migration route through the Balkan countries, and by sharing that information on social media probably contributed to the large-scale migration waves of 2015.²⁴ Furthermore, Eurostat's data may not reflect the full picture of the migration waves from Syria to the EU, especially considering the fact that some refugees from several other countries have been known to falsely report that they originate from Syria when applying for asylum in the EU. However, despite the reasons mentioned above, it is still a fact that migration waves from Syria exploded in numbers particularly after the U.S. intervened in the conflict, and that Russia's support for President al-Assad's regime led to the escalation of the conflict. Referring to Russia's support to al-Assad's regime, Kelly Craft, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, has stated that: *"What we are witnessing is not counter-terrorism, but an excuse to continue a violent military campaign against those who refuse to accept the Assad regime's authority"*²⁵.

3.2. Russia's Intervention in Ukraine

Similarly to the Syrian conflict, the Ukrainian conflict started with popular mass protests against the decision of the former President of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich, to suspend the implementation of the EU association agreement in November 2013. The anti-government protests basically evolved into a revolution and in February 2014, Yanukovich fled from Ukraine to Russia²⁶. Claiming that President Yanukovich

²³ **Why is there a War in Syria?** 2019.

²⁴ **What caused the refugee crisis?** 2015. – The Guardian, December 9. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/dec/09/what-caused-the-refugee-crisis-google>.

²⁵ **Russia casts 13th veto of U.N. Security Council action during Syrian war.** 2019. – Reuters, September 19. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-security-un/russia-casts-13th-veto-of-u-n-security-council-action-during-syrian-war-idUSKBN1W42CJ>.

²⁶ For further information, e.g. **European Parliament** 2018. At a glance: A UN peacekeeping mission in eastern Ukraine? March. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2018/614737/EPRS_ATA\(2018\)614737_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2018/614737/EPRS_ATA(2018)614737_EN.pdf). [**European Parliament** 2018], as well as **Poltorakov, O.** 2015. The Functional Dynamic of Ukraine's "Maidan" – Russian Politics & Law, Vol. 53(3), pp. 28–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10611940.2015.1053783>, and **Veebel, V.** 2016. Escaping the Imperial Grip of Russia: Ukraine, Belarus, Armenia, and Georgia. – Cross Border Journal for International Studies, Vol. 1(1), pp. 107–126.

had asked Moscow for assistance, Russia sent its troops to Ukraine in February-March 2014 to justify the annexation of the Crimean peninsula. In March 2014, Russia organised a referendum in Crimea, never recognized by the international community. After Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, violent confrontations broke out in Eastern Ukraine between the Ukrainian Armed Forces and the separatists backed by Russia.

The first version of the Minsk Protocols, a ceasefire negotiated under the auspices of the OSCE, was signed in September 2014; however, in retrospect, it is apparent that Russia had no intention to step back its efforts in Ukraine and to stop supporting separatists in Eastern Ukraine²⁷. Consequently, in January 2015, a full-scale armed conflict broke out in Eastern Ukraine, culminating in the Minsk II agreements, the second cease-fire agreement in the Donbass war, in February 2015. However, the situation remains complicated to this day, with armed confrontations still taking place in Eastern Ukraine almost on a daily basis between Ukrainian armed forces and the Russian-backed separatists.²⁸

As many authors have pointed out, Russia has clearly used the strategy of hybrid warfare in Ukraine both in terms of military and non-military measures as well as state and non-state actors²⁹. All throughout the conflict and even before its start, various lines of operation were utilised in multiple areas such as diplomatic and political relations, economy, energy, religion, military and informational sphere, with the aim of enabling Russia to

²⁷ Veebel, V., Markus, R. 2018. European Normative Power during Ukrainian-Russian Conflict. – *Baltic Journal of Law and Politics*, 11 (1), pp 1–20.

²⁸ For further information, see, e.g. **European Parliament** 2018, as well as Šlaboviš, A. 2016. Chapter 4.2: Military Overview. – Sazonov, V.; Müür, K.; Mölder, H. (eds.). Russian Information Campaign against the Ukrainian state and Defence Forces. Combined analysis. NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence and Estonian National Defence College, Tartu, pp. 64–65. [Sazonov *et al.* 2016] <https://www.stratcomcoe.org/russian-information-campaign-against-ukrainian-state-and-defence-forces-0>; and Mölder, H.; Sazonov, V. 2016. Chapter 4: Overview of Political and Military Events. – Sazonov, V.; Müür, K.; Mölder, H. (eds.). Russian Information Campaign against the Ukrainian state and Defence Forces. Combined analysis. NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence and Estonian National Defence College, Tartu, pp. 61–98.

²⁹ See, e.g. Sazonov *et al.* 2016; Renz, B. 2016. Russia and 'hybrid warfare'. – *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 22, Issue 3, pp. 283–300; Chausovsky, E. 2019. Ukraine Provides a Test Case of Russia's Hybrid Warfare Strategy. – *Stratfor, On Geopolitics*, March 28. <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/ukraine-test-case-russias-hybrid-warfare-strategy-moscow-putin-kremlin>; Midttun, H. P. 2019. Hybrid War in Ukraine – Predictions for 2019 and beyond. – *Euromaidan Press*, April 18. <http://euromaidanpress.com/2019/04/18/hybrid-war-in-ukraine-predictions-for-2019-and-beyond/>. [Midttun 2019]

gain control over Ukraine and change public opinion both in Ukraine and globally³⁰. In addition, Russia has also provided military “aid” to the separatists to maintain a foothold in Eastern Ukraine³¹; not to mention the massive, comprehensive and systematic information operation Russia conducted in Ukraine in 2014³².

Thus, based on Russia’s recent actions in Ukraine, the authors propose using the term *hybrid aggression* instead of *hybrid war* or *hybrid warfare*, considering that *aggression* has connotations with hostile or violent behaviour, or general readiness to attack or confront. In Ukraine, Russia utilised a complex set of instruments, including unconventional, covert, and inherently illegal forms of pressure that seems to align better with the meaning of *aggression* as opposed to *warfare* as it is conventionally understood. Furthermore, another important aspect in defining *hybrid aggression* seems to lie in the attempt to avoid incurring the legal status of a country that is in violation of international law, which also seems to deviate from the traditional meaning of ‘warfare’. During the conflict in Ukraine, Russia’s President Putin has argued that he had every right to annex Crimea, relying on shared historical legacy, and maintaining that no violation of international law had taken place in Ukraine. Moreover, he called out other countries, particularly the United States and Germany, to acknowledge Russia’s actions, referring to their own historical practice³³.

Finally, in the case of *hybrid aggression*, unlike in traditional *warfare*, it is often difficult for the attacked party to realize that it is actually under the attack³⁴. Thus, the conflict in Ukraine is more akin to an *aggression* than traditional *conflict* or *warfare*, referring to hostile and violent behaviour exhibited by the aggressor and its overall readiness to confront and attack.

As regards the migration waves from Ukraine to the EU, they fully reflect the dynamics of the conflict, i.e. before the outbreak of the conflict in November 2013, less than a 100 first-time asylum applications from Ukrainian citizens were submitted to EU countries on a monthly basis, whereas the number of applications increased significantly during the

³⁰ Midttun 2019.

³¹ Mölder, H. 2016. Chapter 7: Conclusions. – Sazonov *et al.* 2016, pp. 112–115. <https://www.stratcomcoe.org/russian-information-campaign-against-ukrainian-state-and-defence-forces-0>.

³² Sazonov *et al.* 2016.

³³ President of Russia 2014.

³⁴ NATO Parliamentary Assembly 2018, p. 2.

conflict and peaked from October 2014 to May 2015 with up to 2,100 first-time asylum applications submitted per month (Figure 3).

Granted, the scale of migration pressure from Ukraine to the EU is not comparable with the migration waves originating from Syria; however, they are still quite significant in comparison with the levels prior to the start of the Donbass War in November 2013. Considering that Russia escalated the conflict with the annexation of Crimea in the first quarter of 2014, it makes Russia also responsible for the increased migration flow from Ukraine to the EU.



Figure 3. The number of first-time asylum applications submitted from 2010 to 2018 to EU countries from Ukraine [persons per month]³⁵

4. Conclusion: Instigation of Large-scale Migration Flows as a New Form of Hybrid Warfare?

Over the past decade, EU countries have found themselves overwhelmed by serious challenges. They seemed to be particularly unprepared for the 2013–2014 crisis in Ukraine, as nobody expected that a war would break out in Europe and that Russia would have the audacity to violate international law and infringe Ukraine’s sovereignty. These developments have seriously undermined the foundations of European security. What is more, the Syrian

³⁵ Source: Eurostat 2019.

conflict has further endangered the existing global security order, as well as set off large-scale migration flows from Syria to the European Union³⁶. In both cases, the migration flows increased significantly after internal conflicts turned to international confrontations and escalated to full-scale warfare. Thus, over the past couple of years, EU countries have repeatedly found themselves confronted with complex situations beyond their control.

At the same time, these situations – both in Ukraine and in Syria – seem to have been fully ‘under the control’ of Russia, who played an active role in escalating both conflicts. Furthermore, in both cases, Russia had several opportunities to de-escalate these conflicts but never chose to do so. During the Syrian conflict, Russia repeatedly used its veto power to block the UN Security Council’s resolutions aimed, for example, to investigate and impose sanctions over the use of chemical weapons in Syria, to stop the bombing and achieve a truce in Aleppo, and to condemn the actions of the Syrian government against the opposition³⁷. In Ukraine, after the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, Russia escalated the military conflict in the eastern part of Ukraine, sabotaged the Minsk I ceasefire agreements and conducted information campaigns to tarnish Ukraine’s image both domestically as well as internationally³⁸. Conversely, if Russia would not have blocked Western initiatives to solve the conflict in Syria and if Russia would have withdrawn from Crimea and stopped arming Ukrainian separatists, it would not have led to drastically increased migration flows from Syria and Ukraine to the EU countries. Thus, Russia is clearly responsible for the increased migration flows to the EU originating from Syria and Ukraine.

Admittedly, increased migration flows, under controlled conditions, are perfectly normal in today’s ever globalising world. However, as the Syrian and Ukrainian conflicts have demonstrated, the situation becomes critical as soon as controlled migration turns into uncontrolled migration. Regardless of whether Russia considers the instigation of large-scale migration flows to the EU as part of its strategy of non-linear warfare or not, the overall impact

³⁶ **Veebel, V.; Kulu, L.; Tartes, A.** 2014. Conceptual factors behind the poor performance of the European Neighbourhood policy. – *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, Vol. 31, pp. 85–102.

³⁷ **Russia’s 12 vetoes on Syria.** 2018. – RTÉ (Raidió Teilifís Éireann, Ireland’s National Public Service Broadcaster), April 11. <https://www.rte.ie/news/world/2018/0411/953637-russia-syria-un-veto/>.

³⁸ **Veebel, V.; Markus, R.** 2016. At the Dawn of a New Era of Sanctions: Russian-Ukrainian Crisis and Sanctions. – *Orbis*, Vol. 60(1), pp. 128–139. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2015.12.001>.

of such massive migration flows is overwhelming for destination countries in several ways.

Firstly, Western societies have been shown to be extremely susceptible to social disintegration triggered by a massive influx of refugees. The increasing popularity of far-right parties in some EU countries relies to a large extent on their anti-immigrant views³⁹, and the migration flows that have overwhelmed the EU play right into their hands.

Secondly, and quite possibly even more importantly, massive migration waves and the way they are often depicted in social media under the guise of simply ‘sharing information’ have demonstrated the potential to undermine democratic values⁴⁰, and in this context, such undermining of democratic values is directly associated with the concept of hybrid warfare. It is also clearly illustrated by the popular reaction to the European migration and refugee crisis that has been, and still is, relatively painful in some EU countries, maintaining that European countries should close their borders to these migrants. Even if there are grounds for this argument (e.g. financial considerations arguing that the EU is unable to help everyone in need), these views do not reflect the higher normative values that the EU is trying to promote around the world. Should the EU lose its normative power in the world arena⁴¹ as a result of undermining its underlying democratic values, Russia would once again be one step closer to realising its aggressive ambitions in other countries⁴².

Based on this research, it could be argued that the most recent large-scale migration flows have occurred primarily after internal conflicts have turned into international ones, mainly as a result of interventions staged by other countries, particularly Russia. In that respect, Russia is clearly implementing its idea of *selective multipolarity*, meaning that it actively participates in

³⁹ See, for example, **Janning, J.** (ed) 2016. Keeping Europeans Together: Assessing the State of EU Cohesion. – European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). <https://www.ecfr.eu/images/eucohesion/ECFR186%20KEEPING%20EUROPEANS%20TOGETHER.pdf>; **Veebel, V.** 2019a. The Rise of Right-Wing Populists in Estonia. – Foreign Policy Research Institute, Baltic Bulletin, July 31. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2019/07/the-rise-of-right-wing-populists-in-estonia/>.

⁴⁰ **Knipp** 2016.

⁴¹ **Veebel, V.** 2019b. European Union as normative power in the Ukrainian–Russian conflict. – International Politics, Vol. 56(5), pp. 697–712.

⁴² **Veebel, V.** 2017. Russia’s Neo-Imperial dependence model: Experiences of former Soviet republics. – Romanian Journal of Political Science, Vol. 1, Issue 1. <http://www.sar.org.ro/polsci/?p=1292>.

international conflicts and carefully selects opponents that would allow Russia to present itself as a global power in the world arena, i.e. as “the one that sets things in motion”⁴³. Assuming that Russia has not abandoned its aggressive ambitions both in its neighbouring countries as well as globally, it could be expected that Russia fully intends to conduct conflict interventions in the future as well. Thus, according to the analysis of the authors, it would be in the best interests of the West to continuously assess the situation on a case-by-case basis and to take active countermeasures to prevent massive migration flows (most likely to the EU) as soon as it becomes evident that Russia has targeted a country for those purposes. In more practical terms, it would mean systematic and careful monitoring of political situations and potential hybrid scenarios in various countries around the world (i.e. not the developments the EU would like to see in those countries, but understanding what is actually happening there/on the ground in reality). This applies particularly to the countries covered under the EU’s Neighbourhood Policy.

In conclusion, Russia’s current ‘operation’ to return Eastern Europe under its sphere of influence cannot be implemented without destroying the foundations of existing strategic alliances, including the foundations of the European Union. However, President Putin’s recent statements⁴⁴ and his actions clearly indicate that Russia has already started down that road. On the other side, the EU has defined itself as a community that is united by universal values rather than by fleeting interests. Those universal values are liberal values that form the foundation for the cooperation between the EU member states and they are also very attractive to people of the EU’s neighbouring countries, including Ukraine.

⁴³ **Polyhakova, A.** 2018. Putin’s true victory in Syria was not over ISIS. – The Brookings Institution, February 26. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/putins-true-victory-in-syria-isnt-over-isis/>.

⁴⁴ For example, in his recent interview with the Financial Times, Russian President Putin argued that the liberalism has outlived its purpose, stating that this is best reflected in the way the public had turned against immigration, open borders and multiculturalism. For more see **Vladimir Putin: liberalism has ‘outlived its purpose’**. 2019. – The Financial Times, September 17. <https://www.ft.com/content/2880c762-98c2-11e9-8cfb-30c211dcd229>.

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ASYLUM SEEKERS: VICTIMS OR A NOVEL WEAPON FOR THE 21ST CENTURY?

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Abstract: Since 2015, the question of asylum seekers and challenges arising from forced migration have become one of the most pressing issues in the public and political discourse. The influx of refugees into European countries has raised grave concerns. What is more, two countries – Russia and Turkey – have forced migrations and aim to use the consequences to achieve their own political goals. The authors use the typology developed by Kelly M. Greenhill to analyse the weaponisation of forced migration. For example, the manner in which Russia has weaponised migration might be analysed in the framework of coercive engineered migration, the 5th column and the propagandist/political sub-types, whereas Turkey’s approach can be characterized as more coercive and dispossessive.

Keywords: migration, hybrid warfare, propaganda, Russia, Turkey, refugees

1. Introduction

Throughout history, the European continent and individual European countries have faced several bouts of mass migration, with the Migration Period (encompassing the 4th to 6th centuries A.D.) resulting in the fundamental change of Europe’s ethnic structure. In the 18th and 19th centuries, migration was mainly fuelled by industrialisation. In the 20th century, large-scale population movements were mainly spurred by the two World Wars and subsequent decolonization.¹ In all of those instances, migration posed a threat but also brought about changes as a result. A common characteristic of all those past migrations is their objective and impersonal causes.

¹ **Van Mol, Christof; de Valk, Helga** 2016. Migration and Immigrants in Europe: A Historical and Demographic Perspective. – Garcés-Mascreñas B.; Penninx R. (eds). Integration Processes and Policies in Europe. Contexts, Levels and Actors. (IMISCOE Research Series). Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 31–55. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-21674-4_3 (12.11.2019).

However, things have changed in the XXI century. Not only did the 2008 global economic crisis become a reason for migration², but the outpouring of refugees also became an instrument for intimidating and blackmailing sovereign states or even whole regions. How it became possible and what may be done about it are the focal questions of this paper.

2. Historiography and Methodology

It is not surprising that the refugee crisis has attracted research attention. In 2008, Kelly M. Greenhill, combining statistical data analysis and case studies, provided a detailed examination of the active manipulation of population movements as political and military weapons of war. In addition, Greenhill has also proposed a comprehensive typology of the most prevalent ways that displaced persons have been used as political and military weapons since the end of the Cold War³. One version of Greenhill's typology is presented in the table below (see Figure 1).

- * The *coercive type* of engineered migration occurs when a challenger nation utilises or threatens to utilize human migration as a foreign policy instrument to induce behavioural changes or to gain concessions from the target nation.
- * The *dispossessive type* is usually precipitated by a series of events during which the challenger employs migration as a means to appropriate territory or resources from the target group. This type can include the expulsion of a target group that is considered to be an ethnic, political, or economic threat.
- * The *exportive type* is when a dissident target group is expelled in order to solidify power; in addition, the displacement of a population may also be used to destabilise political adversaries.
- * The *economic type* is when a challenger takes advantage of the inflow or outflow of economic migrants or dislocated civilians for financial gain.

² de Haas, Hein 2018. European Migrations: Dynamics, Drivers, and the Role of Policies. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/sites/jrcsh/files/kjna29060enn.en_.pdf (12.11.2019). [de Haas 2018]

³ Greenhill, Kelly M. 2008. Strategic Engineered Migration as a Weapon of War. – Civil Wars. Vol. 10(1), pp. 6–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698240701835425> (10.11.2019).

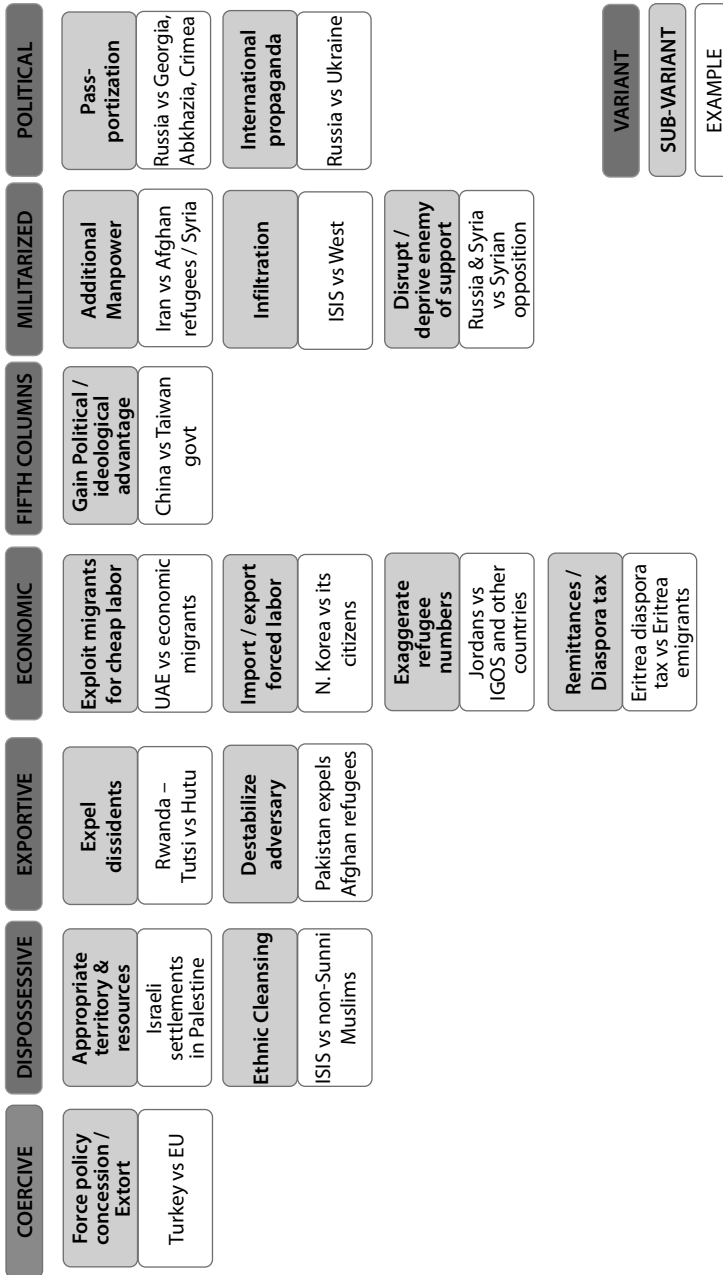


Figure 1. Categories of Weaponised Migration⁴.

⁴ Steger, Nathan D. 2017. The Weaponisation of Migration: Examining Migration as a 21st-Century Tool of Political Warfare. Monterey, California: United States Naval Post-graduate School, p. 6. <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/56815> (10.11.2019).

- * The *fifth column* refers to a long-term strategy in which the challenger dispatches migrants into the target's territory (or recruits migrants already within an area) to undermine the target government. Opportunistically, the challenger, seeking to undermine their adversary, may choose to employ its citizens and/or sympathisers that are already living abroad as a fifth column.
- * The *militarised type* includes the forced displacement of a population to disrupt enemy operations in order to weaken support for opposing military forces. This form of weaponised migration can also include the infiltration of migrants into a target's territory or the recruitment of dislocated civilians.
- * The *propaganda/political type* leverages migration to increase political legitimacy, to decrease an adversary's political clout, or to justify future actions. Generally, challengers will incorporate migration-related propaganda into their information operations to improve the perception of the legitimacy of their actions both regionally or internationally.⁵

Although Greenhill developed this typology more than 10 years ago, it is still applicable for analysing the weaponisation of migration. At the end of this paper, we will determine whether the recent migration crisis has been weaponised and as what type.

In 2015, Europe welcomed 2.4 million legal refugees and migrants. In addition, Europe was also flooded with almost 1.3 million asylum seekers (with Syrians and Afghans representing about 25% and 16% of all applicants)⁶, laying bare the limitations of the EU's common border control and burden-sharing systems. Therefore, it is no wonder that, since at least 2016, migration has been considered a hybrid threat in scientific texts.⁷ One of the most recent papers on this subject was written by Ukrainian authors Piotr Pacek, Yuriy Danyk, and Maryna Semenkova.⁸

⁵ **Greenhill, Kelly M.** 2010. *Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy*. Cornell University Press, p. 360.

⁶ **de Haas** 2018.

⁷ **Nail, Thomas** 2016. *A Tale of Two Crises: Migration and Terrorism after the Paris Attacks*. – *Studies of Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Vol 16, Issue 1, April 2016, pp. 158–167. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12168>.

⁸ **Danyk, Yuriy; Semenkova, Maryna; Pacek, Piotr** 2019. *The Conflictogenity of Migration and its Patterns during the Hybrid Warfare*. – *Torun International Studies*, Vol. 1(12), pp. 61–73 (published online September, 2019). <https://apcz.umk.pl/czasopisma/index.php/TSM/article/view/TIS.2019.004/18167> (12.11.2019).

3. Exploiting the EU's Weakness

Using migration as a weapon is not a novel Russian invention. For example, Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi successfully used migration as a coercive measure to force a lifting of European economic sanctions in 2004⁹. However, in recent years, the numbers of refugees have been much more significant, not to mention the number of problems caused.

In 2011, after the outbreak of hostilities in the Middle East, waves of refugees poured into Europe. What is more, in addition to the refugees, some people who took part in the hostilities in the Middle East also moved to Europe (e.g. fighters from various combat groups ranging from pro-government groups to ISIL fighters). Consequently, the level of terrorist threat in Europe grew, resulting in an increased number of religiously motivated terrorist attacks, as well as increasing numbers of supporters of “racial purity”.¹⁰

In some EU countries, asylum seekers became the catalysts of crisis. The majority of member states were not really prepared to face this challenge; in fact, their authorities and societies are still looking for answers to this complex and long-term problem that includes racism, growing pressure on social infrastructure and state budgets, difficulties with upholding human rights, etc.¹¹

For example, Cyprus is in desperate need of the EU's assistance to manage the influx of migrants. According to the UNHCR, one of the main challenges has been the backlog of asylum applications because the numbers

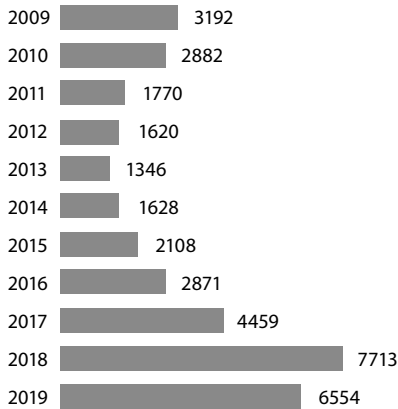
⁹ **Bachmann, Sascha-Dominik** 2016. Hybrid Threats 2016. http://www.aspals.com/hybrid%20threats2016_english.pdf (10.10.2019).

¹⁰ **Crone, Manni; Falkentoft, Maja Felicia; Tammikko, Teemu** 2017. Europe's Refugee Crisis and the Threat of Terrorism – An Extraordinary Threat?, DIIS (Danish Institute for International Studies) Report 2017:05. http://pure.diiis.dk/ws/files/910914/Report_05_Europes_Refugee_Crisis_Web.pdf (12.11.2019); **Simcox, Robin** 2018. The Asylum–Terror Nexus: How Europe Should Respond. The Heritage Foundation, Backgrounder No 3314, June 18, 2018. <https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/BG3314.pdf> (12.11.2019). For more detailed data, please refer to Europol's annual **EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT)**. 2019. – Europol. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/tesat-report> (12.11.2019).

¹¹ **Improving the Responses to the Migration and Refugee Crisis in Europe**. 2016. Vision Europe Summit. <https://bruegel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/VisionEurope%E2%80%93PolicyPapersweb.pdf> (21.11.2019); **Carballo, Manuel et al.** 2017. Evolving Migrant Crisis in Europe: Implications for Health Systems. – The Lancet Global Health, Vol. 5 (3), pp. e252–e253. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(17\)30040-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(17)30040-2) (21.11.2019).

have drastically increased over the last two years and the system was not prepared to absorb such a high number of asylum seekers.¹²

Asylum applications in Cyprus 2009–2019



Source: UNHCR, Data until June 2019 © DW

Figure 2. Asylum applications in Cyprus, 2009–2019¹³

Source: Deutsche Welle, based on UNHCR Fact Sheet – Cyprus [April 16, 2019]

The Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has been using forced migrations to extract additional funds from the European Union.¹⁴ According to the deal concluded between the EU and Turkey in March 2016, Ankara agreed to stem the flow of refugees and migrants into Europe in return for billions of euros in aid; recently, Erdogan has even resorted to blackmailing the EU. Turkey, currently hosting about 3.6 million Syrian refugees, controls parts of northern Syria where it says 350,000 Syrians have already returned.¹⁵ As of October 2019, approximately 1 million refugees were concentrated on the Syrian-Turkish border, and Erdogan has threatened to unleash them on the

¹² **Refugee crisis in Cyprus close to tipping point.** 2019. – Deutsche Welle. Top Stories. Europe, September 09. <https://www.dw.com/en/refugee-crisis-in-cyprus-close-to-tipping-point/a-50352565> (10.10.2019).

¹³ *Ibid.* Data derived from **UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency) Fact Sheet – Cyprus** (April 16, 2019). https://www.unhcr.org/cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2019/04/Cyprus-Fact-Sheet_APRIL-2019_FINAL.pdf (12.11.2019).

¹⁴ **Ingleby, Melvyn** 2019. Europe's Complicity in Turkey's Syrian-Refugee Crackdown. – The Atlantic, August 29. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/08/europe-turkey-syria-refugee-crackdown/597013/> (12.11.2019).

¹⁵ **Erdogan: Turkey could open the gates of Europe to refugees.** 2019. – Al Jazeera. News, September 5. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/09/erdogan-turkey-open-gates-europe-refugees-190905103137895.html> (12.10.2019). [**Erdogan: Turkey could open the gates of Europe to refugees** 2019]

EU, which would undoubtedly exacerbate the refugee situation in Europe. Thus, Turkey is taking advantage of Europe's weakness and using it to capture Syrian territory, while also aggressively handling the Kurdish issue. At the moment of writing, Turkey had launched a combat operation against the Kurds in Syria.¹⁶

4. The EU's Political Situation and its Susceptibility

There is nothing newsworthy in pointing out that Russia is actively seeking to influence the political situation in some EU member states, with the aim of bringing to power parties and politicians that would be loyal, or at least sympathetic, to the Kremlin. To that end, Russia has used the following instruments of influence:

- sponsoring political forces and actors that have an impact on the political life of targeted countries and on the overall strength of the European Union;¹⁷
- supporting non-governmental organisations by providing tools targeted to affect public attitudes¹⁸;
- pragmatic and intensive use of opinion leaders (e.g. retired politicians (e.g. Gerhard Schröder), intellectuals, journalists, etc.) and social media to promote messages that serve Russia's interests¹⁹;
- concealed advertising placement (i.e. paid media coverage not counted as advertising) that leaves the impression of an authoritative opinion, intended to influence public opinion and people's attitudes.

This is important in the framework of the refugee crisis because these politicians and media are ready to promote pro-Kremlin narratives of the refugee

¹⁶ **Turkey's Erdogan threatens to release millions of refugees into Europe over criticism of Syria offensive.** 2019. – CNBC News, published October 10. <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/10/10/turkeys-erdogan-threatens-release-of-refugees-to-europe-over-syria-criticism.html> (12.11.2019).

¹⁷ The most famous example being France's National Rally (until June 2018 known as the National Front): **Is the Kremlin financing Europe's right-wing populists?** 2014. – Deutsche Welle, November 29. <https://www.dw.com/en/is-the-kremlin-financing-europes-right-wing-populists/a-18101352> (21.11.2019).

¹⁸ **Vojtiškova, Vlada et al.** 2016. *The Bear in Sheep's Clothing: Russia's Government-Funded Organisations in the EU.* Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies (Research Paper), July. https://martenscentre.eu/sites/default/files/publication-files/russia-gongos_0.pdf (21.11.2019).

¹⁹ **Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe.** 2018. – RAND Corporation. <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2237> (21.11.2019). [**Russian Social Media Influence 2018**]

problem²⁰. Against the background of increasing numbers of refugees, radical movements are also becoming more active, and their numbers are growing steadily as the rhetoric of far-right politicians fuels anti-refugee sentiments. Thus, the activities of right-wing extremist groups may be considered a destabilising factor in the EU.

5. Resulting Problems

Growing differences within the EU. There have been many disputes among various countries in the process of trying to find solutions to Europe's migration problem. Increasing confrontation among EU member states is one of Russia's most obvious foreign policy goals. For example, Austria, the Slovak Republic, Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic have proposed alternative migration quotas, to no avail.²¹ Furthermore, the European Court of Justice confirmed the legality of the EU's refugee allocation quotas, dismissing the complaint brought by Slovakia and Hungary that sought recourse from the court to overturn the decision of the European Council.²² Slovakia has acknowledged the Court's judgment and will therefore not be subject to sanctions by the European Commission.

Turkey's dependence on external aid. The deal concluded between the EU and Turkey in March 2016 does not seem to satisfy Turkey anymore. We have already mentioned Erdogan's blackmailing, and he has threatened that Turkey may reopen the route for 3.6 million refugees and migrants into Europe if it does not receive adequate international support to manage the millions of refugees it has taken in. "This either happens or otherwise we will have to open the gates. Either you will provide support or excuses, but we are not going to carry this weight alone. We have not been able to get help from the international community, namely the European Union," said Erdogan in one of his speeches²³.

²⁰ **Russian Social Media Influence** 2018.

²¹ **EU targets Poland, Hungary and Czechs for not taking refugees.** 2017. – BBC News, June 13. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40259268> (22.11.2019).

²² **EU court dismisses complaints by Hungary and Slovakia over refugee quotas.** 2017. – The Guardian, September 6. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/06/eu-court-dismisses-complaints-by-hungary-and-slovakia-over-refugees> (22.11.2019).

²³ **Erdogan: Turkey could open the gates of Europe to refugees** 2019.

Growing terrorist threat. Nenad Taneski has rightfully claimed that, since the beginning of 2014, there has been an increase in terrorist activities in Europe with the perpetrators being returnees from crisis regions²⁴. However, the situation seems to be improving. The 2018 Global Terrorism Index, recently released by the Institute for Economics and Peace, demonstrated that Europe had the most significant year-on-year percentage improvement, with total deaths falling by 75%.²⁵ The decreased activity of ISIS and other jihadist groups in Europe has occurred alongside significantly stricter counterterrorism and security measures implemented throughout Europe, as well as territory lost in Iraq and Syria.²⁶ It is difficult to predict if the situation will improve in the near future, but the outlook is positive.

Growing intolerance in Europe. As Nenad Taneski claims, “the EU has failed to create a vision of how people should think about Islam in Europe, or to differentiate the terms such as ‘refugees’ and ‘settlers’ from ‘terrorists’ and ‘criminals’”.²⁷ The fundamental human right to asylum is upheld poorly, and one of the possible reasons is that communities perceive asylum seekers as a threat.²⁸

Increasing crime rates. Germany is an excellent example of this trend. According to the annual report of the German Ministry of the Interior, there were 27 murders (either committed or attempted) by illegal migrants in 2017. In contrast, the German far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD) has claimed that illegal migrants were responsible for 447 murders or attempted murders. However, national police statistics indicate that this number applies to all asylum seekers and refugees who are in Germany legally.²⁹ What is

²⁴ **Taneski, Nenad** 2016. Hybrid Warfare: Mass Migration as a Factor for Destabilization of Europe. – Contemporary Macedonian Defense / *Sovremena Makedonska Odbrana*, Volume 16, Issue 30, pp. 73–84. [Taneski 2016]

²⁵ **What the Global Terrorism Index results mean for Europe.** 2018. – Vision of Humanity [The Institute for Economics and Peace]. <http://visionofhumanity.org/news/global-terrorism-index-results-mean-europe/> (12.10.2019).

²⁶ **Global Terrorism Index 2018.** Measuring the impact of terrorism. Institute for Economics & Peace. November, Sydney. <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2018/12/Global-Terrorism-Index-2018.pdf> (15.10.2019).

²⁷ **Taneski** 2016, p. 83.

²⁸ Chapter “**European Union**” in **Human Rights Watch 2019. World Report 2019 – Events of 2018.** <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/european-union> (21.11.2019).

²⁹ **Police Crime Statistics Report 2017.** 2018. Bundeskriminalamt (Federal Criminal Police Office of Germany). https://www.bka.de/EN/CurrentInformation/PoliceCrimeStatistics/2017/pcs2017_node.html (12.11.2019).

more, the overall crime rate in Germany is on the decline, reaching its lowest level since 1992. At the same time, crime among migrants has increased. An analysis of statistics by the government of Lower Saxony, which ranks fourth in the number of refugees accepted, indicates that between 2014 and 2016, violent crimes increased by 10.4%.³⁰

6. Conclusions

Weaponised migration occurs when a challenger – a state or a non-state actor – takes advantage of large-scale population movements – either voluntary or forced – to achieve political, military, and/or economic objectives. Russia and Turkey are the main beneficiaries of the weaponisation of migration. Russia's main objective is to weaken the EU and reap the resulting geopolitical benefits, whereas Turkey is seeking to extract more financial resources and – even more importantly – acquiescence for its activities against the Kurds.

The geopolitical benefits arising from the weaponisation of migration may not be immediately obvious since they are the kind that will bear fruit in the long-term. However, it is quite clear that refugees pose a challenge to the existing social, labour, and security environment in EU countries. What is more, in some cases these processes have led to increased intolerance and anger, as well as appeals to close borders and retreat into isolation, even if just to avoid facing these challenges. As a result, far-right political movements (often sponsored by Russia, e.g., National Rally in France) have recently enjoyed an upsurge of electoral success in several EU countries. However, we must also bear in mind that democratic values – the values of freedom and human rights – are the ultimate target of these hybrid attacks and general animosity, with the refugee crisis exacerbating underlying feelings of insecurity, fear, and xenophobia.

The typology developed by Greenhill covers seven types of weaponised migration – coercive, dispossessive, exportive, economic, the fifth column, militarised and political. This typology seems to provide a suitable methodological framework for further analysis of this problem. We must admit that the two principal beneficiaries discussed in this paper – Russia and Turkey – have very different strategic goals, which also means that they

³⁰ **Проверка фактов: правда ли, что преступность в Германии растет за счет мигрантов?** – BBC News, 13.09.2018. <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-45515756> (15.10.2019) [English version: **Reality Check: Are migrants driving crime in Germany?** – BBC News, 13 September 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45419466>].

employ different sub-types of weaponisation. When seeking solutions to these challenges, it is crucial to understand the differences between the types of weaponised migration and to be aware of the roots of the problems caused by forced population movements.

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OVERVIEW OF METHODS SUPPORTING THE DE-RADICALISATION AND DISENGAGEMENT OF ISLAMIC RADICALS

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Abstract: Europe is increasingly struggling to support the reintegration of people who have returned from ISIS-controlled areas and have been adherents of their ideology. There are a variety of methods developed to support the de-radicalisation and disengagement of Islamic radicals. This article provides an overview of the methods and discussion topics used by practitioners in the framework of such de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes. The research is based on interviews with experts from Austria, Finland, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom. As a result, the author has drawn the following conclusions: 1) The selection of methods used for de-radicalisation and disengagement depend on the individual in question. In this context, the most important starting point is to gain an understanding of the factors that contributed to that specific person's radicalisation and/or involvement in an extremist organisation; 2) The main supportive methods are mentoring, socio-economic aid/assistance, psychological and religious counselling; 3) The discussions with mentors and other sponsors are aimed at developing new perspectives. The main topics of discussion are related to identity, belonging, foreign policy and possible new ventures; whereas the issues of religion and ideology are the focal topics for people whose radicalisation and/or engagement with extremist organisations was motivated primarily by those aspects. Overall, the results indicate that the methods used to support de-radicalisation and disengagement should be tailored to the needs of the individual. However, there is still a lot of work to be done by organisations running such radicalisation and disengagement programmes in order to improve their capacity to deliver a variety of activities to support an individual's reintegration in a holistic manner.

Keywords: ideology, de-radicalisation in Europe, disengagement, rehabilitation, violent extremism, terrorism

1. Introduction

The interconnected nature of religion, migration, integration, radicalisation and psychology was on full display during the European migration crisis of 2015, when the proposed relocation and resettlement schemes raised questions in Estonia as well as in other European countries about the points of

contact between different religions and cultures, as well as potential conflicts, and other issues related to integration and religious radicalisation.

These issues remain pressing to this day, because the civil war that erupted in Syria back in 2011, followed by the European migrant crisis, has fuelled religious and cultural conflicts, put pressure on national adaptation systems and provided fertile ground for the proliferation of both Islamic radicalism and right-wing extremism. As a result of these developments, there was an increasing number of radicalised people in Europe who wanted to join the brutal terrorist organisation ISIS, and many of them did; whereas those who remained in Europe engaged in activities to support ISIS in their home countries. The emergence of the ISIS terrorist organisation, joined by numerous fighters coming from Europe, created a new security paradigm. It is estimated that between 2013 and 2018, approximately 41,490 people from around 80 countries joined ISIS operating in the territories of Iraq and Syria¹.

As a result of the civil war in Syria, the activities of ISIS and the migration crisis, there has been an increase in the threat of radical Islamist terrorism, which has also fuelled the rise of the far right. That, in turn, increased the risk that ISIS supporters returning to Europe from Iraq and Syria might use migration routes to carry out terrorist acts.

Before the European migration crisis of 2015, jihadist terrorists were primarily characterised based on Michael M. Laskier's theory of frustration among second- and third-generation migrants. However, the new radical Islamist movements that emerged from the Syrian civil war, their recruitment practices and stakeholders have created new target groups for radicalisation².

There are also numerous ISIS supporters who, despite their extremist ideological views, remained in their European home countries, with many of them serving time in prison. At the same time, due to the setbacks suffered by ISIS in recent years, there is a growing number of people wanting to return to Europe. While some countries have welcomed these people back,

¹ **Cook, J.; Vale, G.** 2018. From Daesh to "Diaspora": Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State. ICSR Report. The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR), Department of War Studies, Kings College, p. 3. <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICSR-Report-From-Daesh-to-%E2%80%98Diaspora%E2%80%99-Tracing-the-Women-and-Minors-of-Islamic-State.pdf>.

² **Laskier, M.** 2008. Islamic Radicalism and Terrorism in the European Union: The Maghrebi Factor. – Inbar, E.; Frisch, (eds.) 2008. Radical Islam and International Security: Challenges and Responses. Besa Studies in International Security. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 93–94.

there are also examples of European nations refusing to do that (e.g. the case of Shamima Begum in the UK)³.

This article explores the answers to two questions: 1) What methods are being used in the process of supporting the de-radicalisation and disengagement of Islamic radicals? 2) What topics are the focal issues covered in discussions with mentors and other practitioners?

2. Methodology and Research Sample

The author of this article sought answers to these questions by interviewing 21 experts from six European countries that have developed and implemented programmes to support the de-radicalisation and disengagement of Islamic radicals as a result of the considerable upsurge in the activities of ISIS in recent years. Due to the remarkable adaptation abilities exhibited by terrorist organisations, most resources produced before 2015 have become obsolete and there are not many new publicly available governmental documents and research papers on this topic. The semi-structured interviews conducted between May and November 2018 in the framework of this research enabled the collection of the most up-to-date information from experts working in the field and allowed for a closer examination of select topics on which there is little public information available. Interviews were conducted with experts from Finland, Sweden, the UK, the Netherlands, Germany and Austria. These experts included researchers, social and youth workers, the creators of de-radicalisation programmes and also civil servants. In addition to Islamic radicals, a number of interviewees also had experience in working with other extremists, e.g. neo-Nazis and white supremacists. In order to protect their anonymity, the names of the interviewees will not be mentioned.

3. Theoretical Framework

Terms such as *'terrorism'*, *'fundamentalism'* and *'radicalisation'* are widely used in research on de-radicalisation and disengagement; however, they may carry different meanings for different authors and across disciplines. This study uses these core terms in the following meanings:

³ Shamima Begum: Ex-Bethnal Green schoolgirl who joined IS 'wants to come home'. 2019. – BBC News, February 14. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-47229181> (22.09.2019).

- **Terrorism** refers to politically motivated violence that intentionally targets civilians and non-combatants. As a tactic, terrorism typically comprises symbolic acts of violence that are intended to influence the political behaviour of a target group via the deliberate creation of fear.⁴
- **Extremism** is the most extreme form of radicalism, rejecting democratic values and processes. Extremists present their own ideology as universally applicable and believe that it must be imposed upon the population, if necessary by the use of violence.⁵
- **Islamism** refers to ideologies and movements that strive to establish some kind of an ‘Islamic order’ – a religious state, sharia law, and moral codes in Muslim societies and communities.⁶
- **Fundamentalism** implies a rigid in-group and out-group distinction between the superiority of our ‘true’ belief and a modern world that is contradictory or hostile to our religion.⁷
- **Radicalisation** is generally defined as a process of social and psychological change whereby an individual adopts beliefs and attitudes that can motivate, among other things, involvement in terrorist activity.⁸
- **De-radicalisation**⁹ is the social and psychological process whereby an individual’s commitment to, and involvement in, violent radicalisation is reduced to the extent that they are no longer at risk of involvement and

⁴ Neumann, P. 2009. *Old and New Terrorism*. Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 7.

⁵ Demant, F.; Slootman, M.; Buijs, F.; Tillie, J. N. 2008. *Decline and Disengagement. An Analysis of Processes of Deradicalisation*. Amsterdam: Institute of Migration and Ethnic Studies (IMES), p. 13.

⁶ Bayat, A. (ed.) 2013. *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 4–5.

⁷ Verkuyten, M. 2018. Religious Fundamentalism and Radicalization among Muslim Minority Youth in Europe. – *European Psychologist*, Vol. 23(1). Special Issue: Youth and Migration: What Promotes and What Challenges Their Integration? pp. 21–31. <http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=00453911-778e-44a1-900c-397ba451abd5%40sdc-v-ses smgr02&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=2018-12389-003&db=pdh>.

⁸ Horgan, J. 2017. Psychology of terrorism: Introduction to the special issue. – *American Psychologist*, Vol. 72(3), pp. 199–204; Jackson, B. A. 2006. *Training for Urban Resistance: The Case of the Irish Republican Army. – The Making of a Terrorist: Recruitment, Training, and Root Causes*. Ed. by Forest, J. F. Vol. 1. Westport, CT: Praeger, pp. 118–135.

⁹ According to experts, this particular term has a negative connotation, which is why a wide range of terms are used, e.g. deprogramming, rehabilitation, integration, disengagement, counter-ideology or counter-brainwashing. In in this article ‘deradicalisation’ is used throughout to avoid ambiguity. For a more detailed discussion see: Elshimi, M. 2017. *De-Radicalisation in the UK Prevent Strategy: Security, Identity, and Religion* (Routledge Critical Terrorism Studies). London, New York: Routledge, p. 58. [Elshimi 2017]

engagement in violent activity.¹⁰ In more general terms, it is the process of changing an individual's belief system, in the hope that the individual would reject the extremist ideology, and embrace mainstream values.¹¹ De-radicalisation can be both individual and collective, focusing either on just one person or on changing the attitudes of the collective or the organisation as a whole.¹²

- **Disengagement** is a dynamic process resulting in behavioural changes (i.e. refraining from violence and withdrawing from a radical organization) but not necessarily in a change in beliefs. This process is usually set off by a trigger (e.g. traumatic event or emotional crisis), creating a cognitive opening that leads to questioning and serious deliberation about remaining in the group and supporting its ideology, eventually culminating in a decision to leave the group. After exiting, the former radical needs to create a new identity and reintegrate into mainstream society. However, although a person can exit a radical organisation and refrain from violence, they may nevertheless retain a radical worldview. What is more, a distinction is made between physical and psychological disengagement.¹³
- **Reintegration** is the process of developing a commitment to a different ideological system – a moral community – through nurturing a more complex sense of self related to different identity groups that together inform moral evaluations and behaviour.¹⁴

While '*de-radicalisation*' refers to the process of moderating a person's radical beliefs, '*disengagement*', on the other hand, refers to the process of changing one's behaviour by withdrawing from a radical organisation and refraining from violence. However, it is important to bear in mind that a

¹⁰ **Horgan, J.; Braddock, K.** 2010. Rehabilitating the Terrorists? Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-Radicalization Programs. – *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 22, March, p. 280 (pp. 267–291). www.start.umd.edu/start/publications/Derad.pdf.

¹¹ **Rabasa, A.; Pettyjohn, S. L.; Ghez, J. J.; Boucek, Chr.** 2010. Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, National Security Research Division, p. xiii. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG1053.html>. [**Rabasa** 2010]

¹² **El-Said, H.** 2015. *New Approaches to Countering Terrorism. Designing and Evaluating Counter Radicalization and De-Radicalization Programs (New Security Challenges)*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, pp. 10–11.

¹³ **Rabasa** 2010, pp. xiii, 11–12.

¹⁴ **Marsden, S.** 2017. *Reintegrating Extremists. Deradicalisation and Desistance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, p. 80. [**Marsden** 2017]

person can, at the same time, be de-radicalised but take part in an organisation's activities, or be disengaged but still hold radical views.

In the course of conducting this research, the interviews covered examples of people who had been convicted for terrorist activities, but also those who had merely been radicalised and/or joined an organisation without engaging in the planning or execution of terrorist activities. Owing to that, throughout this paper the term '*radical*' is used, instead of '*terrorist*' or '*extremists*'.

4. Results

This section provides a brief overview of the methods used to support the de-radicalisation and disengagement of Islamic radicals. It is important to note that the approaches adopted differ across EU member states. This section provides a general overview of the most commonly used methods and approaches used by organisations and agencies that deal with these issues either by court order or on a voluntary basis.

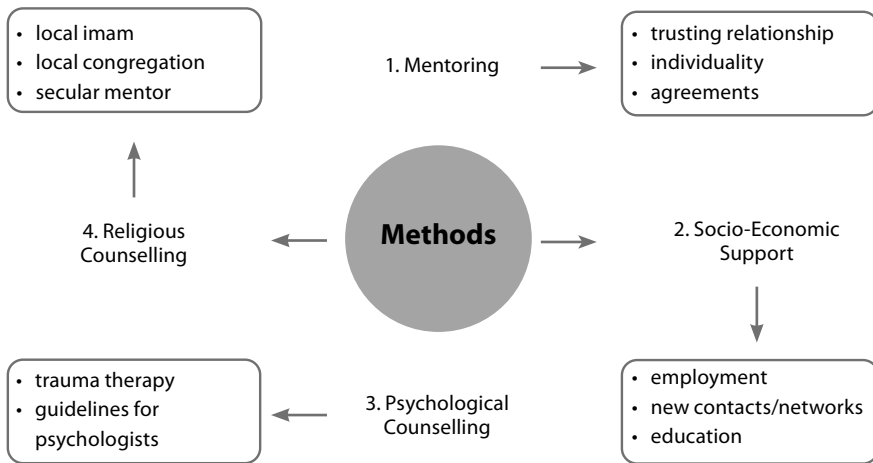


Figure 1. Methods for Supporting De-radicalisation and Disengagement.

4.1. Mentoring

Mentoring entails one-on-one work with a specialist with the aim of supporting a person's individual development. This is one of the most frequently used methods to support the reintegration of Islamic radicals. Islamic radicals often want to disengage from the rest of society, and in those cases, the role of mentors is akin to a bridge between the Islamist and the rest of the world, helping them find ways to return to the society from which they have tried to disengage.

Although the types of persons who offer such mentoring differ across countries, they are primarily social workers who support personal development through their activities and attitudes, as well as by helping their mentees develop a more positive attitude towards society.¹⁵ For example, in the Netherlands, mentors are appointed by the state but their duty is to provide individual support as somebody the mentees can talk to, not only about crime and punishment, but other personal issues as well. Usually they are Muslims who are well-regarded in their local community or people who have relevant knowledge about Islam or Islamist radicalism.¹⁶

After being convicted Islamic radicals usually lose their existing personal support network and mentors often play a critical role as the people they can always turn to in need. After establishing trust, work continues one-on-one, depending on the needs and preferences of the individual, with meetings usually taking place once a week. In this setting, it is essential to develop mutual trust and cultivate open communication in order for the mentee to open up to the mentor. In addition, separate agreements are concluded with mentors, i.e. to establish when they are obligated to inform the police. Since many radicals often lack critical life skills and a support network, having a mentor can prove to be a critical bridge between a person and the so-called outside world. For example, in Austria, mentoring meetings are arranged at least twice a month.

We usually meet at the youth centre or somewhere the mentee prefers. Mainly we talk about things that are currently going on in their lives. For example, tomorrow I'm meeting a man who is in the middle of a divorce, and the court's ruling should be announced by now, so we'll talk about how things are going with his wife and kids.¹⁷

¹⁵ Marsden 2017, p. 48.

¹⁶ Interview with an expert from **the Netherlands**.

¹⁷ Interview with an expert from **Austria**.

Thus, mentoring is one of the methods that the state or the NGO sector can use for reintegrating Islamic radicals.

4.2. Socio-Economic Support

The larger community plays an essential role in the process of reintegrating Islamic radicals¹⁸. The most likely scenario awaiting Islamic radicals who are trying to reintegrate is that of inactivity, unemployment and criminal networks because contacts with loved ones and immediate family have shrunk, as have job prospects and thus, also the outlook for reintegration.¹⁹ Social and economic support can be divided into three larger strands: employment, networks and education.

4.2.1. Employment: *[Re-]entering the Labour Market*

Employment is an excellent way to help people stay on track and not fall back into criminal habits, enabling them to acquire new experiences and develop new networks. This is all the more important given the fact that approximately 30% of European Islamists have had a criminal background before radicalisation.²⁰

In the context of (re-)entering the labour market, mentors can offer invaluable support to the Islamic radicals. Marsden has pointed out that many young radicals are highly sceptical about mainstream society, one could even say that they are fearful (e.g. they may fear to go to work centres by themselves), and mentors can offer support, e.g. by accompanying them.²¹

For example, Finnish experts mentioned that they often help people find new alternatives to their existing jobs, such that would be better suited to their knowledge and skills (e.g. suggesting to former drug dealers – people with sales and marketing experience – to consider applying their skills in a non-criminal environment, e.g. as a car salesman).²² Experts maintain that

¹⁸ Marsden 2017, p. 47.

¹⁹ Andrews, D. A.; Bonta, J. 2003. *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct*. 3rd ed. Cincinnati, OH: Anderson, p. 245. [Andrews, Bonta 2003]

²⁰ Rekawek, K.; Matějka, S.; Szucs, V.; Beňuška, T.; Kajzarová, K.; Rafay, J. 2018. *Who are the European Jihadis? Project Midterm Report*. Bratislava: GLOBSEC Policy Institute (Defence and Security Programme), p. 10. https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/GLOBSEC_WhoAreTheEuropeanJihadis-Midterm-Report.pdf.

²¹ Marsden 2017, p. 50.

²² Interview with an expert from **Finland**.

people mainly need support in taking the first steps; giving them positive feedback fosters the development of a new identity that is different from that of a fighter or an Islamic radical.

4.2.2. *Establishing New Contacts and Networks*

D. A. Andrews and J. Bonta have pointed out that negative social capital as a consequence of belonging to a criminal network will only increase the risk of falling back into radicalism.²³ The adoption of radical views and affiliations as well as criminal convictions have significant negative effects on personal networks because Islamic radicals often push people away or become withdrawn themselves.²⁴ What is more, in the course of de-radicalisation people are often prohibited from communicating with at least some of their former contacts.

The establishment of new contacts is essential for reintegration; however, it can prove to be extremely difficult. Islamic radicals often need to obtain permission from the police or their probation officer to associate with their new acquaintances. According to Marsden, former radicals are often fearful of establishing new friendships, believing that since they themselves are being monitored, it might put their new friends at risk as well.²⁵ That may be one of the main reasons why people are not very proactive in establishing new contacts.

Mentors can advise radicals to engage in recreational activities in order to come into contact with new people and environments. According to a German expert, arts and sports offer an excellent outlet for self-expression, leaving people feeling that they are in control of something in their lives. These activities also provide positive feedback and offer a chance to collaborate with other people.²⁶ Ultimately, such collaboration facilitates interpersonal relations and enables radicals to show another side of themselves.

²³ Andrews, Bonta 2003, p. 245.

²⁴ Weggemans, D.; de Graaf, B. 2017. Reintegrating Jihadist Extremist Detainees: Helping Extremist Offenders Back Into Society (Routledge Contemporary Terrorism Studies). Routledge, p. 19. [Weggemans, de Graaf 2017]

²⁵ Marsden 2017, p. 58.

²⁶ Interview with an expert from Germany.

4.2.3. Education

Social and economic support plays an important role when deciding to continue studies or embark on new educational pursuits. According to a German expert, this is an area where it is essential to offer support, especially in ascertaining the person's needs: whether they need secondary education, vocational training or a university degree, etc.

Whatever they are interested in should be supported and cultivated through acquiring knowledge that will make their worldview more multifaceted, introducing shades of grey that will pave the way for shifting radical views.²⁷

In the case of Islamic radicals, people's world views are often very closed-off, revolving only around one central truth. Acquiring knowledge will offer different perspectives, not to mention factual knowledge and development of logical thinking, ultimately leading to a better understanding of different perspectives that enhances personal empathy.

The socio-economic needs of people seeking to de-radicalise and/or disengage from radical organisations are very different. For reformed radicals, having a criminal record can make subsequent reintegration even more difficult. There is a large number of people among Islamic radicals who have served time in prison and who do not have the skills, knowledge and networks needed for life outside the prison. This is where mentors or probation officers can offer support in helping people with finding work or with educational pursuits, fostering a more positive attitude towards the state and subsequent contacts with the public sector.

Research conducted in the Netherlands indicates that most people who took part in such programmes felt that this kind of practical help for "getting their life back on track" was extremely useful.²⁸

4.3. Psychological Counselling

It must be borne in mind that Islamic radicals may have been exposed to violence and cruelty. Psychological counselling offers a way to support people in coping with such experiences.²⁹ Interviews conducted in the Netherlands with people who had engaged in terrorism indicated that in addition to

²⁷ Interview with an expert from **Germany**.

²⁸ **Weggemans, de Graaf** 2017, p. 138.

²⁹ Interview with an expert from **Ireland**.

adjustment difficulties those people also often suffer from long-term depression and panic attacks.³⁰

Although psychological counselling was mentioned as a method in several expert interviews, not all organisations provide this service themselves and people are often sent to a psychologist separately. According to a German researcher, Islamic radicals often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of what they have gone through or due to previous traumas, such as violence experienced in childhood, their parents divorcing or sexual abuse. In such cases, working with a therapist can help people cope with trauma and overcome what has happened in a radicalised environment.³¹ The United Kingdom has recently developed ethical guidelines for psychologists working in the areas of violent extremism and terrorism, offering guidance on providing assistance to Islamic radicals and how to help them rethink their relationship with the state, social norms and their radical views.³²

Overall, psychological counselling seems to be an instrument that very few organisations can offer to radicals, mainly due to a lack of professionals and resources, or because they focus on other methods in their practice. This is a problematic issue, especially considering that the provision of mental health care as well as analysis of attitudes and experiences is an essential part in the process of de-radicalisation and reintegration, raising the question of how people are supposed to deal with all of that by themselves or without the help of a mentor with relevant training.

4.4. Religious Counselling

Religious counselling is another widely used method for supporting Islamic radicals in the process of de-radicalisation. This section focuses on the practical methods used for people who have sought religious counselling, as well as the role played by the local clerics and the community.

³⁰ **Weggemans, de Graaf** 2017, pp. 93–94.

³¹ Interview with an expert from **Germany**.

³² **Al-Attar, Z.; Bates-Gaston, J.; Dean, Chr., Lloyd, M.** 2018. Ethical Guidelines for Applied Psychological Practice in the Field of Extremism, Violent Extremism and Terrorism. The British Psychological Society (Division of Forensic Psychology), September. <https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/ethical-guidelines-applied-psychological-practice-field-extremism-violent-extremism>.

4.4.1. Collaboration with Local Clerics and Religious Community

Religious counselling can be provided by the local clergy, who can welcome and introduce the newcomer to the congregation, discuss theological issues and share information about learning opportunities. For example, in the Swedish town of Malmö, the social workers have developed a close partnership with the local imam.

Islamic radicals are often interested in discussing religion, and the local imam offers a place for former radicals to consult with more moderate religious leaders who can offer people alternative perspectives (incl. Quran discussion groups); unfortunately we don't have anything similar to offer for right-wing extremists.³³

However, this type of religious counselling provided by the clergy and the congregation is not available everywhere. For example, in the Netherlands, official places of worship are fearful of working with former radicals because the police keep a keen eye on mosques. The provision of religious counselling also depends on the capabilities of the clergy. According to a Dutch expert, we should not overestimate the clergy because often they are

old men with outdated views who come from small villages in Morocco. They are not particularly inspiring and as a result, they are unable to establish a meaningful rapport with Islamic radicals.³⁴

Although at first glance it may seem that in the case of de-radicalisation and disengagement the greatest effort should be made by local clerics and their congregations, the reality is actually far more complex. If they want and are able to, the local clergy and the community can prove to be invaluable in the process of reintegrating radicals; however, it must be borne in mind that if the clergy and the community are not particularly inspiring or open to collaboration, one cannot rely on them for religious counselling.

4.4.2. Religious Discussions with a Mentor or other Secular Experts

Islamic radicals often discuss religious issues with their mentors or some other secular expert. Usually, these discussions take place in the course of

³³ Interview with an expert from **Sweden**.

³⁴ Interview with an expert from **the Netherlands**.

other activities and are not planned as such. According to an Austrian expert, mentors often discuss religious topics with their mentees, although they do not have the relevant training. Some of them are Muslims themselves, while others have undergone additional training on Islam and religion.³⁵ Religious discussions with mentors are more likely to happen if the mentor is also of the same religious affiliation. Such interactions reveal personal views and enable people to talk about their individual perspectives.

In addition to a shared religion, the same origin and the place of residence can also serve as shared points of contact. The Unity Initiative, launched by Usman Raja and Angela Misra, is a UK-based British-Muslim intervention consultancy that focuses on rehabilitating individuals convicted of terrorist offenses. The couple behind the organisation are British-Pakistani, Muslims, East Londoners and one of them left behind a hyper masculine career as a cage-fighter, which has made them more approachable to many Islamic radicals who share a similar background. Owing to all that, they are better able and equipped to engage in preventive work and interact with prisoners or those that have been released from prison (incl. discussing the meanings and linguistic differences in the Quran in the modern world vs when it was written and about the meaning of different hadiths). This popular and extremely influential organisation, which offers one-on-one counselling has successfully managed to blend cage-fighting, community work and extremism, offering its clients an inspirational role model that is easy for them to identify with.³⁶

In the Netherlands, many mentors are people with religious status or who are well-versed in Islam, enabling radicals to engage in serious discussion on theological issues.³⁷ In the case of secular mentors, the bonus for Islamic radicals in discussing theological issues is the fact that their discussion partner does not have extensive prior knowledge in that area. There is an example from the UK, where a probation officer and an Islamic radical started to read the Quran together and began delving deeper into the issues with the help of expert commentaries, resulting in the Islamic radical realising that he had previously misinterpreted several hadiths.³⁸

³⁵ Interview with an expert from **Austria**.

³⁶ **Cruickshank, P.** 2015. An Interview with: Usman Raja. – CTC Sentinel, Vol. 8, Issue 7, July. Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at U.S. Military Academy West Point. <https://ctc.usma.edu/an-interview-with-usman-raja/> (14.10.2018).

³⁷ Interview with an expert from **the Netherlands**.

³⁸ Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

Based on literature and the interviews, it can be surmised that religious counselling generally plays a critical role in the process of de-radicalisation and disengagement. Often it is thought that the increase in the number of radical Islamists is a problem that only concerns Muslims and the Islamic clergy, however that is not actually the case. The local clergy and community can play a critical role in the process of reintegrating Islamic radicals, particularly by offering a forum to learn about and discuss religious issues. However, it is also important to note that if the local clergy and the community are not attractive or cooperative, they will not be able to get through to the target group. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the people engaged in such counselling would be able to achieve a personal connection and establish mutual trust with Islamic radicals.

At the same time, other mentors or organisations can also have a significant impact, especially if they share an Islamic and/or similar background to the person in question, because it is easier to discuss theological issues if the relationship is based on personal identification and mutual trust.

In addition, throughout this process, it is also important to keep in mind the personal motivating factors for each person in question. For example, if the reasons behind a particular person's radicalisation are not related to religious views, then discussing theological issues will not play a particularly important role in the de-radicalisation process either. In such instances, the local clergy and community will not have a significant role to play; whereas in cases where religion has been the underlying factor behind radicalisation, the clergy, community and mentors can offer invaluable support to former radicals in acquiring new knowledge and perspectives.

5. Criticism and Analysis of Commonly Used Methods

The expert interviews indicated that the main methods used to support de-radicalisation and disengagement are linked to the creation of a strong mentor-mentee relationship, the provision of socio-economic support, as well as psychological and religious counselling. In general, the focus is on specific methods and one organisation does not provide all of the services described in the previous section. For example, there are organisations that are able to engage specialists on the basis of the specific needs of particular persons, e.g. if a person wants, they can consult with a psychologist or the clergy, but these are often not part of the official programme.

German de-radicalisation expert D. Koehler³⁹ pointed out in his interview that interventions relying only on one or two methods are too simplistic. Radicalisation is an individual process that is influenced by a number of factors, and therefore people need assistance from different sectors in order to change their mind-sets and reintegrate into society. According to Koehler, successful de-radicalisation or disengagement requires a holistic approach, covering the following five areas:

- (1) **Theological or ideological debate**, i.e. scholars, clergy and other experts, such as former radicals, offering an opportunity to discuss theological or ideological issues;
- (2) **Social work**, i.e. social workers, mentors and other sponsors help people get involved in community activities that will help them pursue their interests in a non-violent manner;
- (3) **Psychological counselling**, i.e. psychological assistance offered to support people coping with disorders and trauma (e.g. sexual abuse, violent childhood, etc.);
- (4) **Education**, i.e. supporting people's educational pursuits, either vocational or academic;
- (5) **Fine Arts & Sports**, i.e. engagement in creative activities and sports enables people to come into contact with others and establish new relationships.

Koehler asserts that a personalized plan should be prepared for each person, covering all the above mentioned five areas and tailored to the person's specific needs. This type of holistic approach is also recommended by an UK expert who stresses the importance of covering all areas of life, because otherwise it will be very difficult to disengage from existing relationships.⁴⁰ Based on this model, we would ideally need five different experts working in concert with one individual, because developments in one area are closely intertwined with others. Koehler maintains that a person's mood and needs can change significantly over the course of just one day, and therefore, we need a programme based on their specific needs, at least five mentors (i.e. one for each area), and one more person to oversee the big picture and

³⁹ Interview with an expert from **Germany**.

⁴⁰ Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

coordinate their activities by devising a strategy and an action plan while also monitoring the efficiency of applied methods.⁴¹

However, this multi-faceted approach is very expensive. This is especially relevant considering that many activities are project-based and are often not eligible for support. What is more, there is also a lack of people equipped with the relevant skills and knowledge. Interviews conducted with experts indicated that in Germany and other European countries, all five approaches are often mentioned but usually only one or two are actually used due to insufficient capabilities or resources. Furthermore, organisations currently lack the ability to assess the impact of their activities. As a result, they are often unable to indicate what types of activities need to be added or how to modify existing ones. What they need, in addition to supplementary funding, is more people who have been trained to deal with these specific issues and more time spent per individual.

5.1. Topics of Conversation to Support De-radicalisation and/or Disengagement

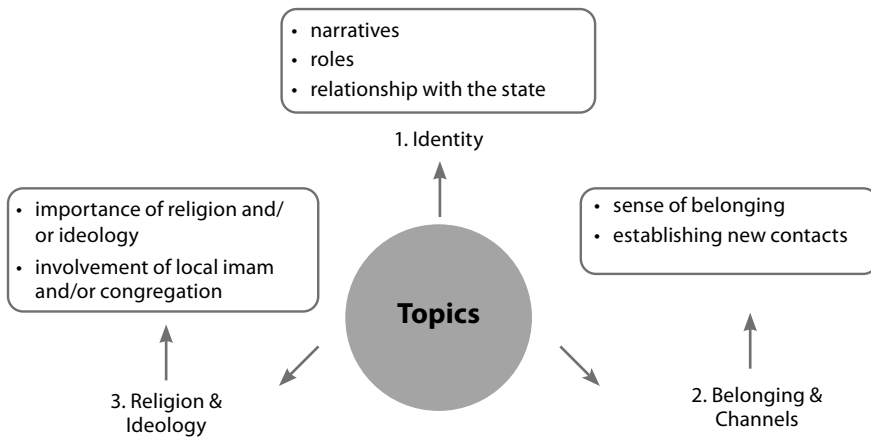


Figure 2. Topics of Conversation to Support De-radicalisation and/or Disengagement.

⁴¹ Interview with an expert from **Germany**.

5.2. Identity

Mohammed Elshimi, a researcher from the United Kingdom, has stated that social identity is at the heart of neo-jihadism. Specifically, there are communities around the world that feel besieged by others. Violent extremists do not consider themselves to be terrorists, instead they see themselves as soldiers and warriors.⁴² When asked to comment on this statement, the experts interviewed in the context of this study agreed with that statement without hesitation. Several experts pointed out that in the early stages of radicalisation, people have a tendency to want to acquire a specific identity and later, make every effort to attain it, and therefore, the recruiters must offer an inspiring outlook.⁴³ In addition, there are also experts who say that people need to be offered alternatives in the form of a new identity; whereas others insist that the de-radicalisation programme must be responsible for supporting individuals in moving towards a new identity. How can that be achieved and what issues are chosen for discussion in that context?

5.2.1. Narratives

Narratives are stories that give shape to perceived aspects, thoughts and emotions, as well as events and experiences.⁴⁴ Furthermore, narratives change over time and are dependent on the perspective shed on the past at the time of retelling. In addition to relying the experience, it also indicates how the event and activity have been stored in memory.⁴⁵ The shape that a narrative lends to events, thoughts and experiences is subjective – in the case of radicals, it can help justify certain life events – and affects the development of identity, because over time, certain events and stories become part of personal memory and thereby affect the way that person perceives the world around them. As was pointed out by an expert from the UK, some people exhibit signs of mourning or feelings of abandonment in connection with certain life events or regarding the way their life has unfolded in general. In such cases,

⁴² Elshimi 2017, p. 193.

⁴³ Interview with an expert from the United Kingdom.

⁴⁴ Andrews, M.; Squire, C.; Tamboukou, M. 2008. *Doing Narrative Research*. SAGE Publications, p. 8.

⁴⁵ Throop, C. J. 2003. *Articulating Experience*. – *Anthropological Theory*, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 222–223. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499603003002006>.

an ideology-based narrative can provide justification for how they are feeling and for the violent acts they have committed.⁴⁶

The Austrian Strategy for the prevention and countering of violent extremism and de-radicalisation recognises that discussions regarding identity must include solutions for challenges that are related to social inequalities, barriers, and discrimination and opportunities for social, economic and political engagement.⁴⁷ The highlighted themes were related to narratives that support radicalisation, often coupled with religious and political views. According to a Muslim de-radicalisation expert, some narratives facilitating the emergence of Islamic radicalism in Europe, are the following: ‘Muslims are being persecuted’; ‘The West hates Muslims!’; and ‘There is a war against Islam, initiated by the Shia, Western policies or islamophobia’.⁴⁸

Although such ideas may seem like unfounded slogans, instead of a coherent worldview, some second or third generation migrant youths who are struggling to find a place in society may find it difficult to dismiss them. For example, according to the same Muslim expert, those narratives have been composed deliberately by focusing on individual views or events, and not based on a comprehensive analysis of all the facts. These are then used for the purposes of motivating vulnerable young people to take action against all this injustice (through an organisation or movement).⁴⁹

There is also a strong link between identity and narratives – the former develops on the basis of the narratives that explain why the world around us is the way it is. However, it is possible to change those narratives, and consequently also identities, but the person must want it themselves. In the case of groups and movements, leaders can be the initiators and supporters of bringing about such changes in attitudes.

In the process of facilitating de-radicalisation and disengagement, it is essential to analyse the individual’s personal narrative and to look for negative patterns in order to deconstruct them. Recognising underlying narratives, talking about them and picking apart harmful stereotypes constitute an important part of the work done by mentors and other sponsors.

⁴⁶ Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

⁴⁷ **Austrian Strategy for the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism and De-radicalisation** 2018. Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI), National Network for Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism and De-radicalisation (BNED), Vienna, p 17. <https://www.beratungsstelleextremismus.at/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2241.pdf>.

⁴⁸ Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

A Dutch expert, engaged in the activities of the European Commission's Radicalisation Awareness Network, highlighted the following with regard to working on narratives:

Although it might seem reasonable for a person to find a logical cause-and-effect relationship between dropping out of school, being kicked out of their apartment and heading to Syria to fight with ISIS, it may not actually always be the case. Instead, those questions should be addressed in the process of supporting de-radicalisation and disengagement by inquiring why a certain decision was made, what the motivation was behind the decision and how best to proceed. Perhaps the unfortunate events that unfolded had nothing to do with persecution of Muslims, perhaps it was due to personal challenges in dealing with difficult situations.⁵⁰

The de-radicalisation process must support the acceptance of an alternative identity or the development of a completely new one. Working with narratives and stereotypes supports the emergence of new perspectives and changes of view, which allows a person to rethink the principles that they have valued in the past. Sponsors can help break down harmful stereotypes by sharing their personal opinions and as a result, the person may develop commonalities with people they used to eschew. Ultimately, this type of work with personal narratives may result in significant changes in worldview and perceptions as well as the perceived causal relationships between different events. However, it is important to stress that a fruitful discussion of narratives entails the establishment of a relationship based on mutual trust and the initiative for change must come from the person themselves.

What is more, social realities play an important part in the work with narratives and the development of new ones. According to a UK expert:

It varies from country to country but in France, for example, young second and third generation migrants from North Africa face serious challenges. Living in the suburbs of Paris, completely cut off from the rest of society, there's little hope for finding work, at least the type they would prefer. The deeper the socio-economic divide between different social groups, the less potential there is for a change of perspective that would allow the person to feel that they have a place in this world and that the world is a fair place to live. It is extremely difficult to force a person who comes from an impoverished background as a result of social inequalities to change their narrative if they feel that they have no place in life.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Interview with an expert from **the European Union**.

⁵¹ Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

These abovementioned examples illustrate the difficulties encountered in this line of work, trying to bring about changes. In this context, mentors and other sponsors can lead by personal example, i.e. sharing their own stories, experiences and their personal world view, while also pointing out educational opportunities that would help cultivate new perspectives, develop empathy and discernment, thereby reducing susceptibility to propaganda.

5.2.2. Roles

The roles that people decide to take on or perform constitute an essential part of a person's identity. These roles can become a substantive part of their identity, because they serve as the foundation for a person's perception of themselves and the world around them, as well as their behavioural models. This section focuses on the examination of the role of victim, the impact of polarisation, and the ways to support the acceptance of different roles.

A Finnish expert pointed out that a significant part of the work with identity is linked to the victim role. For example, many young Muslims living in Finland feel very vulnerable as a result of what is going on in Syria or Palestine:

Such identification with people and victims in conflict zones, in turn, affects the way people see themselves as part of the society they live in, i.e. as victims and they feel the urge to fight back. My experience shows that terrorist organisations often ground their propaganda in victimization and that tactic seems to work particularly well on young and vulnerable people.⁵²

In addition, the victim role may also elicit feelings of helplessness – feeling that the whole system is rigged against them and there is nothing they can do about it. Thus, once a person has assumed the role of a victim, they are ripe for the picking for violent extremist organisations that through their ideology, provide a means for fighting back and also a reason for justifying their actions.

The acceptance of different roles is also affected by overall social polarisation. The belief that a person can have only one narrative and role might prove to be problematic. According to an UK expert, we all assume different roles depending on the context, whether it be at work, at home, spending time with friends or elsewhere. The tendency to see oneself as having just one

⁵² Interview with an expert from **Finland**.

role, for example, only as a father or as a fighter, is devoid of nuance and the acknowledgement of the different sides we all have.

Islamic radicals are often performing only one specific role that is attributed with certain characteristics or activities. For example, fighters perceive themselves as extremely violent and they see themselves that way in all contexts. While it may seem that performing a role may help people to reinvent and reframe themselves, in reality it only serves to break them down as an individual.⁵³

The polarisation of roles has a significant effect on people. According to the UK expert referenced above,

the current political landscape in the UK indicates that there seem to be only two options: a person is either a right-wing Brexit supporter or a liberal EU fanatic, a so-called snowflake. This type of thinking both here and in other areas of life is extremely harmful because real life is much more complex.⁵⁴

Thus, activities geared toward supporting de-radicalisation and disengagement should help people realise that they can have several different roles at once, i.e. parent, colleague, sports buddy, spouse, patriot, and EU supporter. In this context, it is important to help people realise that people carry many different roles and that the choice of a role and the ensuing behaviour and world view depend on the context.

Mentoring also plays an extremely important role in facilitating the perception of the self in multiple roles. Many radicalised young men aspire to be heroes and warriors, striving to make the world a better place through their actions. Therefore, it is beneficial to use mentors who are professionally accomplished and contribute to society, e.g. fire fighters, paramedics, or people who serve in the special forces. By coming into contact with such people, radicals get a better sense of true everyday heroism, providing fertile ground for cultivating a mutually respectful and trusting connection.

These examples illustrate that through a personal example it is possible to demonstrate multiple ways of being a courageous and respected person – a personal goal of many people at risk of radicalisation. In this context it is important to highlight that it is not necessary to enlist in Syrian forces to change the world for the better, there are also other options (e.g. volunteering). Whatever one chooses, it is important to show that it is possible to

⁵³ Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

fight for justice using non-violent means and that people can have several roles that have different aims.

5.2.3. *Relationship with the State and Foreign Policy*

When it comes to identity, a person's relationship with the state and its institutions as well as its foreign policy also plays an important role. A person's relationship with the larger society can often serve as a conducive factor in terms of radicalisation or a hindering factor in the process of de-radicalisation. According to experts, in such cases people often feel disconnected or alienated from the rest of society. Furthermore, attitudes towards national foreign policy also impact the narratives and roles that underlie a person's identity.

A social entrepreneur, engaged in international youth projects pointed out that the feeling of being a part of the larger society plays an essential part in this problem.⁵⁵ This is often due to the fact that the state and its institutions are often perceived as penalizing entities, and there is also a lack of trust. According to Marsden's analysis, radicals often do not believe that the state is able to do something to improve their situation.⁵⁶ Taking into consideration that radicals are unable to forge a meaningful connection with the state, it is important to bear in mind that it would be better if such services would be provided by non-governmental organisations. A social worker at a German youth prison pointed out that people convicted of violent terrorism had told them that they had gone to Syria because they expected to find a better society. For some, German society was not sufficiently Islamic, and that's why they opted to immigrate to a predominantly Islamic state.⁵⁷

Several interviewed experts highlighted that it is very positive when people themselves want to discuss current foreign policy issues because they offer fertile material for enhancing their world view. Therefore, in discussions about foreign policy, the aim should be on introducing shades of grey into a traditionally black-and-white view of the world by asserting, for example, that they personally do not harbour negative feelings towards Palestine or that they condemn the UK's drone attacks in Yemen.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Interview with an expert from **Sweden**.

⁵⁶ **Marsden** 2017, p. 101.

⁵⁷ Interview with an expert from **Germany**.

⁵⁸ Interview with an expert from **Austria**.

According to experts, it is perfectly natural that people think about their homeland or conflict zones that they feel a special connection to. A Finnish youth worker offered the following insight to illustrate this tendency: “Our clients from Somalia and other Middle Eastern countries have told us that even if people have lived in Finland for a very long time, they still want to keep in touch with their homeland.”⁵⁹ Talking about events that are taking place back home, especially when it comes to conflict zones, allows people to open up, and establish a stronger relationship with their mentors, but also to share their thoughts. These issues are difficult to discuss because often there are no clear right or wrong answers.

What is more, foreign policy decisions may often seem unreasonable and sometimes even hypocritical. One expert shared the following:

*The UK's foreign policy is one of the main reasons why many people decide to rebel against the system and become radicalised. It's not really a question of Western vs Islamist values. There are, for example, people who feel that the UK still considers itself a colonial empire and acts as if it was, which many people find unacceptable.*⁶⁰

The same expert also stressed that it is important for people to understand that sometimes practical considerations are more important than ideology. In such circumstances, it is very problematic if people have an extremely narrow and unrefined world view, especially if it is grounded in poor knowledge of factual circumstances and inadequate perception of context. Analysing foreign policy is one way to develop a person's critical thinking (incl. source evaluation and a more nuanced view of the world) as a transferable skill that can have a positive effect on a radical's world view and their attitude toward society.

5.3. Sense of Belonging and Establishing New Channels

The expert interviews highlighted the sense of belonging as one of the drivers behind joining radical groups. Young people especially are often motivated by this feeling of belonging and the desire to make a difference. This section focuses on de-radicalisation of people whose affiliation with a radical group was mainly motivated by wanting to belong somewhere and outlines ways to prevent or even resolve the issue of the need for belonging and resorting

⁵⁹ Interview with an expert from **Finland**.

⁶⁰ Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

to violent actions by supporting these people in finding new social networks and helping them find positive, non-violent outlets.

The motivating factors behind joining terrorist organisations are often social and linked to relationships, sometimes even outweighing ideological and religious reasons, because these organisations offer an opportunity to make new connections and acquire a sense of belonging. One way to counter this trend is to help people find new social networks. The UK expert pointed out that their experience has shown that “in the initial phases, people need help in finding already existing communities – be it computer games, basketball or other sports – where they could integrate and build positive relationships.”⁶¹ What is more, this is considerably easier if a person is able to join an already existing network and does not need to build it from scratch.

Any programmes or activities must be geared towards helping people find the most suitable organisations and tools in order to channel their ambitions and energy into more positive outlets. The results of a Norwegian research project on preventing radicalisation in Scandinavia showed that the majority of extremists returning from Syria and serving time in prison indicated that when they thought about conflict situations they felt the need to take action against the troubling situation.⁶² Several interviewees pointed out as well that, as a general rule, the people who have radicalised or joined such organisations are very idealistic by nature and want to accomplish something. According to the UK researcher, it is very difficult to think of ISIS-supporters as people who want to do something magnanimous, but that is true within their own cognitive framework, in their own utopian community.⁶³

A member of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), who joined the organisation at the age of 15, also indicated the desire to do something worthwhile as the prime motivator and that he joined the terrorist organisation mainly because the circumstances were favourable, and he did not manage to find other more suitable outlets for his desire to improve the situation.⁶⁴ All this raises the question: how could we best support a person’s desire to make the

⁶¹ Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

⁶² **Bazilchuk, Nancy** 2018. In conversation with Norway’s home-grown extremists. – Science Norway, October 17. <https://sciencenorway.no/extremists-forskningno-norway/in-conversation-with-norways-home-grown-extremists/1459326>.

⁶³ Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

⁶⁴ **Horgan, J.** 2009. *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements* (Routledge Political Violence). New York: Routledge, p. 79. [**Horgan** 2009]

world a better place while at the same time preventing them from joining radical groups for that purpose?

The principle of non-violence was one of the main points that came across in all interviews regarding potential activities geared towards de-radicalising Islamists. All experts interviewed emphasized the importance of getting across the idea that one can dislike or even hate certain people, but one must not be party to any kind of violence against them. As specified by a British expert, Islamist radicals often hate white, English-speaking Christians and perceive them as enemies, because of the narrative that they are against true Muslims – and that is where the attitude of non-violence comes into play⁶⁵. This approach enables people to maintain their freedom of religion and thought, but it comes with a strict obligation to remain non-violent. However, according to the same expert, this is becoming more and more difficult, because of increasing segregation and resulting social inequalities between different social groups.

Previous sections have highlighted the importance of different narratives, roles and social engagement in the process of radicalisation, and they are consequently also applied in the case of de-radicalisation. People tend to compare themselves and the group they belong to with others and are sometimes left feeling that they are not being treated properly. Based on the theory of relative deprivation, people may feel discriminated against, deprived of something or disproportionately hurt in the case of conflict zones. The perception of injustice in relation to oneself or one's group can serve as a powerful driver behind radicalisation and joining a terrorist organisation.⁶⁶

Often, people don't know how to channel their emotions into more positive outlets, and instead resort to violence. Therefore, it is important to facilitate the channelling of people's energy and can-do attitudes into positive outlets by offering non-violent solutions. According to a Finnish expert,

people who are worried about Syrians or Somalis often say that what they are witnessing is a holy war and they feel compelled to intervene. In such cases it is important to point out alternative ways to help these people, such as the Red Cross, and remind them that compassion for other people and providing aid is not dependent only on religion and nationality or ethnicity, but it can be done and actually is done by people coming from very different backgrounds.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

⁶⁶ **Weggemans, de Graaf** 2017, p. 29.

⁶⁷ Interview with an expert from **Finland**.

In this context, it is important to stress that peoples' feelings associated with the situation in the Gaza Strip, Iraq, Syria or other conflict zones will not disappear in the process of de-radicalisation and disengagement. Many radicalised people share the desire to be a part of a group and contribute to making the world a better place. Therefore, it is necessary to offer guidance with regard to how they could best help in a given situation, so that people would feel they are contributing to solving the problem in a positive and non-violent manner.

5.4. Religion and Ideology

On the one hand, the issue of Islamic radicalism falls under the topic of religious freedom, but when these religious beliefs result in violent acts, they become the subject of national penal law. For outsiders, the violence perpetrated by Islamist radicals may seem to be related only to religion and therefore it plays a very important role in both radicalisation and de-radicalisation. This section focuses on the actual role of religion and ideology in the process of de-radicalisation and disengagement of Islamic radicals.

According to leaked classified research conducted in the UK by MI5, a large number of those involved in Islamist terrorism do not practise their faith regularly, and/or even lack religious literacy. "They are mostly British nationals, not illegal immigrants and, far from being Islamist fundamentalists, most are religious novices."⁶⁸ Thus it can be surmised that extensive knowledge and a well-established religious identity actually seems to protect against violent radicalisation because it diminishes susceptibility to manipulation and outside influence.

When asked about the importance of religion and ideology, the interviewees' responses varied widely. They all reiterated that the importance of religion or ideology depends on the person in question, i.e. there are people for whom religion is the main reason for joining a terrorist organisation and they warrant in-depth theological discussions. However, there are also those for whom religion is less important because they are motivated by other factors (e.g. social factors and personal relationships, feelings of excitement and a sense of belonging, materialism or identity).⁶⁹

⁶⁸ **MI5 report challenges views on terrorism in Britain.** 2008. – The Guardian, August 20. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/aug/20/uksecurity.terrorism1> (27.10.2018).

⁶⁹ Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom.**

Other experts were even more adamant against putting everything on religion. According to an Irish terrorism researcher, it is dangerous to assume that all people who engage in terrorism are doing it for religious reasons. What is more, there can be a wide variety of attitudes towards ideology even within one group or movement. The Irish expert specified:

I have experience with two brothers who went to Syria to join the fight. For one of them, religion and the organisation's ideology were the main drivers, whereas the younger brother just followed the older one because he did not want to get left behind.⁷⁰

According to a German expert, anyone who maintains that religion plays an important role in the process of radicalisation and that those topics need to be covered, or conversely, that religion is not that important to the process, do not really know what they are talking about. "In Europe, there are people who are highly motivated by religion and ideology, but there are also those very high in the hierarchy who are not concerned by those issues at all."⁷¹

According to radical Islamic cleric Omar Bakri Mohammed, who does not deem himself a terrorist but was nevertheless exiled from the UK, the ideological or religious world view of Islamic radicals is closely connected with the feeling of being persecuted.

A lot of it (i.e. showing off by extremists) is childish, but we must stop giving it fuel because it will only get worse. When they feel oppressed, other people start to sympathise with them. Don't oppress them by saying stop dawa, let's be moderate because it will only make them more radical.⁷²

As long as it is not ascertained why a certain person feels persecuted, it is not reasonable to focus on changing their personal beliefs regarding religion and ideology, because it will only lead to the person feeling even more distressed.

At the start of this research, the main aim was to ascertain which religious topics and principles are discussed in the framework of de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes, but unfortunately this question cannot be answered. Motivational differences in issues related to religion and ideology make it difficult to identify specific issues and to posit that they hold a special place in the process of de-radicalisation and disengagement. Some experts warn that it is actually misleading to make such claims. With regard to the

⁷⁰ Interview with an expert from **Ireland**.

⁷¹ Interview with an expert from **Germany**.

⁷² **Horgan** 2009, p. 137.

question about the role of religion and ideology in the process of radicalisation, or what types of issues are discussed with mentors, one can only reply that everything depends on the specific person in question, their motivations and the personal importance they give to these issues. For example, there are people who discuss differences between sharia law and the constitution of their host country, but at the same time, there also plenty of those for whom these things are not important.

6. Conclusion

This article sought to determine which methods and issues are used to support de-radicalisation and disengagement work with Islamic radicals. The analysis is based on interviews conducted by the author with experts from six European countries – Austria, Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom – and two experts from institutions of the European Union.

Overall, the methods chosen to support de-radicalisation and disengagement will depend on the individual needs of the specific person in question. The more common methods are: mentoring (i.e. personally assigned mentors who support the person throughout the entire process of de-radicalisation and disengagement); social and economic support (incl. re-entering the labour market, establishing new contacts and educational pursuits); and psychological and religious counselling. With regard to these results, it was surprising that religious counselling is not a mandatory part of the process, but depends in most cases on individual preference (i.e. if a person is not interested in religious counselling, then generally it is not forced upon them). What is more, the current methods are not sufficiently holistic in taking into account the different needs people have, and thus, would need modification which is difficult to arrange in the prevailing circumstances of limited capacities and resources and the project-based setup of these programmes, but it is nevertheless necessary.

The topics addressed in discussions between Islamist radicals and their mentors mainly cover the topics of identity and religious affiliation. Interestingly, for many radicals, religion is often not the primary issue and they do not see the need to talk about it. On issues of identity, radicals and mentors usually discuss the intersections of narratives, roles, foreign policy and relationship with the state. Such discussions enable the mentor to support the emergence of new perspectives, which, in turn, will help establish a new

non-violent identity, for example, by helping radicals see themselves in some other role, pointing out organisations that enable non-violent contributions, and discussing foreign policy issues to support the development of a more nuanced world view.

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VENEMAA FÖDERATSIOONI VÕIMALIK ROLL 2015. AASTA RÄNDEKRIISIS NING SEOS RADIKALISEERUMISE PÕHJUSTEGA EESTI MOSLEMITE LÕIMUMISEL

Katrin Tammekun



ÜLEVAADE. Eestis elavat moslemikogukonda peetakse üldjuhul rahulikuks ning enamjaolt hästi ühiskonda sulandunuks. Osa kohalikust moslemikogukonnast on sulandunud suuremal määral venekeelsesse vähemuskogukonda. Artikli¹ eesmärk on analüüsida, kuidas suhestuvad Venemaa Föderatsiooni huvid Süürias Euroopa Liitu 2015. aastal tabanud rändekriisi ja radikaliseerumise ehk äärmustumise juurpõhjustega Eestis. Radikaliseerumise uurimisel tuginetakse Veldhuis' ja Stauni loodud radikaliseerumise juurpõhjuste mudelile, mis on kohandatud Eesti oludega. Olulisemate järeldustena on võimalik esitada, et Venemaa Föderatsioon on kasutanud rände- ehk migratsioonikriisi eri poliitiliste eesmärkide täitmiseks. Eesti ühiskonnas ilmnevad polariseerumistunnused võivad olla soodne pinnas radikaliseerumise avaldumiseks.

Võtmesõnad: Venemaa Föderatsioon, radikaliseerumine, Eesti moslemikogukond, moslemid

Keywords: Russian Federation, radicalisation, Estonian muslim community, muslims

1. Sissejuhatus

Nüüdses Euroopas on nii terrorismi kui ka rände ehk migratsiooni tagapõhjaks vägivallakonfliktid Lähis-Idas (sh Süüria ja Iraak), Liibüas ning Afganistanis. Nendes konfliktides on põimunud religioossed ja etnilised juured.² Rändevooegade tekke olulisimaid põhjusi on turvatunde puudumine päritoluriigis või otsene oht elule, aga ka riik, kes kiusab kodanikke taga poliitiliste vaadete tõttu. Lisanduvad ka paremate majandustingimuste

¹ Artikkel põhineb 2019. aastal kaitstud magistritööl „Radikaliseerumise juurpõhjusted Eesti moslemite lõimumise kontekstis“. Autor tänab PhD Vladimir Sazonovit ja *dr. phil.* Illimar Ploomi toetuse ja sisuliste kommentaaride eest artikli valmimisel.

² **Weise, F-J.** 2016. Integrating Refugees Reduces Risks. Language Training and Job Placement Are Key to Integration. – Per Concordiam. Journal of European Security and Defense Issues, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 8.

otsijad.³ Kõik see on toonud kaasa rändevood Euroopasse, mida võivad kasutada ära Euroopa julgeolekut ohustavad inimesed⁴. Paradoksaalselt on leitud seoseid Läänes järjest enam võimust võtva terrorismiga seotud rünnakute ja sisserände vahel. Terrorismi kasv on vähemalt osaliselt seotud diasporaade suurenemisega Euroopas, kuna nendega liituvad eri põhjustel koduriigist lahkunud sisserändajad.⁵

Rändekriis, mis algas Euroopa Liidus väga teravalt 2015. aastal, mõjutas märkimisväärselt Euroopa poliitilist debatti. Liikmesriikide valitsuste ja Euroopa Liidu institutsioonidele avaldasid tugevat survet ühelt poolt vaenulik avalik arvamus ja teisalt järjest enam esile kerkivad äärmusjõud (parempoolsed, rahvuslikule identiteedile rõhku panevad liikumised). Solidaarsuse ja riigisisese turvatunde vahel tuli leida üle Euroopa tasakaal.⁶ Samal, 2015. aastal astus Venemaa Föderatsioon Süüria kodusõtta, asudes pommitama kohalikke tsiviilelanikke. See suurendas omakorda juba alanud väljarännet Süüriast. Suur osa põgenikest jõudis Euroopasse. Niisuguse tegevuse taga võib näha Venemaa huvisid Süürias või regioonis laiemalt.⁷ Nii toonane NATO Euroopa vägede ülemjuhataja Philip Breedlove kui ka Ameerika Ühendriikide senaator John McCain on esinenud avalikkuse ees väitega, mille kohaselt kasutab Venemaa Föderatsioon just Süüria kriisi oma poliitiliste eesmärkide saavutamiseks. Tsiviilelanike ründamine on toonud kaasa arvuka väljarände. Selle tulemusena võib suur hulk põgenikke jõuda ka Euroopasse, pannes proovile Euroopa Liidu ühtsuse ja tugevuse.⁸

³ **Schmid, A. P.** 2016. Links between Terrorism and Migration: An Exploration. – ICCT Research Paper, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague, May, pp. 7–8. <https://icct.nl/publication/links-between-terrorism-and-migration-an-exploration> (22.09.2019).

⁴ **Funk, M.; Parkes, R.** 2016. Refugees versus Terrorists. – European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), January. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/greece/resource/static/files/refugees-versus-terrorists.pdf> (15.09.2019).

⁵ **Mullins, S.** 2016. Terrorism and Mass Migration. – Per Concordiam. Journal of European Security and Defense Issues, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 24. <https://globalnetplatform.org/system/files/Per%20Concordiam%20V7N1%20ENG.pdf> (20.12.2019).

⁶ **Braghiroli, S.; Makarychev, A.** 2018. Redefining Europe: Russia and the 2015 Refugee Crisis. – Geopolitics, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 826–827. [Braghiroli, Makarychev 2018]

⁷ **Nyquist, J. R.; Cernea, A.-M.** 2018. Russian Strategy and Europe's Refugee Crisis. – Center for Security Policy, May 29. p. 3. https://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Russia_Refugee_05-28-18.pdf (14.09.2019). [Nyquist, Cernea 2018]

⁸ **NATO Commander: Russia Uses Syrian Refugees as “Weapon” against West.** 2016. – Deutsche Welle, March 02. <https://www.dw.com/en/nato-commander-russia-uses-syrian-refugees-as-weapon-against-west/a-19086285> (22.09.2019). [Syrian Refugees as “Weapon” 2016] Vt ka **McCain: Putin Using Refugee Crisis as a Weapon.** 2016. – Politico, February 15. <https://www.politico.eu/article/mccain-putin-using-refugee-crisis-as-a-weapon/> (06.11.2019).

Radikaliseerumisuuringud Euroopas keskenduvad eelkõige valdkonna uuele küljele – *üksiku hundi terrorismile*. Püütakse avada iseradikaliseerumise olemust ja määratleda mõistet. Iseradikaliseerunud „üksiku hundi“ kohta on erinevaid arvamusi: see arvatakse olevat pigem väljamõeldis või siis oletatakse, et lähituleviku ohvrirohkeimad rünnakud paneb toime just „üksik hunt“.⁹ Pigem nähakse uue terrorismisuuna esiletõusu, milles on olulisel kohal iseradikaliseerunud „üksik hunt“¹⁰. Eelkirjeldatust nähtub, et viimasel ajal on pööratud vähem tähelepanu radikaliseerumise juurpõhjuste uurimisele. T. Veldhuis ja J. Staun¹¹ löid 2009. aastal radikaliseerumise juurpõhjuste uurimise mudeli. Selle abil on võimalik lähemalt seletada tingimusi, mis võivad suunata inimese radikaliseerumise, sealhulgas iseradikaliseerumise teele. Viimase aja analüüsides on otsitud ühisosa hübriidsõja ja terrorismi vahel¹² ning teadaolevalt eristub radikaliseerumine terrorismist¹³. Seetõttu ongi oluline uurida ühiskonnas peituvaid radikaliseerumistingimusi.

Eestis avaldub ränne mitmel moel, nt seadusliku rändena, mis seostub eelkõige viisade või töötamiseks ja õppimiseks mõeldud elamislubadega. Seadusliku rände vastand on seadusliku aluseta riigis viibimine, nt riigis viibimise õiguse kaotamine viisarežiimi rikkumisel või ebaseaduslik riigipiiri ületamine. Lisanduvad veel Eesti kui Euroopa Liidu liikmesriigi vastu võetud rahvusvahelised kohustused, mis tähendavad ümberpaigutamise ja -asustamise programmis osalemist.¹⁴ Eesti roll Süüria kodusõjas on eelkõige sõjapõgenike aitamine ja sel moel Euroopa Liidu rinderiikide toetamine. Vähem kajastamist on leidnud see, et Eestist on mindud välisvõitlejateks

⁹ **Pantucci, R.; Ellis, C.; Chaplais, L.** 2015. Lone-Actor Terrorism: Literature Review. – Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism Series, No. 1. London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI), pp. 1–19. <https://rusi.org/projects/lone-actor-terrorism> (30.09.2019). Vt ka **Ellis, C. et al.** 2016. Lone-Actor Terrorism: Analysis Paper. – Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism Series, No. 4. London: RUSI, pp. 1–22.

¹⁰ **Gallagher, M. J.** 2016. The 2016 “Lone Wolf” Tsunami – Is Rapoport’s “Religious Wave” Ending? – Journal of Strategic Security, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 60–76.

¹¹ **Veldhuis, T.; Staun, J.** 2009. Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model. – Clingendael, the Netherlands Institute of International Relations, The Hague, October. https://www.diis.dk/files/media/publications/import/islamist_radicalisation.veldhuis_and_staun.pdf (30.09.2019). [**Veldhuis, Staun** 2009]

¹² **Minniti, F.** 2018. Hybrid Warfare and Hybrid Threats. – European Eye on Radicalization, April 16. <https://eeradicalization.com/hybrid-warfare-and-hybrid-threats/> (10.11.2019).

¹³ **Powers, S. M.** 2014. Conceptualizing Radicalization in a Market for Loyalties. – Media, War & Conflict, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 234.

¹⁴ **Vabariigi Valitsus** 2019. Pagulasküsimus, 9. aprill. <https://www.valitsus.ee/et/pagulased#seisukohad> (06.11.2019).

Süüria kodusõtta. Avalike andmete põhjal on läinud Eestist välisvõitlejaks alates 2013. aastast parkümmend inimest¹⁵.

Artiklis käsitletakse esmapilgul eraldiseisvaid teemasid, mis tekitab küsimuse, kuidas eelmainitud valdkonnad suhestuvad. Analüüsitakse Venemaa Föderatsiooni poliitilisi huve Lähis-Idas ning peatutakse Süüria kodusõjal ja suhtel Läänega. Vaadeldakse Venemaa võimalikku rolli Euroopat tabanud rändekriisis. Kõige sellega luuakse raamistik Venemaa Föderatsiooni tegevusele ning võimalikule suhestumisele radikaliseerumise põhjustega Eesti moslemikogukonna näitel. Analüüsis¹⁶ kasutatakse autori 2019. aastal kaitsitud magistritöös tehtud radikaliseerumise juurpõhjuste mudeli uuringu tulemusi ning võrreldakse neid Venemaa võimaliku rolliga rändekriisis.

Artikli esimeses põhipeatükis analüüsitakse Venemaa Föderatsiooni ja Euroopa Liidu omavahelisi suhteid rändekriisis ning tuuakse välja võimalikud versioonid, milline on Venemaa roll Süüria kodusõjas ja rändekriisis. Järgmises peatükis keskendutakse Eesti moslemikogukonnale. Viimastes peatükkides käsitletakse analüüsimeetodit ja uuringutulemusi. Sealhulgas analüüsitakse radikaliseerumise juurpõhjuste mudelit ning põhjuste võimalikku avaldumist Eestis.

2. Lääs, Venemaa ja rändekriis

Mõistmaks Venemaa ja Lääne suhteid, tuleks peatuda esmalt poliitika-kujundamisel. Lääne ja Venemaa välispoliitika kujundamine erinevad põhimõtteliselt. Lääne arusaam probleemilahendusest põhineb soovil leida partneriga ühine keel, kuid Venemaa lähtub pigem seisukohast „kõik või mitte midagi“.¹⁷ Teisalt saab Süüria kodusõja näitel iseloomustada Venemaa poliitikat kahepalgelisena¹⁸. Ühelt poolt toetab Venemaa Bashar al-Assadi režiimi ning käsitleb al-Assadi ja tema valitsust liitlasena. Teisalt on leitud tõendeid, et Venemaa toetab ka Süürias tegutsevat äärmusrühmitust,

¹⁵ **Kaitsepolitseiamet** 2019. Aastaraamat 2018, p. 30. https://www.kapo.ee/sites/default/files/public/content_page/Aastaraamat-2018.pdf (29.09.2019).

¹⁶ **Tammekun, K.** 2018. Radikaliseerumise juurpõhjusted Eesti moslemite lõimumise kontekstis. Magistritöö. Tallinna Tehnikaülikool, lk 28–38. [Tammekun 2018]

¹⁷ **Cornell, S. E.** 2016. The Fallacy of “Compartmentalisation”: The West and Russia from Ukraine to Syria. – European View, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 98–101. [Cornell 2016]

¹⁸ **Barari, H. A.** 2016. Russia – Double Game in Syria? – The Jordan Times, October 03. <http://jordantimes.com/opinion/hassan-barari/russia-%E2%80%94-double-game-syria> (09.11.2019).

terroriorganisatsiooni ISIS. Näiteks on ta andnud selle liikmetele välja isikut tõendavaid dokumente.¹⁹ Lääs on aga Venemaasse suhtunud kui partnerisse, kellel on konstruktiivne roll Süüria kriisi lahendamisel. Üldjoontes tuleb tõdeda, et Venemaa Föderatsiooni poliitiline tegevus on ilmselt üheks osaks Süüria kriisi lahendusest, kuid mitte nendel tingimustel, mida peaksid sobilikuks Lääs või Süüria opositsioon.²⁰ Segastele poliitilistele signaalidele lisanduvad veel võimalikud selgitused, miks Venemaa oli nõus sekkuma Süüria kodusõtta. Võimaliku ja ilmselt ühe olulisema põhjusena on nimetatud Venemaa soovi pöörata tähelepanu eemale Ida-Ukrainalt ja sellega seostuvalt. Järgmise põhjusena on leitud, et Venemaal on tahe muutuda Lääne partneriks, mis omakorda võiks tuua kaasa järeleandmisi sanktsioonides.²¹

Analüüsides Venemaa tegevust Süürias, on jõutud järeldusele, et kuigi ta astus Süüria sõtta eesmärgiga võidelda radikaalse islamiga, on selgunud, et pigem rünnati tsiviilisikutega seotud objekte või sihtmärke, mida olid toetanud Lääs või Türgi²². Selline tegevus on kutsunud esile terava kriitika Venemaa Föderatsiooni pihta. Nagu eespool viidatud, on nii NATO juhtametnik kui ka Ameerika Ühendriikide senaator väljendanud, et Venemaa soovib süvendada rändekriisi Euroopas, kasutades selleks sõjapõgenikke. Rändekriisi süvendamise eesmärgina nähakse Venemaa poliitilist tahet lõhestada ja nõrgestada Euroopa Liidu ühtsust.²³ Kuigi üldsus peab selliseid väljaütlemisi emotsionaalseks, tuleks vaadelda informatsiooni Venemaa Föderatsiooni riigisiseste tegevuste kohta enne 2015. aastat. Avalike allikate põhjal on võimalik välja tuua, et Venemaa on kasutanud Süürias 2011. aastal alanud rahutusi juba varemgi enda huvides. Ta suunas või julgustas riigivõimuga vastuolus olevaid inimesi, kellel olid väidetavalt äärmuslikule islamile omased vaated ning kes olid seetõttu julgeolekuorganite vaateväljas, lahkuma Süüriasse ja ühinema sealsete äärmusrühmitustega, sh ISIS-ega. Seda tehes

¹⁹ Nyquist, Cernea 2018, pp. 11–14.

²⁰ Charap, S. 2013. Russia, Syria and the Doctrine of Intervention. – Survival, Vol. 55, No. 1, p. 35.

²¹ Souleimanov, E. A.; Dzutsati, V. 2018. Russia's Syria War: A Strategic Trap? – Middle East Policy, Vol. XXV, No. 2, pp. 42–43.

²² Cornell 2016. Vt ka Miller, J.; Fitzpatrick, C. A. 2015. Putin in Syria: Even ISIS Says Russia Is Not Bombing ISIS. – The Interpreter, November 19. <http://www.interpretermag.com/putin-in-syria-even-isis-says-russia-is-not-bombing-isis/> (24.09.2019).

²³ Syrian Refugees as “Weapon” 2016.

vähendas Venemaa terrorismiohtu riigis.²⁴ Leidub ilmselgeid viiteid, et Venemaa on kasutanud rändekriisi oma poliitiliste eesmärkide täitmiseks, nt propagandas. Samas ei ole leitud otseseid tõendeid, et Venemaa sooviks eesmärgistatult süvendada rändekriisi Euroopas. Pigem võib eeldada, et Euroopasse jõudnud Süüria põgenikud on nn kaasnev kahju (ingl *collateral damage*) olukorras, kus Venemaa ründab tsiviilobjekte.²⁵

Venemaa Föderatsiooni tegevusi Lääne suunal seostatakse hübriidsõjaga²⁶, mille üks vahendeid on rändekriis. Dr Peter Roell on välja pakkunud hübriidsõja definitsiooni, mis hõlmab palju detaile ja tegevusi, kuid selles kontekstis võib välja tuua järgneva. Hübriidsõda on kombinatsioon eri teguritest, sealhulgas järjepidev poliitiliste ja ideoloogiliste konfliktidega manipuleerimine ning terroristide või kriminaalse taustaga inimeste kaasamine.²⁷ Hübriidsõja kontekstis eristatakse kahte mudelit: terroriorganisatsiooni ISIS mudel ja Venemaa Föderatsiooni hübriidsõja mudel. Venemaa Föderatsiooni mudeli puhul on oluline märgata detaile, mis esmapilgul tunduvad tühised ega ole seotud Venemaa laiema tegevuskavaga. Venemaal on peaaegu kogu peavoolumeedia allutatud Kremstile, mis edastab sisuliselt president Putini poliitsõnumeid. Selline teguviis annab võimaluse vormida avalikku arvamust hõlpsasti sobilikus suunas. Avaliku arvamuse vormimisele väljaspool Venemaa piire aitavad kaasa propagandaväljaanded. Seejuures on tähelepanuväärne, et ka Eestis esindatud väljaanne Sputnik on asunud värbama Eestist ajakirjanikke.²⁸

²⁴ **Tsvetkova, M.** 2016. Special Report: How Russia Allowed Homegrown Radicals to Go and Fight in Syria. – Reuters, May 13. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-militants-specialreport/special-report-how-russia-allowed-homegrown-radicals-to-go-and-fight-in-syria-idUSKCN0Y41OP> (07.11.2019). Vt ka **Weiss, M.** 2017. Russia's Double Game with Islamic Terror. – Daily Beast, July 12. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/russias-double-game-with-islamic-terror> (07.11.2019).

²⁵ **Schoemaker, H.** 2019. Allegations of Russian Weaponized Migration against the EU. – Militaire Spectator, July 26. <https://www.militairespectator.nl/thema/internationale-veiligheidspolitiek/artikel/allegations-russian-weaponized-migration-against-eu> (25.09.2019).

²⁶ **Wigell, M.** 2019. Hybrid Interference as a Wedge Strategy: A Theory of External Interference in Liberal Democracy. – International Affairs, Vol. 95, No. 2, pp. 2–4. [**Wigell** 2019]

²⁷ **Roell, P.** 2016. Migration – A New Form of “Hybrid Warfare”? – Institute for Strategic, Political, Security and Economic Consultancy (ISPSW) Strategy Series: Focus on Defense and International Security, Issue No. 422, May, p. 2. http://www.ispsw.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/422_Roell_RINSA.pdf (11.11.2019).

²⁸ **Thiele, R. D.** 2015. The New Colour of War – Hybrid Warfare and Partnerships. – Institute for Strategic, Political, Security and Economic Consultancy (ISPSW) Strategy Series: Focus on Defense and International Security, Issue No. 383, October, pp. 4–9. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/194330/383_Thiele.pdf (08.11.2019).

Tulles tagasi rändekriisi ja propaganda juurde, võib öelda, et Venemaal on välja töötatud strateegiad, mille eesmärk on ilmselgelt lõhkuda Lääne ühtsust ning laiemas plaanis muuta üldine julgeolekuolukord ebastabiilseks²⁹. Rändekriis on Venemaale suurepärase vahend jagada väärinformatsiooni, mis ilmselgelt toob inimestes esile mitmesuguseid emotsioone. Eeltoodu näitlikustamiseks sai Saksamaast seesuguse rünnaku objekt. Nimelt leidis Venemaa meedias laialdast kajastust juhtum, kus väidetavalt vägistasid moslemitest põgenikud Saksamaal Venemaa kodakondsusega 13-aastast tüdrukut, kuigi Saksamaa ametivõimud lükkasid uudise ümber.³⁰ Sellise tegevuse taga võib näha Venemaa poliitikat, mida on varem kasutatud suhetes Eesti ja Lätiga – russofoobiapoliitika elavdamist.

Rändekriis andis Venemaale võimaluse kasutada sellist poliitikat ka suhetes teiste, mitte ainult endise Nõukogude Liidu riikidega. Kirjeldatud juhul sai sihtmärgiks Saksamaa. Niisugusel meediakajastusel saab olla üks eesmärk: näidata Saksamaa juhitud rändepoliitikat ohtliku ja ebaturvalisena,³¹ luues sedasi ulatuslikku arvamust ebaõnnestunud Euroopa Liidu migratsioonipoliitikast ning lõhestades ühiskonda ja kahjustades valitsuse mainet³². Lühidalt võib öelda, et narratiivid, mida Venemaa kasutab Kremli-meelsetes meediakanalites väärinformatsiooni levitades, on järgmised: Lääs on ise süüdi ja põhjustanud Euroopat tabanud rändekriisi seoses tegevustega Süürias. Sellisele narratiivile järgneb „ohu“ käsitlus, milles avaldatakse kas väljamõeldud või moonutatud statistikat põgenike ja migrantide toime pandud kuritegude kohta. Eesmärki täidavad ka seksuaalse alatooniga kajastused, nt eespool kirjeldatud Saksamaa juhtum. Kõigele sellele järgneb lahenduse pakkumine Euroopa liikmesriikidele. See seisneb järgmises üleskutses: Venemaa on ainus riik, kes suudab Euroopat rändekriisist päästa, kaitsta eurooplasi ning luua turvalisust.³³

²⁹ **Sazonov, V.** 2017. Kremli hübriidsõja praktika Afganistani näitel ehk miks Venemaa relvastab Talibani. – *Diplomaatia*, 16. juuni. <https://diplomaatia.ee/kremli-hubriidsoja-praktika-afganistani-naitel-ehk-miks-venemaa-relvastab-talibani/> (07.11.2019).

³⁰ **Schnauffer, T. A. II.** 2017. Redefining Hybrid Warfare: Russia's Non-linear War against the West. – *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 28. Vt ka **Gressel, G.** 2016. Russia's Hybrid Interference in Germany's Refugee Policy. – *European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)*, February 04. https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_russias_hybrid_interference_in_germanys_refugee_policy5084 (26.09.2019).

³¹ **Braghioli, Makarychev** 2018, pp. 832–833.

³² **Wigell** 2019, p. 14.

³³ **Nestoras, A.** 2019. How the Kremlin is Manipulating the Refugee Crisis: Russian Disinformation as a Threat to European Security. – *Institute of European Democrats (IED)*. <https://www.iedonline.eu/publications/2019/kremlin-refugee-crisis.php> (30.09.2019).

Ajal, kui idanaaber püüab eri vahenditega Euroopa Liidu ühtsust lõhestada, tuleb ette ka liidusiseseid konflikte, mis võivad ühtsust murendada. Rändekriisi taustal on üks teravaid konflikte nn Dublini III määruse menetlus, mille eesmärk oleks vähendada rände rinderiikidel (Itaalia, Kreeka) põgenikega seotud koormust. Lisaks Krimmi anastamist puudutav terrorismiohu kasv Euroopas ning ohvrirohked rünnakud Pariisis ja Brüsselis. Kõik see on esile tõstnud rahvusriigi küsimused ning vähemalt osaliselt toetanud parempoolsete parteide esilekerkimist Euroopas.³⁴

Kui eeldada, et rändekriisi süvendamine on üks Venemaa strateegiaid suhetes Läänega, tuleks vaadelda, millist kasu võib sellest saada. Euroopas on toimunud järsk poliitiliste pingete intensiivistumine (parempoolsed vs. vasakpoolsed). Üha enam esile kerkivaid parempoolseid on võimalik suunata eri vahenditega Moskva poole. NATO on nõrgenenud ja kadunud on üleüldine usk institutsioonidesse.³⁵ Süüria sõtta astumine on olnud Venemaale välispoliitiliselt pöördepunkt suhetes Lähis-Idaga. Venemaa on taastanud või loonud uuesti suhted regiooni poliitiliste jõududega, mis on toonud kaasa olukorra, kus ta on muutunud poliitiliste huvide vahendajaks. Seega võib öelda, et Venemaa Föderatsioonil on tugev tahe muutuda järjest arvestatavamaks jõuks Lähis-Idas.³⁶

3. Eesti moslemikogukond

Ajalooliselt vaadatuna on moslemikogukond tekkinud Eestisse juba Liivi sõja ajal, 16. sajandil. Osaliselt on see seotud venekeelse vähemuskogukonnaga Eestis. Ühtlasi seostatakse Eestis elavaid moslemeid eelkõige aserite ja tatarlastega.³⁷ Tänapäevast moslemikogukonda võiks iseloomustada kogukonnana, kes on globaalsete sündmuste tõttu kaitsepositsioonil. Lisanduvad kogukonnasisesed vastuolud, mistõttu on kogukond muutuv ning tatarlaste

Vt ka **Sazonov, V.** 2015. Vladimir Sazonov: Venemaa salapärane gambiit Süürias. – Postimees, 10. oktoober. <https://arvamus.postimees.ee/3355113/vladimir-sazonov-venemaa-salaparane-gambiit-suurias> (12.11.2019).

³⁴ **Postelnicescu, C.** 2016. Europe's New Identity: The Refugee Crisis and the Rise of Nationalism. – Europe's Journal of Psychology, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 204–205.

³⁵ **Nyquist, Cernea** 2018, p. 11.

³⁶ **Rumer, E.** 2019. Russia in the Middle East: Jack of All Trades, Master of None. – Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 31. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/31/russia-in-middle-east-jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none-pub-80233> (07.11.2019). [**Rumer** 2019]

³⁷ **Linnas, R.** 2004. Islam Eestis. – Akadeemia, nr 9 (186), lk 2116–2122.

osatahtsus vähenemas.³⁸ Kogukonna muutumist on mõjutanud ka 2015. aasta rändekriis, mille lahendamise käigus asustati Eestisse ümber või paigutati siia Süüria sõjapõgenikke, aga niisamuti on mõjutanud sisserändajad. Kogukonnas on järjest enam esile tõusmas Aafrika, Lähis-Ida või Lõuna-Aasia päritolu moslemid. Kogukonda kuuluvad veel konvertiidid, sh eesti päritolu usuvahetajad³⁹. Moslemikogukonna suurust on keeruline määratleda, kuid tõenäoliselt on see umbes 5000 inimest. Eesti ühiskonna suhtumise moslemikogukonda saab jagada kolmeks. Osa ühiskonnast suhtub moslemitesse pigem neutraalselt või ei pane neid tähele. Teine osa peab moslemeid võõraks, suhtudes neisse kartlikult või võõristusega. Sellel osal ühiskonnast ei ole varasemat kogemust moslemitega suhtlemisel. Kolmas osa on äärmuslikult meelestatud ning lähtub pigem narratiivist, et kõik moslemid on halvad.⁴⁰

On võimalik üldistada, et kogukonna liikmed on teadlikud radikaliseerumisilmingutest ning tunduvad olevat nende pärast mures. Võimalike ohtudena nähakse hiljuti usku pöördujaid, kuna informatsiooni leidub külluses ning selles on keeruline orienteeruda, mistõttu võidakse omaks võtta radikaalsed vaated. Veel võivad radikaalse mõtteviisi ja käitumise kaasa tuua sisserändajad, kes on inspireeritud salafistlikest või vahhabistlikest mõjudest.⁴¹ Samas ei ole radikaliseerumine ja Süüriasse välisvõitlejaks suundumine Eesti moslemikogukonnale võõras. Avalikest allikatest selgub, et Eestis on süüdi mõistetud kaks isikut terrorikuriteos, st terroristlikku ühendusse kuulumises ja terrorismi rahalises toetamises.⁴² Tuleb nentida, et need olid Eestis elavad Venemaa Föderatsiooni kodanikud, kelle peamine suhtluskeel on ilmselt vene keel, kuna kohtuotsus tõlgiti vene keelde. Üks neist vajab kohtuprotsessi mõistmiseks tõlgi abi.⁴³ Kohtualustega on seotud ka Ivan Sazanakov, kes suundus Eestist

³⁸ Lepa, E. 2016. Eesti islamikogukonna dünaamika: senine arengulugu ja praegune olukord. – Usuteaduslik Ajakiri, nr 2 (70). [https://usuteadus.ee/wp-content/uploads/2016_2%20\(70\)/Lepa.pdf](https://usuteadus.ee/wp-content/uploads/2016_2%20(70)/Lepa.pdf) (17.09.2019).

³⁹ Lepa, E. 2019. Eesti islamikogukonna dünaamika pärast taasiseseisvumist. Dissertationes theologiae Universitatis Tartuensis. Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, lk 34–36. [Lepa 2019]

⁴⁰ Tammekun 2018, lk 28–29.

⁴¹ Lepa 2019, lk 95–96.

⁴² Kohus mõistis terrorismi toetamises süüdistatavad vangid. 2016. Harju Maakohu pressiteade, 12. jaanuar. <https://www.kohus.ee/et/ajakirjanikule/uudised/kohus-moistis-terrorismi-toetamises-suudistatavad-vangi> (08.11.2019).

⁴³ Terroriprotsessi moslemid mõisteti aastateks vangid. 2016. – Äripäev, 12. jaanuar. <https://www.aripaev.ee/uudised/2016/01/12/terroriprotsessi-moslemid-moisteti-aastateks-vangi> (08.11.2019).

Süüriasse võitlejaks. Tema pärineb õigeusklikust perekonnast, kuid pöördus islamisse. Vähemalt avalike allikate põhjal ei ole võimalik öelda, kuidas ta äärmustus ning millised sündmused viisid ta Süüria sõtta.⁴⁴ Senise informatsiooni põhjal võib eeldada, et radikaliseeruda võis aidata internetist leitud informatsioon⁴⁵.

4. Metoodika

Artikkel põhineb Eesti moslemikogukonna kohta tehtud juhtumiuuringul, mille andmekogumismeetodina on kasutatud poolstruktureeritud intervjuud. Uuringu käigus tehti üheksa intervjuud. Uuringu piiranguna on võimalik välja tuua intervjuueeritud ekspertide vähesus. Teisalt tuleb mõista, et tegu on vähemuskogukonnaga ning seetõttu on eksperte keeruline leida. Eestis on kogukond väike, kuid haaratud muutustesse, mis ilmselt hõlmavad ka toimunud või toimuvaid poliitilisi sündmusi. Sellisele järeldusele on võimalik jõuda seoses eksperdikis palutud praktiseeriva moslemi keelduva vastusega. Tõsi, täpsed asjaolud ei ole teada.⁴⁶ Uuringusse valiti osalema eksperdid, kellel on teadmised moslemikogukonnast ja moslemitega suhtlemise kogemus. Lisaks neile ka eksperdid, kellel olid peale selle teadmised Eesti ühiskonna suhtumisest moslemitesse ja moslemikogukonda.⁴⁷

Radikaliseerumise põhjuste uurimises puudub teaduskirjanduses ühtsus⁴⁸. Seetõttu on igal riigil tarvis ühiskonna eripärast lähtuvalt otsustada, millised võivad olla radikaliseerumise põhjused⁴⁹. Radikaliseerumise juurpõhjuste mudeli koostamisel on Veldhuis ja Staun lähtunud sotsiaalteaduste

⁴⁴ „Pealtnägija“: Eestist pärit islamivõitleja Ivan-Abdurrahman võitleb Süürias uskmatusena. 2015. – Eesti Rahvusringhääling, 21. jaanuar. <https://www.err.ee/528407/pealtnagija-eestist-parit-islamivoitleja-ivan-abdurrahman-voitleb-suurias-uskmatutega> (08.11.2019).

⁴⁵ **Estonian Man Converted to Islam and Went to Fight with ISIS in Syria.** 2015. – Delfi.ee, 22. jaanuar. <https://www.delfi.ee/news/en/news/estonian-man-converted-to-islam-and-went-to-fight-with-isis-in-syria?id=70620007> (08.11.2019).

⁴⁶ **Tammekun** 2018, lk 26.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, lk 25–27.

⁴⁸ **Dzhekova, R.; Stoynova, N.; Kojouharov, A.; Mancheva, M.; Anagnostou, D.; Tsenkov, E.** 2016. Understanding Radicalisation: Review of Literature. – Center for the Study of Democracy. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309732865_Understanding_Radicalisation_Review_of_Literature (30.09.2019).

⁴⁹ **Odoorfer, C.** 2015. Root Causes of Radicalization in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), pp. 20–21. <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/conflict-prevention/discussion-paper---root-causes-of-radicalism.html> (30.09.2019).

distsipliinidest (nt sotsioloogia, psühholoogia, antropoloogia, rahvusvahelised suhted). Autorid on jaganud radikaliseerumise juurpõhjused mikro- ja makrotasandile. Makrotasandi tingimusteks on määratud poliitilised, majanduslikud ja kultuurilised tingimused. Mikrotasandil on ühiskondlikud tingimused, s.o ühiskondlik samastumine, sotsiaalne suhtlemine ja grupiprotsessid, suhteline ilmajaetus, peale selle veel individuaalne tasand. Kõiki tasandeid ühendab päästiksündmus.⁵⁰ Sellest lähtuvalt uuriti Veldhuis' ja Stauni välja töötatud radikaliseerumise juurpõhjuste mudelis esinevaid tingimusi Eesti ühiskonna moslemikogukonna näitel. Uuringus ei ole käsitletud radikaliseerumise juurpõhjuste mudelit tervikuna, vaid on keskendunud välise ja ühiskondliku ehk makro- ja mikrotasandi põhjustele. Originaalmudelist on uuringus välja jäetud individuaalne tasand (psühholoogilised tunnusjooned ja isiklikud kogemused), suhteline ilmajaetus ja päästiksündmus (ingl *trigger event*).⁵¹

Uuringust selgus, et Eesti ühiskonnas esineb rassi- ja võõraviha, niisamuti retoorikat, et kõik moslemid on halvad. Sellise retoorika esindajate väljaastumised on leidnud laia kõlapinda ning on nähtavad ja kuuldavad. Eesti ühiskonnas muutub üha ründavamaks poliitiline retoorika või luuakse narratiiv, et moslemid on halvad. Esineb ka halvustavaid väljaütlemisi islami teemal. Sellise narratiivi levik võib vähemuskogukonna liikmetes luua taju, et nad ei ole osa ühiskonnast ning neid ei soovita. See omakorda võib tekitada ühiskonnast tõrjutuse tunnet ning pakkuda soodsat pinnast radikaliseerumise tekkele.⁵² Aasta 2015, mida peetakse rändekriisi algusajaks, oli Eesti inimesele aeg, kui teadvustati laiemalt moslemite olemasolu siinses ühiskonnas. Enamik inimesi ei ole nendega kokku puutunud, see loob omakorda hirmu. Hirm vähemuste ees on loonud olukorra, kus ühiskonnas üha levib äärmuslik propaganda. Seejuures toetuvad propagandas esitatavad sõnumid pigem välisriikides levivatele sõnumitele, mitte ei tugine niivõrd kohalikele oludele.⁵³

Ühe võimaliku radikaliseerumistingimusest Eesti ühiskonnas võib toimida hübriidkonflikt, mis võib olla seotud Venemaa tegevusega laiemalt⁵⁴. Globaalsetest sündmustest tulenevalt seostatakse radikaliseerumist pigem moslemite või moslemiks olemisega. Tagaplaanile on jäänud

⁵⁰ Veldhuis, Staun 2009, pp. 4–23.

⁵¹ Tammekun 2018, lk 13.

⁵² *Ibid.*, lk 30–32.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, lk 33.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, lk 34.

radikaliseerumise seos mittemoslemitega või ühiskonna osaga, kes ei järgi islamit. Mittemoslemite radikaliseerumine võib esile kerkida olukorras, kus pannakse toime nt vägivaldteod haavatavate rühmade vastu.⁵⁵

Siinkohal tasub vaadelda lähemalt radikaliseerumist soodustavaid tegureid Eestis. Oluline on märkida getode tekkimist. Sinna võivad siirduda inimesed, kellel ei ole tööd või elueesmärki. Seda eesmärki võidakse minna otsima väljapoole Eestit. Tavaliselt ühinetakse islamit praktiseerivate rahvuskaslaste diasporaadega. Pöördudes tagasi juurte juurde, kujundatakse uus identiteet ning sel moel võivad ka vaated muutuda fundamentalistlikuks. Identiteedi muutumise eeldus saab olla nt elueesmärgi puudumine, tööpuudus või muudel põhjustel eraldatuse või ilmajäetuse tunne. Järgmise võimaliku tegurina saab välja tuua puuduliku adekvaatse informatsiooni religiooni kohta. Alles usku pöördudes on keeruline tunnetada piiri konservatiivse ja äärmusliku islami vahel. Olulist rolli mängib Eesti puhul ka lõimumine. Eelkirjeldatud terrorijuhtumise osalejad pärinevad venekeelsest vähemuskogukonnast. Kahjuks ei ole võimalik välja tuua, et venekeelne vähemus oleks tänapäeva Eestis edukalt lõimunud. Eelkirjeldatule lisandub diskrimineerimine ja võõraviha ühiskonnas.⁵⁶

5. Arutelu

Venemaa on kasutanud rändekriisi iga võimalikku tahku ära poliitilistes huvides. Seni ei ole kindlaid tõendeid, et Venemaa oleks põhjustanud 2015. aasta rändekriisi Euroopas. Pigem võiks pöörata tähelepanu hüpoteetilisele seosele Süürias tegutsevate terroristide toetamisega enne 2015. aastat. Võis see olla pelgalt riigisisese turvalisuse tagamise „projekt“, mille käigus tehti riigivõimuga vastuolus isikutele ettepanek lahkuda Süüriasse ning liituda sealsete äärmusrühmitustega, või oli eesmärk midagi muud?

Kõige enam kolmandatest riikidest Eestisse sisserändajaid pärineb Venemaalt⁵⁷. Üldjuhul on see seaduslik ränne (õppimise või töötamise eesmärgil). Tähelepanu tuleks pöörata Venemaalt ebaseaduslikult Eestisse saabujatele. Eestis on välja töötatud tegevuskavad arvuka sisserände ohjeldamiseks ning 2018. aasta siseturvalisuse valdkonna riskianalüüsist selgub, et eeldatakse

⁵⁵ **Tammekun** 2018, lk 34–38.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, lk 36–37.

⁵⁷ **Anniste, K.** 2018. Rändetrendid maailmas, Euroopas ja Eestis. – Poliitikauuringute Keskus Praxis, lk 33. http://www.praxis.ee/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/rita_ranne.pdf (11.11.2019).

sisserännet kas Venemaalt või Lätist⁵⁸. Ilmselt tuleb siia massilisel sisse-rändel väga erinevaid inimesi ning eeldatavasti ei ole kõik Venemaa Föderatsiooni kodanikud. Sellele tuleb tähelepanu pöörata, sest arvuka sisserände ohjeldamisel võib olla piiratud siseturvalisuse ja julgeoleku eest seisvate asutuste tegevus.⁵⁹

Kokkuvõtlikult on radikaliseerumine protsess, mille kutsuvad esile tugevad sotsiaalsed, poliitilised või muust keskkonnast tulenevad tingimused⁶⁰. Radikaliseerumise tõenäosus suureneb olukorras, kus ollakse haavatavas seisundis, mida võib seostada väljaarvamise ja kogukonnast või ühiskonnast, või kui on kogetud nt sotsiaalset, poliitilist või muud moodi ilmajätust⁶¹. Muu hulgas võib ilmajätetus tähendada ka eraldatust ümbritsevast⁶². Radikaliseerumine on lõpule jõudnud, kui ilmneb isiklik päästiksündmus, mis viib toime panema terroriakti (nt rünnak), kusjuures päästiksündmuse toimumise hetke ei ole võimalik ette näha⁶³. Radikaliseerumise juurpõhjusena on välja toodud poliitiline tingimus, mis seostub nt paremäärmusluse või parempoolsete erakondade esilekerkimisega ühiskonnas. Rändekriisi taustal on nii Eestis kui ka teistes Euroopa liikmesriikides üha enam esile kerkinud parempoolsed parteid (paremäärmuslased), kelle sõnumites leidub immigratsioonivastasust ning pannakse rõhku põlisrahvuslusele (ingl *ethno-nationalism*). Ühtlasi on sisseränne vorminud tugevalt poliitilist sõnumit, mis sisaldab ka ohuelementi: sisserändajad võivad ohustada rahvusriiki.⁶⁴ Sellised sõnumid lõhestavad ühiskonda. Kõnealusel juhul edastatakse

⁵⁸ Riskianalüüs 2018. – Politsei- ja Piirivalveamet. <https://www.politsei.ee/et/riskianalueus> (11.11.2019).

⁵⁹ Kavandata eelnõu määrab, kuidas hädaolukorras pagulastetulvaga toime tulla. 2017. – Eesti Rahvusringhääling, 21. märts. <https://www.err.ee/585244/kavandata-eelnou-maarab-kuidas-hadaolukorras-pagulastetulvaga-toime-tulla> (11.11.2019).

⁶⁰ Wilner, A. S.; Dubouloz, C.-J. 2010. Homegrown Terrorism and Transformative Learning: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding Radicalization. – Global Change, Peace & Security, Vol. 22, No. 1, p. 48.

⁶¹ Stern, J. 2016. Radicalization to Extremism and Mobilization to Violence: What Have We Learned and What Can We Do about It? – The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 668 (1), p. 105.

⁶² Pajunen, C. 2015. The Lone Wolf Terrorist: Mechanisms and Triggers of a Process-Driven Radicalization. – Paideia, Vol. 2, p. 103. <https://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1018&context=paideia> (19.12.2019).

⁶³ Klausen, J.; Campion, S.; Needle, N.; Nguyen, G.; Libretti, R. 2016. Toward a Behavioral Model of “Homegrown” Radicalization Trajectories. – Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, Vol. 39, No. 1, p. 78.

⁶⁴ Rydgren, J. 2008. Immigration Sceptics, Xenophobes or Racists? Radical Right-Wing Voting in Six West European Countries. – European Journal of Political Research, Vol. 47, No. 6, pp. 737–740.

ka Eesti ühiskonnas poliitilisi sõnumeid, milles sisaldub nii võõraviha kui ka diskrimineerimine. Sedasi luuakse kuvand ühiskonnast, kuhu ei ole oodatud teise nahavärviga või muukeelsed inimesed.⁶⁵ Võttes kokku radikaliseerumisprotsessi ja praeguse Eesti ühiskonna seisundi, võib öelda, et on tekkimas või juba tekkinud soodne pinnas radikaliseerumisele.

Praeguses Eesti ühiskonnas elavad eestlased ja venelased endiselt paralleelmaailmas ning nende sotsiaalsed sidemed on väga nõrgad⁶⁶. Radikaliseerumise põhjuste uurimisel peetakse oluliseks teguriks just paralleelmaailmade teket. Väärrib äramärkimist, et osa moslemikogukonnast määratleb end venekeelse kogukonna kaudu. Suur osa, ligikaudu 90% venekeelsest kogukonnast elab Kremli inforuumis ja toetab selle vaateid. Seetõttu ei näe nad Venemaad Eesti julgeoleku ohustajana. Üldjoontes ei ole Venemaa Eesti-poliitikas märgata olulisi muudatusi. Endiselt tehakse etteheiteid venekeelse vähemuse õiguste rikkumise kohta või pannakse Eestile süüks natsismi ülistamist.⁶⁷ Ei ole teada, kui suur osa vene keelt kõnelevatest moslemitest elab Venemaa inforuumis ning milline on nende poliitiline eelistus. Hübriidsõja tunnuste valguses tuleb mõista, et need võivad toimida vähemalt kahel moel. Ühelt poolt võivad need olla radikaliseerumise tekkepõhjus (nt poliitilised tingimused, paremäärmuslus), teisalt toimida radikaliseerumisprotsessis olijale päästiksündmusena.

Lääne demokraatlikke ühiskondi iseloomustab pluralism, vaba meedia ja avatud majanduskeskkond. Riigi ja ühiskonna suhtlust reguleerivad seadused, mis peavad tagama inimeste põhiõigused ja vabaduse. Teisalt aga muudavad loetletud tingimused demokraatliku ühiskonna haavatavaks välistele mõjudele, nagu hübriidsõja tunnused ehk moonutatud või väärinformatsiooni levitamine.⁶⁸ Hea näide on Venemaa Föderatsioon, kes edastab propagandameedias sõnumeid venelaste diskrimineerimise kohta Eestis⁶⁹. Võib eeldada, et järjepidevalt riiki halvustavate uudiste esilekerkimine ei aita luua sidusat ja tugevat ühiskonda.

⁶⁵ Tammekun 2018, lk 40.

⁶⁶ Inimarengu aruanne: Eestis jätkub nõukogudeaegne getostumine. 2017. – Postimees, 1. juuni. <https://www.postimees.ee/4129675/inimarengu-aruanne-eestis-jatkub-noukogudeaegne-getostumine> (01.10.2019).

⁶⁷ Mattiisen, A-M. 2017. Venemaa mõju Eestis. – Diplomaatia, 27. juuni. <https://diplomaatia.ee/venemaa-moju-eestis/> (01.10.2019).

⁶⁸ Wigell 2019, pp. 15–16.

⁶⁹ Euroopa Parlamendis tunnistati, ent „õigustati“ Baltikumi venelaste diskrimineerimist. 2018. – Sputnik Eesti, 23. mai. <https://sputnik-news.ee/news/20180523/10800785/euroopa-parlamendis-tunnistati-oigustati-baltikumi-venelaste-diskrimineerimist.html> (11.11.2019).

6. Kokkuvõte ja järeldused

Kokkuvõtvalt võib öelda, et Venemaal on Lähis-Idas oma poliitilised huvid ning eesmärk on muutuda üheks olulisemaks jõuks regioonis. Vaadeldes Venemaa tegevust laiemalt, eristub üsna selgelt suhete (taas)loomine teiste riikidega. See on tähtis mitmest aspektist, kuid veel enam on see oluline president Putinile. Venemaa Föderatsiooni globaalse mõjuvõimu taastamine pärast Nõukogude Liidu lagunemist on üks riigi välispoliitilisi lubadusi ja eesmärgi. Oluline samm eesmärgi täitmisel oli 2015. aastal Süüria kodusõtta astumine, mis ühtlasi avas võimaluse suurendada võimu regioonis. Samas edastas Venemaa Föderatsioon Süürias sõtta astumisega vägagi selge sõnumi nii Ameerika Ühendriikidele kui ka Euroopa Liidule. Sanktsioonidest ja teravatest suhetest hoolimata ei ole Venemaa poliitiliselt eraldatud, tõrjutud ega tagandatud.⁷⁰ Teisalt võib öelda, et Euroopa Liidus, sealhulgas Eestis, esile kerkinud parempoolsed jõud on kasulikud Venemaa Föderatsioonile, sest annavad oma tegevusega president Putinile võimaluse mõjutada ühtset Euroopa Liidu välispoliitikat⁷¹.

Riiklikes arengukavades on püstitatud eesmärgiks sidus ühiskond. Olukorras, kus venekeelne elanikkond elab endiselt paralleelmaailmas, sealhulgas Kremli infoväljas, tuleb analüüsida valitud meetmete tõhusust ning vajaduse korral kaaluda muudatusi. Ühtlasi tuleks suunata tähelepanu venekeelsele meediale Eestis. Tuleks kaaluda, kas riigi ühel suurima eelarvega kohalikul omavalitsusel on otstarbekas investeerida Venemaa propagandakanali saadete tootmisse⁷² või leida ühisosa juba loodud venekeelse Eesti kanaliga ning panustada sellesse.

Eesti ühiskonnas võivad avalduda mitmesugused radikaliseerumise põhjused. See on tõenäoline, kuna ühiskonnas esineb võõraviha, osa venekeelsest elanikkonnast tunneb end ühiskonnast eemale tõrjutuna ning elatakse võõrriigi infoväljas. Ühiskonda lõhestavad veel avalikud sõnavõetud rände teemal, neist kumab läbi moslemeid halvustav retoorika. Kõrvutades kõike seda hübriidisõja tunnustega, mille kasutamises suudab Venemaa Föderatsioon meistiklassi näidata, on tõenäoline, et eelviidatud terrorismi juhtumid ei jää viimaseks.

⁷⁰ Rumer 2019, pp. 2–11.

⁷¹ Polyakova, A. 2014. Strange Bedfellows: Putin and Europe's Far Right. – World Affairs, Vol. 177, No. 3, pp. 37–40.

⁷² Kümneid ringe ümber PBK 2018. – Propastop.org, 4. jaanuar. <https://www.propastop.org/2018/01/04/kumneid-ringe-umber-pbk/> (10.11.2019).

Hübridsõja tunnused leiavad laialdast käsitlust julgeolekuvaldkonnas. Tänapäeva ühiskonnas võiks selle teemakäsitluse siduda tugevamalt siseturvalisusega ja lülitada vastavate asutuste tegevuskavasse. Seejuures tuleb arvestada ka võimalikku radikaliseerumist.

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KATRIN TAMMEKUN, MA

Politsei- ja Piirivalveameti juhtivmenetleja

SÕJALISED ERAETTEVÕTTED TÄNAPÄEVAL

Ants Laaneots



1. Sõjaliste eraettevõtete teke

Üheks inimkonna ajalugu iseloomustavaks nähtuseks sõjalises valdkonnas on taas saanud keskajal Euroopas laialt levinud, seejärel unustusse langenud ja nüüd uuesti sündinud palgasõjaväed ja palgasõdurid. Erinevus kahe ajastu palgasõdurite vahel seisneb vaid selles, et kui minevikus värbasid neid riigid või aadlkonna esindajad, siis tänapäeval kasutavad palgasõdurite teenuseid nii riiklikud kui ka äristruktuurid. Nüüdisaja palgasõdur on inimene, kes osaleb relvastatud konfliktis mitte oma poliitilistest, ideoloogilistest või rahvuslikest huvidest lähtudes, vaid sellepärast, et talle makstakse eluohtriku tegevuse eest head palka.¹ Sageli on nii, et palgasõdurid ei ole selle riigi kodanikud, mille territooriumil käib sõda või toimub relvastatud konflikt, kus nad osalevad. Võimalikud on muidugi ka erandid, nagu see juhtus Vene palgasõduritega Ukrainas, mida nad kui slaavi riiki peavad ise üheks osaks Venemaast. Ajalugu on näidanud, et tüüpiline palgasõdur ei anna truudusevannet ei oma riigile ega ka teistele riikidele. Temale ei ole tähtsad poliitilised aspektid, mis seonduvad konfliktiga, milles ta osaleb, teda huvitab peamiselt sissetulek. Selline eraettevõtetus nägi uuesti ilmavalgust möödunud sajandi 60ndatel aastatel. Massiliseks nähtuseks muutus ta veidi hiljem, kui paljudes riikides tekkisid sõjalised eraettevõtted (ingl *private military company*, ka *private security company*, вп *частная военная компания*).

Sõjalised eraettevõtted (SE) kujutavad endast kõrgeklassiliste sõjaväespetsialistidega komplekteeritud äriettevõtteid, kes pakuvad eriteenuseid sõjalises valdkonnas. SE-de töötajad on reeglina professionaalid, kes täidavad või lahendavad kõige erinevamaid operatiiv- ja lahingulisi ülesandeid selliste klientide huvides, kes nende teenuste eest hästi tasuvad. SE-de peamised tegevusvaldkonnad on:

¹ **Егоров, Д.** 2019. История появления и развития ЧВК. 30.04.2019. <https://militaryarms.ru/armii-mira/chastnie-voennie-kompanii/> (18.12.2019). [**Егоров** 2019]

- 1) abi välisriikide kaitseministeeriumitele julgeoleku ja sõjaliste kontseptuaalsete dokumentide väljatöötamisel ning nõu andmine reformide korraldamiseks;
- 2) luureoperatsioonide läbiviimine;
- 3) välismaal asuvate diplomaatiliste ja muude esinduste turvamine ning kaitse;
- 4) teiste riikide jõustruktuuride personali väljaõpe;
- 5) sõjaväestatud formeeringute, luure- ja diversioonigruppide ning võitlejate ettevalmistamine ja nende tegevuse juhtimine;
- 6) miiniväljade ja mineeritud objektide demineerimine ning lõhkekehade hävitamine;
- 7) välisriikides sõdivate relvajõudude üksuste logistiline toetamine;
- 8) strateegiliste ja muude tähtsate objektide valve ning kaitse;
- 9) osalemine lahingutegevuses.²

Viimasel ajal on SE-d üha enam hakanud osalema ka lahingutegevuses ja oma osavõtuga täiendama regulaarüksusi lahinguväljal. Enamikul juhtudel võib sõjalise eraettevõtte töötajat pidada õiguslikus mõttes tsiviiliseks, kellele laieneb Genfi konventsiooniga ette nähtud kaitse. Samas on esinenud olukordi, kus sõjalise eraettevõtte (vabatahtliku sõjalise organisatsiooni) personal ei kvalifitseeru tsiviiliseks ega võitlejateks, vaid nad jäävad nende kahe mõiste vahele. Seepärast on sõjaliste eraettevõtete töötajaid võrreldud ka palgasõduritega, st inimestega, kes osalevad lahingutegevuses isikliku kasu teenimise eesmärgil.³

Euroopa esimene sõjaline eraettevõtte Watchguard International tekkis 1967. aastal Suurbritannias. Selle loojaks oli Briti armee kolonelleitnant David Sterling, mees, kes oli varem loonud kuulsa Briti eriuksuse SAS, mis on üks parimatest eriuksustest maailmas. Töötajate hulk kasvas ja ettevõtte laiienes kiiresti. Watchguard Internationali põhitegevuseks sai erinevate jõustruktuuride väljaõpe Lähis-Ida ja Aafrika riikides.⁴

Sõjaliste eraettevõtete arv hakkas kiiresti suurenema maailma eri piirkondades külma sõja lõpus. SE-sid tekkis kõigepealt USA-s, Suurbritannias, Iisraelis ja Lõuna-Aafrikas. Mitme riigi esimesed SE-d osalesid

² **Еропов** 2019.

³ **Пекарев, J.** 2012. Relvakonflikti privatiseerimisega seonduvad probleemid siseriiklikus ja humanitaarõiguses Venemaa gaasikontserni GAZPROM näitel. Magistritöö. Tartu: Kaitseväe Ühendatud Õppeasutused, lk 17. [**Пекарев** 2012]

⁴ **Еропов** 2019.

lahingutegevuses Angolas. SE-de tegevust kontrollisid nende arengu algetapil üsna tähelepanelikult nende asutajariigid. Kompaniide populaarsus ja arv kasvasid ruttu, nende teenuseid hakkasid kasutama eri riikide valitsused ja ka suurfirmad. Huvi sõjaliste eraettevõtete vastu hakkas tundma isegi ÜRO. 1979. aastal võeti ÜRO-s vastu rahvusvaheline SE-de tegevust reguleeriv resolutsioon, kuid selle praktiline rakendamine ei leidnud maailmas erilist poolehoidu. Selleks oli ka põhjus – maailm oli pärast külma sõja lõppu üleküllastunud sõjavägedest ja sõjaväelastest. Külma sõja perioodil oli näiteks NATO ühendatud relvajõududes 5,25 miljonit sõjaväelast, NSV Liidu loodud Varssavi paktis aga isegi veel rohkem – 7,56 miljonit.⁵

Olukord Euroopas ja Ameerikas muutus järsult pärast külma sõja lõppu 1991. aastal. Lääneriikides tekkis arusaam, et nüüd on läbi suurte sõdade ajastu. Nii Lääne-Euroopas kui ka USA-s hakati tugevasti vähendama kulusi riigikaitsele, külmutati paljud sõjalised projektid ja sõjavägede koosseis kahanes märgatavalt. Venemaa Föderatsioon oli pärast NSV Liidu lagunemist detsembris 1991 omakorda sunnitud mitu korda vähendama päranduseks saadud üle jõu käivaid kolmemiljonilisi relvajõude. Külma sõja aegsetest hiigelarmeetest vabanesid miljonid korraliku väljaõppe ja sõjakogemustega mehed, kellel oli tsiviilühiskonnas suuri raskusi meelepärase töö leidmisega ning kes otsisid häid raha teenimise võimalusi.

Just samal ajal tekkis USA kaitseministeeriumis idee kasutada aktiivsemalt ära reservis olevaid ja tööd otsivaid kutselisi erusõjaväelasi ning luua uus eraettevõtluse haru – sõjalised eraettevõtted. Algul kasutati neid üksuste toetamiseks sellistes valdkondades nagu logistika, tehnika remont ja varustamine, kuid varsti hakkasid SE-d osalema ka sõjategevuses palju tõsisemate ülesannete täitmisel. Näiteks esimese lahesõja ajal 1991. aastal moodustasid USA juhitud koalitsioonivägede personalist Iraagis ligi ühe protsendi erinevatest SE-dest tulnud palgasõdurid.⁶ Nende teenuste ring laienes kiiresti. Möödunud sajandi 90ndatel aastatel osalesid sõjalised eraettevõtted juba mitmes sõjalises konfliktis Aafrikas. Euroopas õpetasid USA palgasõdurid välja Horvaatia sõdureid Jugoslaavia kodusõjas ning aitasid Georgial uue demokraatliku valitsuse võimuletulekul enne Venemaa kallaletungi 2008. aastal õpetada välja ohvitsere ja sõdureid. Ameerika ja Prantsuse SE-d võitlesid piraatidega Somaalias, mitme teise riigi, kaasa arvatud Venemaa, palgasõdurid osalesid Liibüa kodusõjas. See ei ole kaugeltki täielik nimistu

⁵ **Stratfor**. 2014. NATO: The Evolution of the Alliance. April 28. <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/nato-evolution-alliance> (18.12.2019).

⁶ **Еропов** 2019.

viimaste aastakümnete konfliktidest, milles osalesid või osalevad sõjalised eraettevõtted.

Praegu on maailmas ametlikult registreeritud ligi 450 sõjalist eraettevõtet. Praktika näitas, et järjest loodavates SE-des tekkisid üsna pea nende juriidilise staatuse, palgasõdurite ja töötajate õiguste, volituste ning piirangutega seotud probleemid. Riikidel oli tungiv vajadus sõjaliste eraettevõtete tegevuse õigusliku regulatsiooni järele. 2003. aastal kinnitas USA kaitseministeerium esimesena uue õigusliku määrustiku FM 100-21⁷, millega kehtestati koostööreeglid ja -kord Ameerika sõjaväelaste ning SE-de töötajate vahel. USA eeskuju järgisid kiiresti ka teised lääneriigid, kus olid olemas sõjalised eraettevõtted. Võib öelda, et pea kõikides sellistes riikides on nüüdisajal SE-de tegevus, volitused ja piirangud reguleeritud vastavate õigusaktidega. Erandiks selles on Venemaa, kus SE-de suhtes puuduvad seadused täielikult. Veelgi enam, igasugune Venemaa sõjaliste eraettevõtete tegevus on keelatud riigi kriminaalkodeksi § 359-ga. Selle rikkumisel ootab süüdlast kohus ja kuni seitsmeaastane vangistus. Teisalt näib, et Venemaa juhtkond on hakanud siiski mõistma SE-de legaliseerimise vajadust. Riigiduuma saadikud ja eriti välisminister Sergei Lavrov on viimastel aastatel mitmel korral teinud president Vladimir Putinile ettepaneku seadustada Venemaa sõjalised eraettevõtted, kuid probleemi lahendamine venib ilmselt Kremlis erihuvide tõttu. Kõige tuntumad lääneriikide sõjalised eraettevõtted on Academi (endine Blackwater), KBR (endine Kellogg, Brown and Root), DynCorp (kõik kolm on USA firmad), Erinys (Suurbritannia) ja Groupe EHC (Prantsusmaa).

2. Sõjalised eraettevõtted Ameerika Ühendriikides

Esimese suure, ligi pool miljardit dollarit maksva lepingu USA valitsusega sõlmis 1974. aastal sõjatööstuskontsernile Northrop Grumman kuulunud sõjaväestatud turvaettevõtte Vinnell Corporation. Tema ülesandeks sai õpetada välja Saudi Araabia rahvuskaart ja kaitsta selle riigi naftavälju.⁸ Sõjalisi eraettevõtteid hakati 1991. aastal pärast külma sõja lõppu hoopis teistmoodi rakendama. Nii Euroopas kui ka USA-s tekkis omamoodi eufooria. Arvati, et suurte sõdade ajastu Euroopas on nüüd igaveseks läbi, riigid ja rahvad

⁷ **United States Department of the Army.** 2003. Field Manual No. 3-100.21 (100–21): Contractors on the Battlefield, January. Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army. http://www.combatindex.com/store/field_man/Sample/FM_3-100_21.pdf (18.12.2019).

⁸ **Еропов** 2019.

hakkavad elama üksteisemõistmises ja koostöös. USA ja Lääne-Euroopa valitsused vähendasid järsult kulutusi riigikaitsele, relvajõud kahanesid märgatavalt. Samal ajal aga hakkas erinevatel kontinentidel suurenema sõjaliste konfliktide arv. Rahvusvaheline julgeoleku olukord kippus üha enam väljuma maailma üldsuse kontrolli alt. Selleks, et kompenseerida nõrgenenud jõustruktuuride võimekust, hakkas USA sõjalise juhtkonna eestvedamisel kiiresti kasvama sõjaliste eraettevõtete ehk palgasõjavägede hulk.

Loodavate SE-de esmasteks ülesanneteks said relvajõudude logistika ja tagalatoetus, kuid varsti hakkasid nad täitma ka palju tõsisemaid ülesandeid nagu üksuste juhtivkoosseisu, tehnilise personali ja sõdurite väljaõpe, strateegiline planeerimine ning nõustamine sõjalistes konfliktides. Lähtudes eriti lahingukogemustest Iraagis, Afganistanis, endises Jugoslaavias ja Süürias, kaasatakse viimasel ajal ameeriklaste sõjalisi eraettevõtteid laialt selliste objektide nagu lennuväljade, naftamaardlate, rafineerimistehaste, naftatorude, elektrisüsteemide ja rahvusvaheliste konvoide valvesse ja kaitsesse. USA kaitseministeeriumi palgatud eraturvafirmade töötajate arv ületas näiteks teise Iraagi sõja tipp hetkel 130 000 piiri, st eraturvafirmade töötajate ja relvajõudude sõdurite suhe oli 1 : 1, ning 2011. aastal kulutati eraturvafirmadele Afganistanis ja Iraagis rohkem kui 200 miljardit dollarit.⁹ USA palgasõdurid on jätkuvalt kaasatud Iraagi ja Saudi Araabia relvajõudude väljaõppesse, sealsete vanglate kontrolli, vägede tagalateenistuse korraldamisse, õhuluuresse, tuletõrjesse, laevade kaitsesse piraatide vastu jne. Sõjalistel eraettevõtetel on ka tähtis roll sõjast haaratud territooriumite demineerimisel. Koos merepiraatluse tekkega, eriti Somaalia lähistel ja Adeni lahes, said SE-d endale uue tegevusvaldkonna, milleks kujunes võitlus tänapäeva piraatidega. Tankerite omanikel on palju odavam palgata sõjaliste eraettevõtete relvastatud meeskonnad kui maksta laeva kaaperdanud piraatidele selle vabastamiseks kallist lunaraha.

ÜRO, WHO ja veel mitu rahvusvahelist organisatsiooni on seisukohal, et USA ja teiste lääneriikide SE-d on potentsiaalselt kasulikud maailma üldsusele, kuna nende tegevus on rangelt reguleeritud riikide seadustega. Demokraatlikes riikides on nad usaldusväärsed ning erinevalt relvastatud konfliktide piirkondades olevatest rahvuslikest sõjalistest üksustest ei ärata asukohariigi võimude ja ühiskonna umbusku. USA sõjalised eraettevõtted on valdavalt komplekteeritud endiste sõjaväelaste ja teiste jõustruktuuride töötajatega ning suurte lahingukogemustega eriüksuslastega. Viimasel

⁹ Pekarev 2012, lk 9.

ajal on SE-d hakanud palju rohkem värbama ka sõjalise õppeasutuse lõpetanud noori, kes on neile vajalikud. Seejuures on märgatav tendents, et USA sõjalisel eraettevõtetel muutuvad üha enam rahvusvaheliseks, st nendesse värvatakse üha enam teiste riikide kodanikke.

Rahvusvahelises massimeedias märgitakse, et USA-l on suur hulk nii oma territooriumil tegutsevaid kui ka välismaal eriteenuseid osutavaid sõjalisi eraettevõtteid. Üks tuntum neist on sõjaline eraettevõtte Constellis, mille peakorter asub Restonis Virginia osariigis. Constellis pakub mitmesuguseid teenuseid enam kui 45 riigile, kaasa arvatud Lähis-Ida ja Põhja-Aafrika maadele.¹⁰ Tema koosseisu kuuluvad tütarettevõtted Academi (endine Blackwater), Triple Canopy, Olive Group, Centerra, Omniplex, Edinburgh International, Strategic Social ja veel mõned teised firmad. Constellise piirkondlikud esindused on Afganistanis (peakorter Kabulis), Alžeerias, Suurbritannias, Iraagis, Keenias, Mosambiigis, Nigeerias, Tansaania ja Araabia Ühendemiraatides. Constellise juhtkonda kuulub endine USA justiitsminister John Ashcroft, sinna on kuulunud Hillary Clintoni asevälisminister diplomaatilise julgeoleku küsimustes Eric Boswell, endine CIA agentuurloure direktor Jose Rodriguez ja endine USA eriüksuste operatiivformeringu ülem Afganistanis erukindralmajor Edward Reeder. Kokku on ettevõttel üle 20 000 töötaja, kusjuures tendents on töötajate lisandumise poole.

Teine suur sõjaline eraettevõtte MPRI (Military Professional Resources Inc.), mille peakorter on Alexandrias Virginia osariigis, tegutseb USA välisministeeriumi, Pentagoni ja CIA-ga sõlmitud lepingute alusel 40 riigi territooriumil.¹¹ MPRI üks peamine tegevusvaldkond on töötada välja programme tellijariikide eriteenistuste ja õigusorganite töötajate väljaõppeks kriisiolukordades ning kiireks reageerimiseks tekkivatele ohtudele.

MPRI osutab samuti soovijatele teenuseid, kui on vaja relvi ja tehnikat tellida, osta ja kohale toimetada, ning nõustab relvajõude reformimise ja juhtimise alal. Veel üks tähtis MPRI tegevusvaldkond on mitmekülgne konsultatiivne ja praktiline abi USA ja teiste maade riiklikele struktuuridele. Peale selle osaleb MPRI personal mitmes lokaalses sõjas ja sõjalises konfliktis. USA reservohvitseride väljaõppe programmide põhjal töötavad paljud selle eraettevõtte personalist õppejõudude ja administraatoritena

¹⁰ Вильданов, М.; Турыгин, А. 2018. Частные военные компании в США. http://pentagonus.ru/publ/chastnye_voennye_kompanii_v_ssha_2018/19-1-0-2843 (18.12.2019) [Вильданов, Турыгин 2018]

¹¹ *Ibid.*

sõjaväe õppeasutustes. MPRI on ka peamine USA poliitika edastaja ja levitaja Aafrikas, kus ta osaleb mitmes riigis ühiste kiirreageerimisjõudude loomises ja väljaõppes. Venelased väidavad, et MPRI allüksused tegutsevad Georgias, et aidata seasel juhtkonnal reformida relvajõude, töötada välja sõjalist doktriini, koostada operatiivplaanid separatistliku Abhaasia ja Lõuna-Osseetia kohta ning määrata kindlaks õppeprogrammide ja õppuste plaanid ja korraldamise kavad. Lisaks hõlmab nende töö Georgia kõikide erialade sõjaväelaste väljaõpet. MPRI-t juhib endine NATO Euroopa vägede kõrgem ülemjuhataja, USA kindral Bantz J. Craddock. Organisationsioonis töötab üle 12 000 inimese.

Sõjaline eraettevõtte DynCorp, mille peakorter on McLeanis Virginia osariigis, on spetsialiseerunud diplomaatiliste missioonide ning välismaal asuvate USA sõjaliste objektide ja personali füüsilisele kaitsele. Ligi 10 000 töötajaga DynCorpi juhib endine USA staabiülemate ühendkomitee esimehe nõunik poliitilistes küsimustes George Krivo.

Sõjaline eraettevõtte Cubic, mille peakorter asub San Diegos Californias, on maailmas üks edukamaid firmasid, mis töötab välja ja paigaldab riiklike objektide kaitseüsteeme. Cubic teeb seda enam kui 50 riigis.¹² Ettevõtte teine tegevusvaldkond hõlmab erinevate lennuväe ja soomustehnika juhtimise väljaõppevahendite projekteerimist, väljatöötamist, rakendamist ja hooldamist. Peale selle korraldab Cubic mitme riigi jõustruktuuride personali väljaõpet erinevates operatiivolukordades, aitab infot (sh luureandmeid) koguda ja analüüsida ning hoolitseb relvastuse ja soomustehnika ekspluatatsiooni eest.

Selles eraettevõttes, mille juhtide hulka kuulus kuni viimase ajani endine USA merelennuväe juhataja viitseadmiral David Buss, töötab ligi 10 000 inimest.¹³

Ameeriklaste ja brittide ühine sõjaline eraettevõtte HALO Trust (Hazardous Area Life-support Organisation Trust) positsioneerib end ametlikult kui rahvusvahelist organisatsiooni, kes aitab hädas olevatel riikidel teha kahjutuks miine, lõhkemata mürske ja pomme. Ettevõtte personali moodustavad peamiselt endised pioneeri väljaõppega ja praktikaga sõjaväelased ning eriteenistuste töötajad. Ettevõtte põhitegevus on lõhkemata lahingumoon ja miinide demineerimine, miiniväljade kaardistamine ning kohalikele elanikele pioneeri väljaõppe pakkumine maailma eri paikades asuvates konfliktipiirkondades. HALO Trustil on filiaalid Angolas, Afganistanis,

¹² Вильданов, Турыгин 2018.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Vietnamis, Georgias, Kambodžas, Mosambiigis, Nicaraguas, Sudaanis ja Eritreas. Ettevõttel on ka võimekus valmistada ette sõjalisest konfliktist haaratud riikides kohalike relvaformeringute võitlejaid tegevuseks luure- ja diversioonigruppides, pioneerina, instruktorina või topograafilise luure spetsialistina.

Erinevalt Venemaast on SE-de tegevus USA-s rangelt reguleeritud riiklike õigusaktidega. SE-de kasutamist välismaal reglementeerib rahvusvaheliselt Montreux' dokument eraõiguslike sõjaliste ja turvafirmade tegevuse hea tava kohta, mille 17 riigi esindajad võtsid vastu ja allkirjastasid 2008. aastal Šveitsi linnas Montreux's. Nende seas olid ka USA, Suurbritannia, Saksamaa, Prantsusmaa, Kanada, Hiina, Ukraina ja Poola.¹⁴ Lepe kohustab sellega ühinenud riike kontrollima oma SE-de tegevust, kandma vastutust nende kuritegude eest ning vajaduse korral keelama neil osaleda sõjategevuses. Kuna SE-sid kasutatakse maailma erinevates konfliktikolletes järjest rohkem, peab USA vajalikuks luua rahvusvaheline keskus, mis reguleeriks nende tegevust.

USA sõjaliste eraettevõtete personal saab väljaõppe riiklikes ja eraõppekeskustes. Õppejõude valitakse hoolega. Nendeks saavad tavaliselt elukutselised sõjaväelased, kes on teeninud relvajõududes, teistes riigi jõustruktuurides, USA maavägede eriüksustes või merejalaväes. SE-de väljaõppekeskused asuvad San Diego California, Mount Carrollis Illinois ja Moyockis Põhja-Carolinas.

3. Sõjalised eraettevõtted Venemaal

Venelased kuulsid esimest korda oma riigi sõjalisest eraettevõttest 2011. aastal, kui piraatide vastu relvastatud valvet ja kaitset pakkuva turvafirma Moran Security Group omanikud, ärimehed Vadim Gussev ja Jevgeni Sidorov registreerisid Hongkongis sõjalise eraettevõtte nimega Slaavi Korpus (вн *Славянский Корпус*) ning värbasid sinna 287 töötajat, et kaitsta naftamaardlaid ja -torusid Süürias. Ettevõtte meestel tuli aga peagi suure saladuskatte all võtta osa 2011. aastal Süürias puhkenud kodusõjast. Ajakirjanike andmetel osales sõjategevuses Slaavi Korpuses ka tulevane sõjalise eraettevõtte Wagner looja ja juht, endine eriüksuslane alampolkovnik Dmitri Utkin, kelle kutsungiks oli Wagner. Slaavi Korpus kui terviklik üksus lõpetas tegevuse oktoobris 2013 pärast lüüasaamist rindel ja suuri kaotusi Islamiriigile

¹⁴ Вильданов, Турыгин 2018.

(ISIS). Moskva toetuseta jäänud Slaavi Korpuse mehed pöördusid 2013. aastal tagasi Venemaale, kus reavõitlejad sõitsid laiali oma kodukohta, üksuse juhid sattusid aga kohe trellide taha, kuigi ei jäänud sinna kauaks. Venemaa juhtkonnale oli nii SE-de juhte kui ka sõdureid vaja. Peagi kutsusid värbajad nad teenistusse tagasi, kuid nüüd juba sõjalisse eraettevõttesse, mis kandis nime Wagner.

Sõjaline eraettevõtte Wagner kasvas välja pärast Süüria afääri hingusele läinud üksusest Slaavi Korpus. Nii BBC, Peterburi uudisteportaali Fontanka.ru kui ka portaali The Bell andmetel selgus hiljem, et uue üksuse looja ja juht oli seesama Dmitri Utkin, hüüdnimega Wagner. Kutselise ohvitserina oli ta teeninud pikka aega Nõukogude ja hiljem Vene armees kindralstaabi luure peavalitsusele (vn *Главное Разведывательное Управление*, GRU) allunud 2. üksikus *spetsnaz*'i brigaadis, mis algul oli Petseris ja pärast NSV Liidu lagunemist kolis Pihkva lähedale, kusjuures viimased aastad oli ta sellesse brigaadi kuulunud 700. erisalga ülem.¹⁵

Vene allikate teatel lahkus Dmitri Utkin sõjaväe teenistusest 2011. aastal, avastades enda jaoks uue tegevusvaldkonna sõjalises eraettevõttes. Ta olevat saksa helilooja Richard Wagneri suur austaja, tema initsiatiivil pandi ka uuele sõjalisele eraettevõttele selline nimi.¹⁶ SE Wagnerist kirjutas esimesena 2015. aasta oktoobris Peterburis asuv portaali Fontanka.ru. Portaali The Bell avaldas hiljem uuringu, mille pealkiri oli „Presidendi erasõjavägi: Jevgeni Prigožini kõige delikaatsem ülesanne“¹⁷. Uuringus kirjeldati SE Wagneri loomise lugu, organisatsiooni ja juhtfigure, kes saatsid Vene palgasõdureid Ida-Ukrainasse, Süüriasse, Kesk-Aafrikasse ja Venetsueelasse. Viidates Vene kaitseministeeriumile lähedastele allikatele, kinnitab The Bell, et SE-de loomise idee tekkis Vene kindralstaabi juhtidel pärast salajast kohtumist Lõuna-Aafrika relvajõudude ohvitseri Eeben Barlow'ga, kes oli asutanud 1989. aastal ettevõtte Executive Outcomes, mis kujunes maailma esimeseks legaalseks eraarmees. Barlow'ga kohtuti 2010. aasta juunis Peterburis peetud foorumil, milles ta osales. Venelased olid selleks ajaks juba aasta otsa arutanud relvajõududeväliste üksuste loomist erus või reservis olevatest erija õhudessantväelastest, kes olid saanud põhjaliku väljaõppe ning osalenud

¹⁵ **Группа Вагнера.** Материал из Википедии – свободной энциклопедии. https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Группа_Вагнера (18.12.2019) [**Группа Вагнера**]

¹⁶ **Бушуев, М.** 2018. ЧБК Вагнера: все что о ней известно. – Deutsche Welle, August 01. <https://p.dw.com/p/2sjMA> (18.12.2019) [**Бушуев 2018**].

¹⁷ **Частная армия для президента: история самого деликатного поручения Евгения Пригожина.** The Bell, 29.01.2019. <https://thebell.io/41889-2/?fbclid=IwAR0a4H9vDWy-7KIFbIL3OQmesGjJ84wGAKr1H-QiU4gtYXhApUH2P4tPP0> (29.01.2019).

sõjalistes konfliktides. Plaani toetas ka tollaegne kindralstaabi ülem armee-kindral Nikolai Makarov. Barlow kirjeldas Vene ohvitseridele SE-de mudelit ja andis nõu, kuidas kohandada seda Vene tingimustele. Moskvas kujunes peamiseks vaidlusteemaks asjaolu, kas SE peab olema legaalne või mitte. Liisk langes lõpuks siiski sõjalise eraettevõtte üksuste loomisele, kuid tingimused, et SE-d ja palgasõdurid on ülimalt salastatud.

The Bell kinnitas sedagi, et mõte kaasata aktiivne Peterburi ettevõtja Jevgeni Prigožin sõjaliste eraettevõtete loomisesse sündis Vene kindralstaabis. Energiline ärimees Prigožin korraldas riiklike struktuuride, ka kaitseministeeriumi toitlustamist, kusjuures ta tegi seda nii suures mahus, et näiteks 2012. aastal ulatus tema ettevõtete käive hinnanguliselt kümnete miljardite rublani. Tema hüüdnimi on Putini kokk. The Bell märgib ära, et Prigožin on isiklikult tuttav Vladimir Putiniga.

Vene sõjalised eraettevõtted kujutavad endast mitteametlikku sõjalist organisatsiooni, mis ei kuulu – vähemalt näiliselt – Venemaa Föderatsiooni relvajõudude koosseisu, ei ole kusagil arvel ning mille suhtes ei kehti mingid õigusnormid riigi territooriumil. Mitme Vene ja lääne eksperdi arvates juhib tegelikult Wagneri gruppi illegaalselt GRU, mis omakorda allub Vene kaitseministeeriumile. Viimase kaudu värvatakse ka personali, korraldatakse sõjaliste eraettevõtete väljaõpet ning varustatakse neid relvastuse ja tehnikaga. Vene uudistekanal RBK hindas 2015. aastal, et Wagneri grupi ülalpidamiseks kulus aastast olenevalt läbiviidavate operatsioonide iseloomust 5,1–10,3 miljardit rubla. Kulutuste hulka olid arvestatud palgad, tugibaasi korrashoid ja varustamine, personali toit ja väljaõpe, relvastus, tehnika ja kompensatsioon hukkunud meeste peredele. Palka maksti Wagneri grupi palgasõduritele sularahas, kuid ametlikult ei olnud palgalehed kusagil kajastatud. Relvastuse ja varustuse hanked olid rangelt salastatud. Telekanali RBK andmetel rahastasid Wagnerit riik koos tähtsamate ärimestega. Nende hulka kuulus samuti Putini lähikondlane Jevgeni Prigožin. Detsembris 2016. aastal ilmusid Utkin ja Prigožin avalikkuse ette vastuvõtul Kremliis, kus president Putin jagas ordineid erilist kangelaslikkust ilmutanud sõjaväelastele. Internetti lekkis Wagneri juhtkonna ja Vladimir Putini ühisfoto, mis pärast selle ümber pressis tekkinud skandaali üsna kiiresti kõrvaldati.¹⁸

Alates 2017. aastast on Utkin ehk Wagner USA sanktsioonide all. Ameeriklaste vastavas nimekirjas on märgitud, et ta „on seotud sõjalise eraettevõttega Wagner“. Novembris 2017 teatas RBK, et Dmitri Utkin on

¹⁸ Группа Вагнера.

määratud Jevgeni Prigožinile kuuluva restoranide valdusühingu Concord Management and Consulting peadirektoriks. See kinnitas veelkord kahe mehe – Prigožini ja Utkini – tihedat sidet Kremliga ning koostööd Vene sõjaliste eraettevõtetega.

Peale selle teatasid Fontanka.ru, Znak.com, BBC ja The Bell, et sõjalisel eraettevõttel Wagner on Krasnodari krais Molokino polügoonil väljaõppebaas, kus õpetati alates 2015. aastast palgasõdureid välja. Selle polügooni vahetus naabruses asub GRU 10. üksik *spetsnaz*'i brigaad (väeosa nr 51532).¹⁹

7. oktoobril 2017 teatas Ukraina julgeolekuteenistus, et alates 2014. aastast on Wagneri palgasõdurid osalenud Ida-Ukraina konfliktis. Esimeseks Wagneri grupi operatsiooniks oli võitlus Ukraina valitsusvägede vastu Luganski oblastis Ida-Ukrainas²⁰. Ukraina julgeolekuteenistus väitis hiljem, et Wagneri palgasõdurid olid osalenud ka Krimmis Ukraina üksuste desarmeerimisel, mis läks neil üpris lodusalt ja ilma suure verevalamiseta. Hukkus ainult üks Ukraina sõdur. Veidi hiljem juhtis Ida-Ukraina okupeerimisel Luganski oblastis asunud Wagneri gruppi isiklikult Dmitri Utkin. Kreml arvates on Wagneril suured teened Vene separatistide relvastatud vastupanu organiseerimisel ja läbiviimisel Ukraina valitsusvägede vastu Donetsk ja Luganski oblastis. Ukraina luure andmetel tulistasid just Wagneri sõdurid kantavate õhutorjerekettidega alla Ukraina transpordilennuki Il-76, ründasid Donetsk lennuvälja ja Debaltsevet. 17. juulil 2014 lasid Vene sõjaväelased õhutorjekompleksi Buk-M raketiga alla Donetsk oblastis separatistide kontrollitud õhuruumis Malaisia reisilennuki Boeing 777. Hukkus 298 inimest, nende hulgas 15 meekonnaliiget. Moskva eitab siiani hüsteeriliselt, et see pole nende kätetöö, kõiges olevat süüdi ukrainlased.²¹ 8. oktoobril 2017 avaldas Ukraina julgeolekuamet nimekirja suurest hulgast Wagneri grupi palgasõduritest, kes võtsid Venemaa poolel osa lahingutest ukrainlaste vastu. Nimekiri sisaldas 1570 palgasõduri nime ja andmeid, kaasa arvatud nende omad, kes olid saanud surma Ukraina territooriumil. Kahetsusväärne on see, et sõjategevuses Vene okupantide vastu osalesid Ida-Ukrainas ka ukrainlastest riigireeturid. Ukraina julgeolekuameti andmetel (2017. aasta oktoobri seisuga) sõdisid separatistide ridades ligi 40 Ukraina kodakondsusega võitlejat.

¹⁹ Бушуев 2018.

²⁰ Егоров 2019.

²¹ Катастрофа Boeing 777 в Донецкой области. https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Катастрофа_Boeing_777_в_Донецкой_области (18.12.2019).

Üsna pea jätkus Wagneri haarde laienemine teistesse riikidesse. Jaanuaris 2019 avastas lääne ajakirjandus, et 400 Vene palgasõdurit Wagneri grupist kaitsevad nüüd Venetsueela presidenti Madurot.²² Püüdes varjata Moskvat kompromiteerivaid, Vene sõjalisse eraettevõttesse kuuluvaid ja nüüd poliitikasse sekkunud palgasõdureid, kes kaitsevad Venetsueela diktaatorit, on Vene propagandamasin väitnud, et need ei ole mingid Wagneri mehed, vaid GRU *spetsnaz*'i võitlejad.

Briti telekanal BBC teatas, et oktoobris 2015 kolis Wagneri grupp Süüriasse ja sattus kohe lahingute eesliinile. Vene telekanal RBK on omakorda kinnitanud, et Wagneri võitlejad osalesid märtsis 2016 kaks korda iidse Palmyra vallutamises. Neid kasutati löögijõuna demoraliseeritud süürlaste asemel peaaegu kõikides president Assadile alluvate valitsusvägede pealetungioperatsioonides ning nad kandsid raskeid kaotusi. 2015. aasta sügisest 2016. aasta kevadeni kaotas Wagner 32 sõdurit hukkunute ja enam kui 80 haavatutena. 2017. aasta algul teatasid RBK ja rahvusvaheline mitetulundusühing Conflict Intelligence Team (CIT), et Süürias on hukkunud kuus Wagneri palgasõdurit. 15. veebruaril 2018 andis Süüria inimõiguste monitooringu keskus teada, et Tabia Jasira asulas on laskemoona lao plahvatuses hukkunud veel 15 Vene palgasõdurit.²³

Vene ajakirjanikud uurisid välja, et alates 2016. aastast on Süüria gaasi- ja naftamaardlatel alustanud tööd Vene firma Euro Polis. Uut ettevõtet uurinud RBK ja Fontanka.ru teatasid üsna pea, et firma omanik on ülalmainitud Vene ärirees ja president Putini soosik Jevgeni Prigožin. Uuringus väidetakse, et Euro Polis sõlmis 2017. aasta suvel süürlaste riikliku kontserniga lepingu, mille järgi sai ta õiguse valvata Süürias kohalikke naftamaardlaid ja kaevandada energiaressursse, saades endale ühe neljandiku ISIS-e käest vallutatud naftatornide naftast. Naftamaardlate ja -tornide valve ning kaitse võtsid enda peale Wagneri palgasõdurid. Selleks olid ka omad põhjused. Fontanka.ru kirjutas 2017. aastal, et Prigožin ja Vene kaitseminister Sergei Šoigu olid tülli läinud selle üle, kes vallutas kaks korda ISIS-e käest tagasi ajaloolise linna Palmyra. Kas need olid Wagneri võitlejad või Vene relvajõududesse kuulunud ja kaitseminister Šoigule allunud GRU *spetsnaz*'i üksused? Igatähis vähendas kaitseministeerium tüli tagajärjel alates 2017. aasta lõpust

²² **400 Russian Mercenaries From Wagner Group Now Protecting Maduro.** 25.01.2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQtOqh4jvQQ> (18.12.2019).

²³ **ЧВК “Вагнер”: сколько платят, кто командует, чем занимаются.** – “Вечерний вечер”. Специальный выпуск. 14.02.2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4yQGHwEzMT4> (18.12.2019).

järsult Wagneri varustamist, edastades palgasõduritele vaid vananenud relvastust ja tehnikat. Veelgi enam, Vene kaitseministeerium tegi Wagneri juhtidele ettepaneku korraldada Süürias ise oma üksuse rahastamist, milleks nad võiksid ka vallutada uusi nafta- ja gaasimaardlaid. Wagneri sõdurid olid nüüd sunnitud üle minema oma leivakotile. Kuid kõige rängemad sündmused olid naftaväljade ja rafineerimistehaste kujul uusi jahimaid otsival Wagneri grupil veel ees.

Lugejat huvitab kindlasti, millest tulenes Vene inimeste huvi valada oma verd nii relvakonfliktides endistes NSV Liidu vabariikides kui ka kaugetes sõdades väljaspool oma kodumaad. Põhjus oli lihtne – selleks oli hea teenistustasu, mida ei saanud koduse Venemaa palkadega võrreldagi. Kuidas värvatakse ja tasustatakse Venemaal palgasõdureid? Protseduur on lühidalt kirjeldades järgmine. Sõjalistesse eraettevõtetesse tööd otsima tulnud, reeglina sõjalise väljaõppe ja kogemusega mehed kirjutavad kõigepealt alla kohustusele mitte lekitada vähimatki infot oma tegevuse kohta. Seejärel täidavad kõik tulevased palgasõdurid eluloo ankeedi, mida täiendatakse isiklike andmete ja fotoga, ning neid kontrollitakse valedektoriga. Kontrolli edukalt läbinud ja tööle võetud palgasõdurid hakkavad edaspidi saama oma töö eest järgmist tasu: Venemaal 50 000 – 80 000 rubla, välisoperatsioonidel 100 000 – 120 000 rubla, lahingutegevuses osalemise eest 150 000 – 200 000 rubla ning erioperatsioonides ja suurtes lahingutes osalemise eest kuni 300 000 rubla kuus.²⁴ Vene ajakirjanduse andmetel on Wagneri sõjalistes allüksustes eri aegadel teeninud 1350–2000 meest. Saksa ajalehe Bild väitel küündis Wagneri palgasõdurite arv kõige ägedamate lahingute perioodil Süürias ja Kesk-Aafrikas isegi 2500 inimeseni. Formaaljuriidiliselt on SE Wagner Venemaal lindprii. Tema olemasolu eitavad kõik Venemaa ametiisikud. Kreml on vaid aeg-ajalt tunnistanud, et Vene sõdalased võivad tõepoolest eraviisiliselt osaleda lahingutegevuses väljaspool riigi piire.

²⁴ Группа Вагнера.

4. Sõjalise eraettevõtte Wagneri grupp surmaretk 7. veebruaril 2018

Pärast ameeriklaste toetatud kurdide Süüria Demokraatlike Jõudude (SDJ) ja Süüria valitsusvägede ühist laiaulatuslikku pealetungi ISIS-le 2017. aasta suvel leppisid ameeriklased ja Vene väejuhatas Süürias omavahel kokku, et Eufrati jõgi on eraldusjooneks Süüria valitsusvägede ja neid toetavate liitlaste ning kurdide ja neid toetavate USA sõjaväelaste vahel. Hõivatud aladel jõest põhja pool asusid kurdid ja ameeriklastest eriüksuslased, jõest lõuna pool Süüria valitsusväed, Vene *spetsnaz*'i üksused ja sõjalised eraettevõtted. Septembris 2017, kui Dayr az-Zawri linn oli vabastatud ISIS-e käest, ületasid Süüria ja nende liitlaste allüksused Vene sõjaväe inseneriväelaste toetusel Eufrati jõe ning hõivasid ameeriklastega sõlmitud lepet rikkudes omavoliliselt Eufrati põhjakaldal 20 kilomeetri pikkuse ja 5 kilomeetri laiuse sillapea piirkonnas, kus asuvad Khashami ning Al-Tabia gaasi- ja naftaleiukohad. Sillapeast mõne kilomeetri kaugusel asus suur nafta töötlemise tehas Conoco, mis sai oma tooraine Süüria kõige suuremast naftaleiukohast Al-Tabias.

2018. aasta jaanuari teisel poolel lahkusid Süüria valitsusväed olukorraga rahulolematute SDJ-sse kuulunud kurdide survele Eufrati põhjapoolselt kaldalt ning kurdide üksused hõivasid ameeriklaste abiga Dayr az-Zawrist 80 kilomeetrit edela pool asuvad naftaväljad ja nafta rafineerimise tehase. Neid toetasid 40 instruktorist koosnev USA eriüksuslaste salk ja õhutulejuhid. Ameeriklaste juhtimispunkt asus koos kurdide omaga Conocos, äsja üle võetud rafineerimistehases. Ameeriklastele ja kurdidele ootamatult ületas 2018. aasta jaanuari teisel poolel jõe uuesti suur väeüksus, milles tegutsesid süürlaste sildi all lisaks Wagneri liikmetele ka Vene elukutselised sõdurid, mh eriüksuslased ja dessantväelased. Püüdes varjata oma palgasõdureid ja üksuse kavatsusi, esitlesid Vene propagandamasin ning Süürias Latakias Hmeymimi lennubaasis asunud Vene väekontingendi juhtkond maailma avalikkusele järjekindlalt Wagnerit kui süürlaste ja nende liitlaste väekoondist. Eufrati põhjapoolsel kaldal kanda kinnitanud Wagneri üksuse tarvis ehitasid venelased kiires korras üle jõe ka pontoonsilla. Vaatamata kurdide ja ameeriklaste mitmele järelepärimisele selle kohta, kellega on tegemist, ning hoiatustele kontrolljoone ületamise ja mõjutsoonide kokkuleppe rikkumiste eest, vastati Hmeymimist monotoonselt: „Me ei tea midagi. Meie omasid seal pole.“ Vene väejuhatas püüdis kangekaelselt veenda ameeriklasi ja kurde, et „tegemist on ilmselt Süüria valitsusvägede üksuse ja nende liitlastega“. Ameeriklaste hoiatused ei mõjunud. Üsna pea viisid venelased jõe

põhjapoolsel kaldal asuvale sillapeale ka oma tankid ja suurtükid. Reaalsuses käis suurejooneline näitemäng. Mõlemad pooled said suurepäraselt aru, kes on ühel ja kes teisel poolel, kuid tegid näo, et nad usuvad üksteise selgitusi. Piirkonnas olnud USA eriüksuslased ja kurdid teadsid oma luure kaudu väga hästi, millised jõud on Eufraati põhjakaldal ja kellega on päriselt tegemist.²⁵

Olukord pingestus järjekindlalt. Nädal enne 7. veebruari 2018 oli ameeriklastele ja kurdidele selge, et venelased kavatsevad neid rünnata. USA eriüksuslased olid sunnitud tegema viimase hoiatuse nn Süüria vägede: nad avasid kurdide abiga jõe ülemjooksul asuva Al-Tabqa hüdroelektrijaama paisu lüüsid. Võimas veevool viis ära venelaste ehitatud silla ning lõhkus Wagneri üksuse kommunikatsiooniliinid, mis ühendasid neid jõe lõunakaldaga. Põhjapoolsele kaldale oli koondatud enam kui 1000-meheline polgusuurune üksus, mis koosnes kolmest 320–350-mehelisest pataljoni ründesalgast (vene palgasõdurite keeles *штурмовой отряд*), soomustehnika salgast, suurtükipataljonist, üksuse tagalast ning vägede juhtimispunkti. USA luuresatelliidid, luurelennukid ning raadiotehniline ja taktikaline luure jälgisid venelaste tegevust ööpäev läbi. Järgnenud sündmused näitasid, et ameeriklased jõudsid üpris lühikese ajaga ette valmistada põhjaliku kaitseoperatsiooni plaani. Neil oli venelastega klaarimata veel ka üks vana võlg: nimelt olid Vene pommitajad rünnanud 9. septembril 2016 USA humanitaarkonvoid, mis oli liikunud Süüria Punase Poolkuu lipu all. Kolonn oli viinud humanitaarabi 78 000 süürlasele. Pommitajad olid purustanud kolonni, 21 tsiviilisikut oli hukkunud, nende seas mõned ameeriklased ja üks Rahvusvahelise Punase Risti töötaja. Ameeriklastel tekkis nüüd hea võimalus anda õppetund barbaarsetele, end karistamatuna tundvatele Vene sõjarditele.²⁶ Peakaitseliini ette rajasid kurdid ja USA eriüksuslased mehitatud eelkaitsepositsiooni. Oma väejuhatusega kooskõlastati tulevase lahingu ajaks kurdide ja USA eriüksuslaste, lennuväe, lahingukopterite ning suurtükiväe ülesanded, sihtmärgid ja tegutsemise kord.

Lõpetanud ettevalmistused pealetungiks, hakkas Vene üksus 7. veebruari 2018 õhtul, kui pimedus oli kätte jõudnud, liikuma Dayr az-Zawri provintsis asuva Khashami linna suunas, mille läheduses asusid selle sihtmärgid: kurdide valduses olnud nafta töötlemise tehas ja naftamaardlad. Pealetungile

²⁵ **США мстят «Вагнеру» за убитых инструкторов.** – Программа «Совершенно Секретно». Выпуск № 23, 16.02.2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKWBDIk8OUg> (18.12.2019).

²⁶ **Кара-Мурза, В.** 2016. Сирия: кто разбомбил гуманитарный конвой? – Радио Свобода, 21.09.2016. <https://www.svoboda.org/a/28005122.html> (18.12.2019).

asunud Wagneri grupi suhteliselt muretust käitumisest võib järeldada, et oma üksuse suuruse ja tulejõu tõttu olid Vene palgasõdurid kindlad, et nad ei kohta ameeriklastelt ega kurdidelt tõsist vastupanu. Kaasa polnud võetud isegi õõvaatlusseadmeid ega õhutõrjevahendeid. Üksuse ees liikus eelsalgana kümne tanki ja 30 soomusmasinaga tugevdatud pataljoni suurune 1. ründesalk. Temale järgnesid mõne kilomeetri kaugusel 2. ja 5. ründesalk, mis olid valmis kohe astuma lahingusse, kui olukord seda nõuab. Wagneri suurtükipataljon asus laskepositsioonidel Eufrati põhjakaldal, olles valmis tulda avama oma liikuvate üksuste toetuseks. Operatsioonis osalenud ja ellu jäänud Vene palgasõdurite hilisemate seletuste järgi, mida võis leida internetist, oli rünnaku eesmärk hävitada kurdide üksused, anda säru neid toetavatele USA eriüksuslastele, kompromiteerida ameeriklasi meedia kaudu maailma üldsuse ees ning vallutada rafineerimistehas Conocos ja selle läheduses asuvad naftaväljad. Jälgides enda poole liikuvaid Vene üksusi, võtsid kurdide komandör Hassan ja USA õhujõudude kontingendi ülem Süürias kindralmajor James B. Gerard kaks korda ühendust Vene peakorteriga Hmeymimis, et püüda veelkord täpsustada, kas need on Süüria või Vene üksused. Vastus oli sama: „Meie omasid seal pole.“

USA õhujõudude juhataja Euroopas kindral Jeffrey L. Harrigian andis enda sõnul vahetult enne õist lahingut Süürias asunud koalitsioonivägede sideliine pidi Hmeymimi lennubaasis paiknenud Vene väejuhatusele teada, et kurdide SDJ üksused ja ameeriklased asuvad positsioonidel Conoco tehases umbes kaheksa kilomeetri kaugusel jõeäärsest platsdarmist, kus otse enne sõjaretke asus Wagneri üksus. Harrigian nõudis naftaväljade ja tehase poole liikuva üksuse peatamist. Vastus oli ikka sama: „Me ei tea. Meie omasid seal pole.“ See andis ameeriklastele tegutsemiseks vabad käed. Venelased jõudsid kurdide ja Ameerika eriüksuslaste mehitatud eelpositsioonini pilkases pimeduses kell kümme õhtul. Puhkes äge lahing Vene suurtükkide ja tankide tule toetusel. Pärast lühikest tulevahetust taandusid kurdid koos USA eriüksuslastega organiseeritult peakaitsepositsioonile. Ilmselt oli see ameeriklaste kaitseplaani järgi ette nähtud taandumine. Püüdes kiirendada kurdide peakaitsepositsiooni läbimurret, andis Wagneri üksuse juht käsu viia rünnaku tugevdamiseks lahingusse ka teised pataljonide ründesalgad. Oli pime õõ, venelaste eelsalk peatus korraks ilmselt selleks, et oodata teisi järele, et siis rünnata koos. Kuid varsti algas tulemõll, mida venelased kuidagi ei oodanud.

Ameeriklased ja kurdid alustasid kaitseoperatsiooni, mis jagunes kahte etappi ning kestis kuus tundi. Esimestel tundidel hävitasid USA hävitajad-pommitajad F-15 ja mehitamata lennukid MQ-9 Reaper õhk-maa tüüpi raketidega kõik Wagneri eelsalga tankid ja soomusmasinad. Samal ajal avas

tule USA suurtükivägi. Juhitavate rakettide M142 HIMARS-i (ingl *High Mobility Artillery Rocket System*, laskekaugus kuni 300 km) tulega hävitati kottpimedas öös esimese kahe-kolme tunni jooksul Wagneri teine ja kolmas pataljoni ründegrupp, suurtükipataljon, üksuse juhtimispunkt ja tagala. Vähesed ellujäänud Wagneri palgasõdurid on hiljem üksmeelselt kurtnud, et neil puudusid täiesti öövaatlusseadmed ja et soomustehnikast pöördusid järgmise päeva hommikul pärast öist lahingut omal käigul Eufrati vasak-kaldale tagasi vaid üks tank ja üks luuresoomuk BRDM-2. Lahingu teine kolmetunnine etapp, milles osalesid peamiselt USA lahingukopterid AC-64 Apache ning nn lendav tank – erinevate relvade, sealhulgas 105 mm haubitsa ning 40 mm Boforsi ja 25 mm Gatlingi tüüpi kiirlaskekahuritega varustatud lennuk AC-130 –, kujunes tõeliseks jahiks: otsiti ja likvideeriti ellujäänud ja laiali jooksivad Vene sõdureid.²⁷ Pärast lahingut ikka veel šokis olnud ja öistest tapatalgutest internetis oma muljeid jaganud Vene palgasõdureid hämmastas kõige enam USA lennuväe rakettide, pommide ning suurtükkide tule ülim täpsus. Varahommikul, öise lahingu lõpus, helistas ameeriklastele üks ohvitser Vene vägede peakorterist Hmeymimis, et paluda luba oma hukkunud ja haavatud sõdurid ära viia.²⁸ Selline luba nende evakuatsiooniks ka anti. Kuid selle kõnega tunnistas Vene väejuhatuse Süürias nüüd avalikult, et ameeriklaste hävitatud SE Wagner oli nende üksus, mitte Süüria valitsusvägede või mingite teiste Assadi liitlaste oma.

Rahvusvahelisse ajakirjandusse lekkinud info järgi oli USA kuuetunnisesse öisesse lahingusse kaasanud järgmised raskerelvad:

- üks raskepommitaja B-52 (pommide ja rakettide kandevõime kuni 32 tonni),
- neli hävitajat F-22 Raptor,
- kaks hävitajat F-15,
- neli lahingukopterit AH-64 Apache,
- mitu mehitamata lennukit MQ-9 Reaper,
- nn lendav tank ehk ründelennuk AC-130,
- reaktiivsuurtükiväe süsteemid HIMARS.²⁹

²⁷ **ЧВК Вагнера.** ДЕР-СЗ-ЗОР. Кровавый след карлика Плутина в Сирии. Можем повторить. 06.04.2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_8p-v5frPs (05.06.2019)..

²⁸ **Удар США по боевикам ЧВК Вагнера, воевавшим на Донбассе.** <https://youtube.com/watch?v=6FJh6vvV6Y> (18.12.2019).

²⁹ **Фельгенгауер, П.** 2018. Разгром. Что на самом деле произошло в Сирийской провинции Дейр-эз-Зор и какие выводы могут сделать военные РФ и США. – *Novaya Gazeta*, 20.02.2018. <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2018/02/20/75571-razgrom> (18.12.2019) [**Фельгенгауер 2018**]; vrd ka eesti keeles: **Sõjandusanalüütik Pavel Felgengauer räägib**

Lugejal võib tekkida küsimus, mis ülesannet täitsid öise lahingu ajal õhus viibinud USA raskepommitaja B-52 ja neli hävitajat F-22. Võitluses nad ilmselt ei osalenud, vähemalt maailma meedias ei ole sellest mingit infot ega märki. Ameeriklased vaikivad nende lennukite missioonist, kuid paljud sõjanduse asjatundjad on arvamusel, et selle operatsiooni ette valmistanud USA ohvitserid arvestasid ka musta stsenaariumiga, mille järgi võisid venelased oma hädas olevale Wagneri üksusele appi minna ning saata Hmeymimi lennubaasist õhku oma sõjalennukid. Venelastega lahingut pidavatel Ameerika lahingulennukitel ja -kopteritel, eriuksuslastel ning kurdidel oleksid sel juhul võinud tekkida suured probleemid. On üsna tõenäoline, et USA raskepommitaja ja neli F-22 Raptorit julgestasid õhust Dayr az-Zawri piirkonnas toimuvat, isoleerides õhuruumi lahinguvälja kohal. Juhul kui Vene lennukid ikkagi oleksid sekkunud öisesse lahingusse, oleksid radaritele nähtamatud USA hävitajad F-22 neutraliseerinud lennubaasist õhku tõusnud lennuvahendid, mis olid Wagnerile appi saadetud. Raskepommitaja B-52 oli aga ilmselt valmis operatiivolukorra halvenemisel kukutama oma 32 tonni rakette ja pomme kas Khashami lähistel peale tungivale Wagneri üksusele või eriti kriitilise olukorra puhul Hmeymimi lennuväljale, et teha see kasutamiskõlbmatuks.

Enneolematult suured kaotused Süürias olid Kremlile, Vene kaitseministeeriumile ning ka lihtsatele venelastele tõeline šokk. Osapoolte reaktsiooni kohta on erinevaid andmeid. Ameeriklased jätkavad paljutähendavalt vaikimist, piirdudes vaid lühikeste ümmarguste vastustega küsijatele. Moskva püüab aga kõigest väest katastroofi maha salata. Enamik seda öist lahingut uurinud lääneriikide ja Vene ajakirjanikke ja eksperte, kes on Wagneri üksuse ellujäänud palgasõduritega vestelnud, on peaaegu ühel meelel, et lahinguväljal hukkus 317–336 Vene palgasõdurit, kellele lisandusid veel 30–34 meest purustatud soomusmasinates.³⁰ Ellujäänud palgasõdurid kinnitasid reporteritele ühel häälel, et Wagneri üksuses olid ainult venelased ning mitte ühtegi Süüria või mõne teise Assadile lojaalse grupeeringu sõdurit.³¹ Vene liberaaldemokraatliku partei kauaaegne juht Vladimir Žirinovski teatas Vene pressile, et hukkunud on 360 sõjaväelast.

täpsemalt, mis juhtus Vene palgasõduritega Süürias. 2018. – Postimees, 24. märts. <https://arvamus.postimees.ee/4446221/sojandusanaluutik-pavel-felgengauer-raagib-tapsemalt-mis-juhtus-vene-palgasoduritega-suurias> (22.11.2019).

³⁰ Потери ЧВ Вагнера в Сирии. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jddhBT8TJM> (05.06.2019).

³¹ Расстрел ЧВК Вагнер в Сирии. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=031sfTKMtNc> (05.06.2019).

Haavata sai umbes 350 meest, kes transporditi sõjaväelennukitel Venemaa erinevatesse haiglatesse. Uudisteportaali Bloomberg andmetel oli hukkunuid ja haavatuid kokku vähemalt 650 (tuleb meeles pidada, et üksuses oli enne lahingut umbes 1000 meest). Seda arvu on kinnitanud ka endine Vene FSB alampolkovnik Igor Girkin, kes osales 2014. aasta suvel Luganski oblasti vallutamises Ukrainas ja on nüüd Putiniga teravasse vastuollu sattunud.

Kohe pärast öiste sündmuste lõppu teatas Pentagon diplomaatiliselt, et süürlased ja neid toetavad üksused on rünnanud USA liitlaste – kurdide Süüria Demokraatlike Jõudude – ala ning saanud raskelt lüüa. 8. veebruaril 2018 kuulutas Vene kaitseministeerium ameeriklaste karmi vastureaktsiooni ootamatuks, mainimata venelaste osalust lahingus. Suurtest kaotustest šokeeritud Putini propagandamasin oli Vene palgasõdurite osaluse eitamisega öises lahingus end nurka mänginud. Tal ei olnud isegi võimalust avalikult kurde või ameeriklasi milleski süüdistada. Moskva on esitanud asja nii, et mingid Süüria omakaitsevälased tegutsesid 7. veebruari 2018 õhtul ja öösel Khashami piirkonnas omal algatusel, kooskõlastamata seda Vene väejuhatusega. Juba see, et muidu suhtekorralduslike avalduste ja suure propagandalärmiga tuntud Venemaa ametkonnad nii kaua ja nii kidakeelselt vaikisid ega alustanud julmi propagandalööke kohutavate jänkide vastu, süvendab veendumust, et tegemist polnud mitte Wagneri meeste isetegevusliku afääriga, vaid kaitseminister Šoigu ettepanekul tehtud president Putini kui Vene relvajõudude ülemjuhataja vastava käsuga Süürias asuvale Vene väejuhatusele.³² Käivitati operatsioon, mis lõppes katastroofiga ja mille järel hakati Vene sõjalistes ametkondades lahendama igavesi venelikke küsimusi: mida teha ja kes on süüdi? Kõige tähtsam oli aga Moskva Valge maja personalile see, mida ikkagi Putinile ette kanda ja kelle õlule panna süü ränga lüüasaamise tagajärgede eest.

Mõlemad selle öise lahingu osapooled, USA ja Venemaa, on juhtunu selgitustes jätkuvalt ülimalt napolisõnalised. Washington hoiab madalat profiili, ja kui vähegi võimalik, siis vaikib, tehes viisaka näo. Vene poolel on hävingut enam-vähem tõepäraselt internetis kommenteerinud peamiselt lahingus ellu jäänud osalised ning sõjaliste eraettevõtetega seotud inimesed. Kuid näitemäng käib edasi. Ameeriklased, teades väga hästi, kelle nad hävitasid, teatasid kogu maailmale, et nad ründasid vaherahu rikkunud Süüria üksust ja nende liitlasi, mainimata, kes need viimased olid. Moskva püüab juhtunust

³² Как в Кремле «размывают» сирийский разгром «Вagnera». – Re:public, 24.02.2018. <https://republic.com.ua/article/kak-v-kremle-razmyivayut-siriyskiy-razgrom-vagnera.html> (18.12.2019).

mitte rääkida, kinnitades vaid, et Wagner on eraettevõtte ja Vene võimud ei vastuta temaga juhtunu eest. Kreml ei saanud avalikult öelda, et ameeriklasi ja kurde ründas Vene üksus, seepärast hakkaski Vene propagandamasin levitama igasuguseid legende ja kuulujutte. Välja on käidud versioon, et selle lahingu eriti suured kaotused venelaste seas on lääne propaganda väljamõeldis. Moskva propagandaveski väidab, et 7. veebruaril tegutsesid operatsiooni piirkonnas Wagneri selja taga Venemaa relvajõudude eriüksuslased, kes olevat lahkunud õigel ajal ega sattunud ameeriklaste hukatusliku tule alla. Moskva levitab ka teateid, et lahingu piirkonnas olevat viibinud mingi Iraani-meelsete jõudude üksus. Avalikkusele püütakse sisendada väidet, et võib-olla ei olnud operatsiooni eesmärk sugugi rafineerimistehas ega SDJ kurdidest võitlejad, vaid hoopis tehases viibinud lääne nõunikud-eriüksuslased. Detsembris 2018 pesi Venemaa president Vladimir Putin nagu alati oma käed Wagneri katastroofist puhtaks, distantseerides üksuse Venemaast ja tehes selle personali lindpriiks. Venemaa liider tõestas veelkord, et ta peab oma sõdureid odavaks kulumaterjaliks ja et nende elu ei maksa mitte midagi.

Venelaste sõjategevus käib Süürias ja Aafrikas edasi. Jaanuaris 2019 kinnitas Vene välisministeerium Vene palgasõdurite viibimist Sudaanis. Peale selle on andmeid, et sõjalise eraettevõtte palgasõdureid on nähtud ka Kesk-Aafrika Vabariigis just sel ajal, kui sinna sõitnud neli Vene ajakirjanikku mõrvati kummaliselt.³³

Huvitav on tuntud Vene sõjalise eksperdi Pavel Felgenhaueri arvamus ja kirjeldus 7. veebruari 2018 öise lahingu käigust ja tagajärgedest.³⁴ Ta arvab, et kui Wagneril oleks õnnestunud USA eriüksuslased vangi võtta või likvideerida, tehes seda Süüria omakaitseväelaste sildi all ning mõistagi Moskva suure propagandakära ja „terroristide“ laipade demonstreerimisega, oleks selline venelaste edu andnud USA sõjaväe mainele Lähis-Ida regioonis korraliku hoobi, mis oleks võinud isegi viia Ameerika sõjajõudude väljatõmbamiseni Süüriast.³⁵ Felgenhaueri sõnul oleks see enesest mõistetavalt vastanud Moskva strateegilistele taotlustele. Kuid tema arvates ilmutasid Süürias asuvad Wagneri operatsiooni venelastest planeerijad üüratut ebakompetentsust, kui nad unustasid, et USA sõjaväelased eelistavad juba

³³ «Частная армия для президента». The Bell рассказывает историю «ЧВК Вагнера». – Радио Свобода, 29.01.2019. <https://www.svoboda.org/a/29740194.html> (18.12.2019).

³⁴ Фелгэнгауер 2018.

³⁵ USA president andis 2019. aasta oktoobris käsu Ameerika kontingendi Süüriast lahkuamiseks. **Trump orders US troops out of northern Syria as Turkish assault continues.** 2019. – The Guardian, October 13. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/13/trump-us-troops-northern-syria-turkish-assault-kurds> (18.12.2019).

aastaid pidada nii pealetungi- kui ka kaitselahinguid pimedas, sest selleks on neil maailma parim varustus. Vene palgasõdurite kogemus Ida-Ukrainas ja Süüria kodusõjas, kus lahingutegevus toimus peamiselt päeval, mängis Wagneri meestele kurjalt kätte, jättes nad öises lahingus pimedate ja abitudena USA lennuväe pommide ja rakettide alla. Felgenhauer märgib, et lisaks sellele puudus venelastel täielikult arusaam, millised võivad olla sellise õhust tuleva öise täppisrännaku reaalsed tagajärjed.³⁶

Ta imetleb ameeriklaste oskust lahingut planeerida ja juhtida: „Ameerika ja lääneriikide raudne põhimõte on see, et lahinguväljal teab komandör olukorda kõige paremini ja just tema jagab üksustele ülesandeid. Komandör pani näiteks täpselt paika oma eesliini, seades enda ja SDJ võitlejad lahinguformatsiooni ning andes neile korralduse astuda tulevahetusse peale tungiva vastasega. Lahingukorras ei tekkinud üldse segadust ja kõik said täpselt aru, kus ja mida nad peavad tegema. Õhutulejuhtide abil, kes kuulusid tehases viibiva salga koosseisu, andis komandör lahingukorraldused eri tüüpi lennukitest koosnevale löögigrupile ja raskesuurtükiväele, mis samuti avas täppistule. Tulistamine kestis kolm tundi. Et pealetungi oli oodatud ja ameeriklased olid võimelised selle alguse ligikaudse aja juba varem kindlaks määrama, olid lennuväe ründegrupid valmis tegutsema. Kui siis pealetung algas, olid hävitus-pommituslennukid F-15E Strike Eagle, droonid MQ-9 Reaper, tuletoetuslennukid AC-130 ja kopterid AH-64 Apache ning USA keskväejuhatusele taktikaliste ülesannete täitmiseks antud pommituslennukid B-52 ilmselt juba õhus. Grupeeringu põhijõuks olid erioperatsioonide toetuseks mõeldud lennukid AC-130U Spooky, mis on varustatud sihtmärkide jälgimise radari- ja optiliste süsteemidega, mitmekihilise automaatkaitsesüsteemiga vastase kõikvõimalike õhutõrjerakettide vastu, 105 mm haubitsa ning 40 mm ja 25 mm automaatkahuritega ning öiste vaatlusseadmetega. [...] Neid lennukeid on pidevalt moderniseeritud ja hiljem ei ole see enam kellelgi paremini õnnestunud. Haubits M102 võimaldab anda täppistuld kilomeetrite kauguselt, sattumata vastase õhutõrjevahendite tabamiskaugusse. Kuna see lennuk on valmistatud transpordilennuki C-130 baasil, saab sinna paigutada palju lahinguvarustust, et anda katkematut tuld pikka aega. Samuti on lennukis võimas statsionaarne elektroonilise sõjapidamise jaam.“³⁷ Kindralpolkovnik Leonid Ivašovi andmeil halvati lahingu ajal kõik Wagneri juhtimis- ja sidevahendid.

³⁶ Фельгенгауер 2018.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Venelaste sõjalise eraettevõtte Wagner tragöödiast on möödunud ligi kaks aastat, kuid see elab internetis edasi. Kaotatud lahingu ümber jätkub aktiivne arutelu. Vene palgasõdurite ränk lüüasaamine ja suured kaotused elavjõus vapustasid tugevasti mitte ainult sõjaväelasi, vaid ka Venemaa juhtkonda, riigi koorekihti ning kõige enam lihtrahvast, kes kandis oma juhtide kurtelike otsuste tõttu kõige suuremaid ohvreid.

5. Lõpetuseks

Millised on sõjaliste eraettevõtete eelised ja puudused? USA ja maailma paljude teiste sõjategevusega seotud riikide juhtide arvates on SE-de teenuste kasutamise eelised silmanähtavad. SE-d võtavad iseseisvalt vastu otsuseid, kas osaleda sõjategevuses või mitte, vältides nii poliitiku, riigi bürokraatiat kui ka relvajõududes kehtivate õigusaktide kadalippu. On loomulik, et arusaamatuste ärahoidmiseks kooskõlastavad SE-d neile pakutud tegevuse ülesanded, mahu ja korra oma valitsusega. Riigi võimuorganid ei kannu seejuures formaaljuriidiliselt vastutust SE-de korraldatud välismaiste vahejuhtumite eest. Positiivseks loetakse ka seda, et SE-d on võimelised kiiresti valmistuma eelseisvaks missiooniks, komplekteerima isikkoosseisu relvastuse, tehnika ja varustusega, liikuma missiooni piirkonda ja asuma tööle, kutsutama esile rahulolematust omas riigis.³⁸ Nõrga poliitilise süsteemiga riikides võivad ametlikku võimu toetavad SE-d näiteks pakkuda vastukaalu kohalikule relvastatud opositsioonile, sealhulgas separatistlikele formeringutele. Ettevõtte hukkunud või vigastatud töötajaid ei arvestata riigi ametlikus statistikas. SE-de tegevusega seotud positiivseks teguriks peetakse nende võimekust kiiresti reageerida operatiivolukorrale vajalike spetsialiseeritud allüksustega, mis on moodustatud konkreetsete ülesannete täitmiseks.

Sõjaliste eraettevõtete loomisel pööratakse alati suurt tähelepanu värvatavate palgasõdurite heale erialasele väljaõppele, missiooni ülesannetele vastava relvastuse ja tehnika korrashoiule ning hoolduse organiseerimisele. Ameeriklased on märkinud SE-de kasutamisel ära ka pingelanguse ühiskonnas, tavaliselt on relvajõudude sõjategevuses rakendamise pinged ühiskonnas alati süvenenud. Samuti on välja selgitatud, et SE-d on oma kulutuste poolelt palju efektiivsemad kui relvajõudude üksused. Nad kasutavad ja hooldavad varustust ja tehnikat oluliselt hoolikamalt ja kokkuhoidlikumalt. SE-d võivad ka värvata töötajaid ja palgasõdureid, kelle palk on märksa väiksem kui sama eriala sõjaväelastel. Kaitseministeeriumil ei ole kohustust maksta

³⁸ Вильданов, Турыгин 2018.

pensioni sõjaliste eraettevõtete erru läinud personalile, korraldada nende tervisekindlustust, tagada neile elamispind jne. Praktika on näidanud, et SE-d võivad kiiresti kasvatada oma lahinguvõimet, kui olukord seda nõuab, ja hoida seda kaua aega kõrgel tasemel ilma täiendavate rahaliste kulutusteta.

Lisaks peetakse sõjaliste eraettevõtete positiivseks küljeks seda, et relvajõududega võrreldes vajavad nad palju lühemat aega isikkoosseisu, tehnika ja varustuse ettevalmistamiseks ning ümberpaigutamiseks teistesse riikidesse, tagades personali paindliku paiknemise kriisipiirkondades. Neile on iseloomulik töötajate täiendava eriväljaõppe vajaduse puudumine, kuna nad palkavad juba niigi välja õpetatud spetsialiste, kellel on olemas vajalikud kogemused, mis on saadud eelnevas sõjaväeteenistuses või maailma tulipunktides. Näiteks Pentagonil võimaldab sõjaliste eraettevõtete üha laienev kasutamine suuresti vähendada oma relvajõudude personali sõjategevuse piirkonnas ning seeläbi ka lahingukoormust, rotatsiooni ja riigi kulutusi isikkoosseisule.

Sõjaliste eraettevõtete negatiivseteks külgedeks peavad lääneriikide sõjalised asjatundjad järgmisi tegureid: meestel puudub peaaegu täiesti ideeline motivatsioon; otsuste vastuvõtmisel ja tegevuses ollakse liiga iseseisvad, mis väljendub mõnikord ebaproportsionaalse jõu kasutamises kohaliku elanikkonna vastu; asukohariigis kehtestatud nõudeid ja reegleid ignoreeritakse. Märgitakse ka seda, et SE-de juhtkond ei allu oma riigi relvajõudude ülemjuhatausele, mis võib tekitada sõjategevuse piirkonnas arusaamatusi praktilises koostöös regulaarüksustega. Nad täidavad ülesandeid paljuski kasu saamise motiivil, mitte oma kohuse täitmiseks.³⁹ Lepinguliste sissetulekute ja sellega kaasneda võiv palkade vähendamine võib sellistes ettevõtetes põhjustada personali voolavust, mis omakorda vähendab oluliselt SE-de lahinguvõimet, suurendab nende töömahtu uue personali värbamisel ning nõuab kulutusi ja aega täiendõppeks.

Läänderiikide sõjandusekspertide arvates võib täheldada protsessi, mille käigus saavad sõjalistest eraettevõtetest relvajõududele õiguslikult üha võrdväärsemad partnerid. SE-de lülitamine sõjategevusse muudab oluliselt ka operatsioonide ettevalmistamist, läbiviimist ning lahingutegevust ennast. See, et USA ja liitlased kaasasid Iraagis, Afganistanis ja Süürias SE-sid, näitas, et nende personal täidab väga tihti lahinguülesandeid, mis on iseloomulikud erivägede võitlejatele ja regulaararmee üksustele. Koostöö SE-de ja sõjaväe vahel suurendab paljude riikide relvajõudude lahinguvõimet

³⁹ Храмчихин, А. 2018. ЧВК: Наемники или проводники воли Кремля? – Независимая газета, 20.04.2018. http://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2018-04-20/1_993_chvk.html (18.12.2019).

märgatavalt, kusjuures sellega on viimasel ajal hakatud arvestama ka sõjalises planeerimises. On ilmne, et sõjaliste eraettevõtete roll ja tähtsus sõdades ja sõjalistes konfliktides kasvavad ning et nad muutuvad üha enam riikide välispoliitika tööriistaks.

Kirjandus ja allikad

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