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Russian Intervention in the Syrian Civil War

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Abstract

Putin has dramatically stepped up Moscow's support for the Assad regime through the insertion of Russian military forces into the Syrian civil war as well as undertaking a flurry of diplomatic activity aimed at resolving it. Yet while the West, Turkey, and Gulf Arab states calling for Assad to step down have been caught off guard by these moves, it is doubtful that Putin can end the conflict in Syria either militarily or diplomatically—or avoid the costs and consequences of Russian involvement in a quagmire there if he can do neither.

After having surprised the world in 2014 with his annexation of Crimea and support for secessionists in eastern Ukraine, Putin has surprised the world once again in 2015 with his military intervention in the ongoing Syrian civil war as well as his stepped up diplomatic efforts (including a—yet again—surprise meeting with Syrian President Bashar Assad) to resolve it.

Moscow had been backing the Assad regime against its opponents ever since opposition arose there in 2011. Up until recently, though, Moscow tended to downplay its involvement in Syria, claiming that Russian weapons shipments were being made “under existing contracts” (which were apparently open-ended) predating the rebellion.

But with the Assad regime losing ground to its opponents, Moscow significantly ramped up its support for Assad since late September 2015. On October 2, 2015, *The New York Times* cited the Russian Defense Ministry as stating that 50 Russian aircraft and 2,000 Marines had been deployed to Syria. Russian aircraft began bombing missions against opponents of the Assad regime at the end of September 2015. One type of Russian aircraft deployed to Syria, the Su-30—is capable of engaging other aircraft in addition to ground targets. As neither ISIS nor any other Syrian opposition groups possess aircraft, many observers see the purpose of deploying these Su-30s as being to deter American and Coalition aircraft from creating a no-fly zone or flying anywhere near where Russian aircraft are operating.¹

While the Russian military presence may grow further, Putin has indicated that he does not intend for Russian ground forces to become engaged in the Syrian conflict “for now.” On October 5, though, the chairman of the Duma's armed forces committee, Admiral Vladimir Komoyedov, suggested that “volunteer” ground forces consisting of veterans who had fought in eastern Ukraine “cannot be stopped” from going to Syria.² Other Russian

officials quickly denied that Moscow was calling for volunteers to fight in Syria. Komoyedov (a member of the Communist Party) backtracked on his statement and even suggested that the Kremlin was blocking Russian volunteers from going to Syria.³ Whether any “volunteers” will actually arrive in Syria is not yet clear.

Moscow has also launched a diplomatic and public relations campaign (including a speech by Putin himself to the UN General Assembly) warning of the common threat from ISIS, declaring Assad's security services to be the strongest force confronting it, criticizing Western and Middle Eastern governments calling for Assad to step down as having no realistic alternative to him, and inviting others to join (or at least not oppose) Putin's and Assad's efforts to combat ISIS.⁴ Putin's claim that Russian forces in Syria are combating ISIS, though, have been undercut by numerous Western government and Syrian opposition claims that Russian forces have actually been bombing other opposition groups (including American-backed ones).⁵ Moscow, though, insists that it is targeting “terrorists.”

In addition, four countries—Russia, Iran, Syria, and the U.S.-backed government in Iraq—announced that they would share intelligence regarding the Islamic State.⁶

Times, October 5, 2015, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/06/world/europe/nato-russia-warplane-turkey.html>>.

1 Andrew E. Kramer, “As Russia Returns to Middle East, A Look at Some of Its Weapons,” *New York Times*, October 2, 2015, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/03/world/middleeast/as-russia-returns-to-middle-east-a-look-at-some-of-its-weapons.html>>.

2 Andrew E. Kramer, Helene Cooper, and Ceylan Yeginsu, “Kremlin Says Russian ‘Volunteer’ Forces Will Fight in Syria,” *New York*

3 “Russia Says No Ground Troops in Syria, Not Recruiting Volunteers,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, October 6, 2015, <<http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-syria-says-no-ground-troops/27291299.html>>.

4 “Read: The Full Transcript of Russian President Vladimir Putin's Speech at the United Nations General Assembly,” *Newsweek*, September 28, 2015, <<http://www.newsweek.com/transcript-putin-speech-united-nations-377586>>.

5 See, for example, “‘More Than 90%’ of Russian Airstrikes in Syria Have Not Targeted Isis, US Says,” *The Guardian*, October 7, 2015, <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/07/russia-airstrikes-syria-not-targeting-isis>>.

6 Jethro Mullen and Yousuf Basil, “Iraq Agrees to Share Intelligence with Russia, Iran and Syria,” CNN, September 28, 2015, <<http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/27/middleeast/iraq-russia-iran-syria-intelligence-deal/>>.

On October 7, Russian naval vessels stationed in the southern Caspian Sea launched cruise missiles that overflew Iranian and Iraqi territory to strike targets in Syria. One Western military analyst noted that this was an unusual move since these targets could have been struck by Russian aircraft stationed in Syria which were much closer to them.⁷ This action, though, has not been completely smooth. It was widely reported that four of the Russian cruise missiles fired from the Caspian fell on Iranian territory.⁸ Further, the Iraqi government declared that it was not informed by Moscow about Russian missiles overflying Iraqi territory⁹ (apparently their intelligence cooperation does not extend to sharing information about Russian military actions).

Overall, though, Russian actions have had positive results from Moscow's viewpoint. With Moscow's help, Assad's forces are no longer on the defensive vis-à-vis their opponents, and have been able to go on the offensive against them.¹⁰ And while probably related more to the poor design of the endeavor rather than Russia's actions, the Obama Administration has ended its effort to train Syrian opposition forces.¹¹ Further, Washington and Moscow finally signed a "deconfliction agreement" on October 19 aimed at avoiding close encounters between their aircraft over Syria.¹²

Although it is too early to tell just what practical effect Russian military activity in Syria will have, at the very least it should increase the Assad regime's prospects for survival as well as regaining some of the territory Damascus had lost. On the diplomatic front, Putin's

moves have also had an impact favorable to Moscow. Some Western government leaders, including Angela Merkel, have joined Putin in declaring that Assad has an important role to play in the battle against ISIS, and thus should not have to step down.¹³ Even US Secretary of State Kerry has indicated that while Assad should go, he does not need to do so right away.¹⁴ Furthermore, Russian intervention in Syria appears to have played a part in inducing the U.S. government to drop its objections to Iran participating in the ongoing negotiations in Vienna aimed at resolving the Syrian conflict.¹⁵

In addition to preserving the Assad regime, Putin's moves in Syria may be aimed at ending Russia's isolation from the West resulting from their disagreements over Ukraine. Moscow now calls for joining with Western as well as other governments in a "united front" against ISIS. Helping Putin persuade at least some European governments to regard Putin's actions favorably is their growing discomfort with the influx of Syrian refugees. While Western governments and publics may see Assad as unacceptable in the abstract, if working with him could help stem the flow of refugees, then many could well see Assad as the lesser of two evils compared to ISIS.

Yet despite all the initial successes that Putin's new policy toward Syria have had (and may still have), there are many challenges that Moscow faces there going forward.

While the media have hyped how massive the Russian military presence in Syria has grown to, it is really fairly small—indeed, it is smaller than the current American military presence in Iraq aimed at combating ISIS. In that the small American presence in Iraq has not yet proved successful in defeating ISIS there, it is difficult to see how an even smaller Russian presence in Syria can successfully do so in Syria even if it were actually focusing its attacks on that group.

Indeed, there have been persistent reports that, long before the recent Russian intervention, the Assad regime was not actually fighting ISIS (or at least, not very much), but has been focusing its efforts on combating its other opponents which have been receiving aid from Turkey,

7 Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "These Are the Cruise Missiles Russia Just Sent Into Syria," *Stars and Stripes*, October 7, 2015, <<http://www.stripes.com/news/europe/these-are-the-cruise-missiles-russia-just-sent-into-syria-1.372098>>.

8 Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "Pentagon: Some Russian Cruise Missiles Crashed in Iran," *Washington Post*, October 8, 2015, <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/10/07/these-are-the-cruise-missiles-russia-just-sent-into-syria/>>.

9 Loveday Morris, "Iraq Says It Was Not Warned about Russian Missiles Crossing Its Airspace," *Washington Post*, October 9, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/iraq-says-it-was-not-warned-about-russian-missiles-crossing-its-airspace/2015/10/09/bec6bb5c-6e8f-11e5-91eb-27ad15c2b723_story.html>.

10 Anne Barnard and Andrew E. Kramer, "Russian Cruise Missiles Help Syrians Go on the Offensive," *New York Times*, October 7, 2015, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/08/world/middleeast/russia-syria-conflict.html>>.

11 Michael D. Shear, Helene Cooper, and Eric Schmitt, "Obama Administration Ends Effort to Train Syrians to Combat ISIS," *New York Times*, October 9, 2015, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/10/world/middleeast/pentagon-program-islamic-state-syria.html>>.

12 Carla Babb, "US-Russia Memo on Air Safety Over Syria Takes Effect," *Voice of America*, October 20, 2015, <<http://www.voanews.com/content/us-russia-sign-memo-on-air-safety-in-syria/3015576.html>>.

13 "Merkel Says Assad Must Have Role in Syria Talks," *Deutsche Welle*, September 24, 2015, <<http://www.dw.com/en/merkel-says-assad-must-have-role-in-syria-talks/a-18736427>>.

14 Carol Morello, "Kerry Says Syria's Assad Has to Go, but U.S. Is Flexible as to When," *Washington Post*, September 19, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/kerry-says-syrias-assad-has-to-go-but-us-is-flexible-as-to-when/2015/09/19/de7b897c-5cc0-11e5-8475-781cc9851652_story.html>.

15 Thomas Erdbrink, Sewell Chan, and David E. Sanger, "After a U.S. Shift, Iran Has a Seat at Talks on War in Syria," *New York Times*, October 28, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/29/world/middleeast/syria-talks-vienna-iran.html?_r=0>.

Saudi Arabia, and Qatar in particular.¹⁶ While these three had previously been working at cross purposes by supporting opposition groups opposed to one another, more recently they have coordinated their actions and brought about greater cooperation among opposition groups—which is partly why the latter were able to gain ground against the Assad regime in recent months.¹⁷ Reports that Russian aircraft are targeting non-ISIS opposition forces more than ISIS, then, may indicate that Moscow and Damascus have made similar assessments about which opposition groups pose the most serious threat to the Assad regime. But if Moscow and Damascus focus on the non-ISIS opposition to Assad, then the Russian presence in Syria will not weaken ISIS, but may actually strengthen it vis-à-vis other opposition movements. Indeed, there have very recently been reports that Russian attacks on other opposition movements have actually enabled ISIS to gain ground in Syria.¹⁸

Further, to the extent that Russian aid is used to target Assad's other opponents, their external supporters will not be pleased, and may well increase aid to them. Saudi and other Arab officials have also expressed fears that the Russian actions in Syria will result in more money and volunteers going to ISIS and Al Qaeda. Opposition groups Russian forces target may well respond by attacking Russian personnel in Syria. Indeed, the 4,000 or more jihadists from the former Soviet Union that Putin has claimed are fighting in Syria¹⁹ might be inclined to focus their attacks on Russian personnel in particular.

It should also be noted that while the flow of Syrian refugees migrating to Europe may be inducing European governments to look more favorably on Putin's call for a negotiated settlement to the Syrian conflict which includes Assad, his internal Syrian opponents are unlikely to be moved by Europe's plight. Additionally, while Putin may claim to be pursuing the broader goal

of combating ISIS in Syria, the non-ISIS opposition is likely to see his real aim as to weaken and defeat them. This will not reduce the skepticism that they have long had about Putin's proposals that they negotiate with Assad. And despite their rivalry with ISIS, other Syrian opposition movements continue to see Assad as their main enemy, and act accordingly. It should also be noted that mass migration from Syria does not just reduce the number of young men available to fight against the Assad regime, but also the number available to fight for it.

In addition, while Western governments might be more amenable to a negotiated settlement including Assad, Saudi Arabia in particular is not likely to become so. The Saudis are focused on what they see as an existential threat from Iran. They see the Assad regime, the Baghdad regime, and Hezbollah as Iranian allies as well. Highly skeptical that the Iranian nuclear accord will lead to a reduction in Iran's regional ambitions, they do not welcome increased Russian support for Iran's allies in Syria.²⁰

In a surprise move, though, the Saudi defense and foreign ministers met with Putin and Russian Foreign Minister in Moscow on October 11 where it was announced that Russia and Saudi Arabia would "cooperate" in Syria. But a high level Saudi source said afterward that, "The Russian intervention in Syria will engage them in a sectarian war," and that, "Assad should leave and the Saudis will continue strengthening and supporting the moderate opposition in Syria."²¹

In yet another surprise move, Syrian President Assad met with Putin in Moscow on October 20. In what was his first known trip outside of Syria since the outbreak of the war there in 2011, Assad thanked Putin for Russian support, and Putin talked about the need for a political settlement.²² This immediately gave rise to speculation that Moscow might be ready to, eventually, nudge Assad out of office in order to achieve a negotiated solution to the conflict with part of the Syrian opposition. But while Moscow has indicated a willingness to hold early elections in Syria and even provide air support for the Western-backed Free Syrian Army (an offer this group

16 Mark N. Katz, "Who Is Putin Really Protecting Assad From?" LobeLog, September 24, 2015, <<http://lobelog.com/who-is-putin-really-protecting-assad-from/>>.

17 David Ignatius, "Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey Are Getting Serious about Syria—and That Should Worry Assad," *Business Insider*, May 13, 2015, <<http://www.businessinsider.com/saudi-arabia-qatar-and-turkey-are-getting-serious-about-syria--and-that-should-worry-assad-2015-5>>.

18 Anne Barnard and Thomas Erdbrink, "ISIS Makes Gains in Syria Territory Bombed by Russia," *New York Times*, October 9, 2015, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/10/world/middleast/hussein-hamedani-iran-general-killed-in-syria.html>>.

19 Andrew Roth and Erin Cunningham, "In Rare Foreign Trip, Assad Flies to Moscow to Meet with Putin," *Washington Post*, October 21, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/embattled-syrian-president-flies-to-moscow-to-meet-with-putin/2015/10/21/75a7b346-77c6-11e5-a958-d889faf561dc_story.html>.

20 For more on Saudi-Russian relations, see Mark N. Katz, "Saudi-Russian Cooperation: To Be or Not To Be," *The Arab Weekly*, August 28, 2015, <<http://www.thearabweekly.com/?id=1757>>.

21 William Maclean, "Saudis Tell Russia: Syria Action Will Have 'Dangerous Consequences': Source," Reuters, October 12, 2015, <<http://news.yahoo.com/saudis-tell-russia-syria-action-dangerous-consequences-source-122111784.html>>.

22 Andrew Roth and Erin Cunningham, "In Rare Foreign Trip, Assad Flies to Moscow to Meet with Putin," *Washington Post*, October 21, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/embattled-syrian-president-flies-to-moscow-to-meet-with-putin/2015/10/21/75a7b346-77c6-11e5-a958-d889faf561dc_story.html>.

is highly suspicious of), Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov has also made clear that Moscow is not willing to push Assad out of power.²³

With Moscow and Riyadh continuing to hold very different views on the future of Assad, then, reports of increased Saudi-Russian cooperation on Syria do not appear to be promising.

What all this suggests is that while Russia's increased military involvement in the Syrian conflict could delay or even prevent the Assad regime from falling, Moscow's efforts may not be sufficient to enable the Assad regime to prevail over its opponents or reach an agreement with them. Putin's intervention in Syria, then, threatens to become an expensive, long-term commitment that can at best result in stalemate so long as Russian forces remain there, and the downfall of the Assad regime if they are withdrawn (or perhaps even if they are not).

Furthermore, in that the Assad regime is dominated by Syria's Alawite minority and is opposed by Syria's Sunni Arab majority in particular, Putin's support for Assad runs the risk of increasing resentment and hostility toward Russia not just on the part of Sunnis in Syria, but throughout the Sunni Arab and Muslim worlds. Russia's relations with Turkey have already deteriorated significantly as a result of Russian overflights of Turkish territory.²⁴ In addition, Moscow's close association with Shi'a Iran in supporting the Alawite minority regime in Syria risks Sunni governments and publics in the Arab world and Turkey seeing Russia as a friend of what they regard as their main regional adversary. Nor will Moscow's interests be advanced if its actions in Syria, like the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, result in an outpouring of Sunni Arab (and perhaps non-Arab) support for those fighting against the Moscow-backed Assad regime. Even worse, there may be those in the Arab and Mus-

lim world who conclude that the best way to get Russia out of the Middle East is to support Muslim opposition inside of Russia. In early October 2015, dozens of Saudi clerics called on Arab and Muslim countries to support a jihad not just against the Assad regime, but also its Iranian and Russian backers.²⁵

The Western press has repeatedly observed that while the U.S. and its European allies may oppose the Russian air campaign in Syria, they appear powerless to stop it. But if, as some speculate, one of Putin's aims in increasing Russian involvement in Syria was to distract the West from their opposition to his policies in Ukraine and actually find a basis for joint cooperation in opposing ISIS, widespread reports that Russian forces are mainly attacking non-ISIS targets are likely to prevent the achievement of that goal. But even if Western governments were willing to cooperate with Moscow in achieving a negotiated settlement between the Assad regime and some of its opponents, it is not clear that Russia, America, and Europe together could persuade major opposition groups and their regional supporters (Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar) to "share power" in a regime still headed by Assad. Moscow might have a better chance of achieving this if it were able to persuade Assad to step aside, but so far, Putin has not been willing to do this. Indeed, he may not be able to if Iranian support for Assad remains strong.

Putin, then, has succeeded in dramatically inserting Russian military forces into the Syrian civil war as well as engaging in a flurry of high level meetings on how to resolve. It is doubtful, though, that he can end the conflict either militarily or diplomatically—or avoid the costs and consequences of involvement in a quagmire if he can do neither.

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23 Andrew Osborn and Maria Kiselyova, "Russia Says Wants Syria Elections, Ready to Help Free Syrian Army," Reuters, October 25, 2015, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/25/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-idUSKCN0SI08820151025>>.

24 Tim Arango, "Russia Military's Actions in Syria Cause Rift with Turkey," *New York Times*, October 6, 2015, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/07/world/middleeast/russia-turkey-tensions-rise-over-syria.html>>.

25 "Saudi Clerics Call for Jihad against Syrian Government, Russia, Iran," *Moscow Times*, October 5, 2015, <<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/saudi-clerics-call-for-jihad-against-syrian-government-russia-iran/537207.html>>.

Russia between Diplomacy and Military Intervention: The Syrian Conflict through Russian Eyes revisited

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Abstract

As the Syrian Civil War continues to rage relentlessly, the Russian position seems unchanged. While the Kremlin supports the regime in Damascus, Russian media continue to portray the conflict as a legitimate government's struggle against terrorism. This paper analyzes the coverage in Russian media outlets and discusses the Russian diplomatic efforts, which have unfolded particularly since mid-2014. It argues that, at least for the time being, the Russian military intervention complements rather than contradicts Russian diplomatic efforts. While criticized by the West over its role in Syria, Russia has at least contributed to bringing a variety of actors around one negotiating table in Vienna in late October 2015.

Since its start in March 2011, the Syrian civil war has claimed over 250,000 lives and left over one million injured. According to UN figures,¹ 7.6 million Syrians are internally displaced, and over four million have left the country, heading especially to neighboring countries but also to Europe. Syria itself, including historic cities and sites, is devastated. From the start, Russia sided with the regime, endorsing Damascus' narrative of a war against terrorism. Over the past years, the Russian interpretation of the conflict, as well as its pro-regime posture, has seemingly remained unchanged. However, in 2015 Russia has embarked on a remarkable spate of diplomatic activity, triggered or reinforced mainly by two factors: first, the spectacular rise of ISIS and the increasingly difficult situation of the regime on the ground; second, by the nuclear agreement reached between the international community and Iran. Also, the large-scale arrival of Syrian refugees in Europe, softened the latter's diplomatic position. Finally, in a dramatic move, Russia dispatched military aircraft to Syria and became an active warring party. This is post-Soviet Russia's first military intervention beyond its neighborhood. This paper will answer two questions: 1) to which extent did the perception of the conflict in Russia change? 2) What impact has Russian diplomacy had and how does it relate to the Kremlin's decision to intervene militarily?

Russia's View on Syria: the Media Front

Compared to our analysis in this publication in 2013,² the Russian media's attention to the Syrian war has progressively dwindled, only to experience a sudden surge after Russia sent its military into Syria. Between 2013 and 2015, no major reports by embedded journalists, like those by Anastasiya Popova or Yevgeny Poddubny

in 2012, have been aired on Russian mainstream channels. Coverage has widely remained focused on the military ups and downs or on missions of the Russian Emergency Ministry, which has regularly flown supplies to Syria and evacuated Russian citizens and families from Syria. A *Vesti.ru* special section on Syria perfectly reflects this trend.³ Other foreign policy topics have dominated the airwaves instead, especially the conflict in Ukraine. During the past two years, only special interest outlets have provided continuous coverage of the conflict, such as *ANNA-News*. More political assessments were provided by newspapers or by such publications such as *Azia i Afrika Segodnia*, a monthly published by the Russian Academy of Sciences since the late 1950s. The journal mirrors the general Russian skepticism regarding the Arab Spring. Nailya Fakhruddinova, for example, contends in No. 5/2013 that the revolutions in the Middle East have not yielded the expected results. She claims that "the Arabs time and again return to the Islamic ideology", because of a general lack of guiding ideas in the region. The failure of the Arab Spring, she argues, is the result of "the Arab folly and of Western state terrorism", since the Arabs under their previous leaders actually had few things to complain about, citing the Libyan healthcare system under Gaddafi as an example. Such undifferentiated assessments about the "nature of Arabs" are, however, rather the exception. In a seven page-long contribution to No. 6/2015, Maria Kholdynskaia-Golenishcheva, spokeswoman of the Russian permanent representation at the UN in Geneva, describes in detail the development of the international context to the Syrian crisis. Avoiding the incendiary language of Fakhruddinova, she blames especially Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the West for supporting opposition organizations, which have only a slim social basis in Syria itself, while

1 <<http://www.unhcr.org/559d67d46.html>>.

2 Philipp Casula, "Civil War, Revolution or Counter-Insurgency? The Syrian Conflict through Russian Eyes", in *Russian Analytical Digest* 128 (2013): 4–7, <http://www.css.ethz.ch/publications/DetailansichtPubDB_EN?rec_id=2561>.

3 Tema: Konflikt v Sirii, <<http://www.vesti.ru/theme.html?tid=95994>>.

disregarding the regime's internal opponents.⁴ Finally, even the late Yevgenii Primakov, Russia's most renowned Middle East expert, directly blames U.S. policies for the rise of the so-called Islamic State. In No. 7/2015, he highlights the danger that ISIS poses to Central Asia and to Russia itself. ISIS perfectly fits both the Syrian regime's, as well as the Kremlin's, narrative that the bulk of the opposition consists of terrorist groups. All of these reports share a deep-seated distrust of the West and of the revolutions of the Arab Spring.

The recent spike in Russian diplomatic and, now, military activity has triggered more and more reports in Russian mainstream media. Russian policy-makers badly need this surge in reporting, because Russians have mostly not displayed any interest in the Syrian civil war, and widely opposed a Russian military intervention.⁵ Hence, state media has started to report again in more detail on the war⁶, and public opinion is beginning to change.⁷ For instance, the infamous Dmitry Kiselev opened one edition of his *Vesti Nedeli* (September 20) with a report on "We do not give up on Syria" (*Sirii ne sdaiom*). Kiselev argued that the U.S. "stand on one frontline with the terrorist caliphate" and "together they try to destroy Syria as a secular state". The weekly program also marked the return of above-mentioned Yevgeny Poddubny to Syria, reporting from the surroundings of Palmyra and Harasta, and of Anastasiya Popova reporting on threats to the "Christian civilization" in Syria. Both Poddubny and Kiselev resume the grand narrative of the Syrian state's fight against "terrorists" and "radicals", highlighting the presence of Russian citizens in the ranks of ISIS and underscoring that giving up Russia's "staunch ally" Syria would be equivalent with "inviting the terrorists" over to Russia. Russian TV features the conflict with often overzealous reports,⁸ stress-

ing the professionalism of the Russian servicemen and the top-notch technology of Russian weapons. Critical assessments of the Russian involvement can be found in quality newspapers, such as *Vedomosti* or *Novaia Gazeta*. In the latter, the renowned Yulia Latynina complains that Syria "is not our land, not our war, not our territory, not our rules",⁹ while in the former, Grigorii Yudin highlights the legality but the non-legitimacy of the Syrian regime. Denis Volkov shows that whenever "terrorism" enters the political scene it freezes elite competition.¹⁰ Finally, *Gazeta.ru* also provides quality analysis, highlighting that there are at least five separate conflicts going on in Syria today, which are lumped together in the formula of a "war against terrorism".¹¹

What is most appalling about the mainstream-assessments of the Syrian crisis is the sharp criticism of the West and the deep, fervent distrust of the United States. While there can be no doubt that Western policies have been erratic and inconsistent, claiming an alliance between the U.S. and ISIS seems far-fetched. However, this rhetoric bears witness that, for Russia, the Syrian conflict is more than a regional crisis. It is also a question of foreign policy principles, of Russia's status in the world, its identity as major world power, and of the relations between the West and Russia. More specifically, the Kremlin dismisses any foreign interference into other states' internal affairs, rejects regime change, while it is indifferent as to whether a regime is democratic or not. Concerning Syria, this position completely ignores legitimate demands raised by the opposition in March 2011 and the violent repression of these protests, it also disregards that the current regime has lost much if not all of its legitimacy. But if the Western tack on the crisis has been such a failure in Russian eyes, what has Russia accomplished?

The Diplomatic Front: Teaching a Lesson to the West or Failure of an Initiative?

What most Russian observers share is the conviction that Russia has a special role to play in Syria, both on historical and on contemporary grounds. They argue that Russia has special access to both the government and to its rivals. Since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, Russia has consistently supplied diplomatic cover

4 Namely the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change (NCCDC). The NCCDC, however, does not receive any critical treatment by Kholdynskaia-Golenishcheva. Especially, she avoids the thorny question to which extent this opposition is linked to the regime.

5 *Voina v sirii: vnimanie, otsenki, IGI*, <<http://www.levada.ru/28-09-2015/voina-v-sirii-vnimanie-otsenki-igil>>.

6 Russia launches media offensive on Syria bombing, <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34411653>> and Air strikes on the airwaves, <<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/listening-post/2015/10/air-strikes-airwaves-151012151620777.html>>.

7 <<http://www.levada.ru/2015/10/19/simpatii-rossiyan-na-storone-asada/>>; see also "Russian Attitudes on Russia's Intervention in Syria", in Russian Analytical Digest 173 (2015): 13–16 (Levada opinion polls conducted on 2–5 October 2015, with diagrams), <http://www.css.ethz.ch/publications/DetailansichtPubDB_EN?rec_id=3386> and the opinion polls on pp. 11–20 of this issue.

8 Russian TV: Good weather for bombing in Syria, <<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Oct-06/317816-rus>

<[sian-tv-good-weather-for-bombing-in-syria.ashx](http://www.sian-tv-good-weather-for-bombing-in-syria.ashx)>.

9 *Nas kinut' vse*, <<http://www.novayagazeta.ru/columns/70196.html>>.

10 *Asad zakonni, no nelegitimni*, <<http://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2015/10/05/611387-vlast-pravo-dorogu-tiranii>>; *Rossia pomeshalo zapadnoi koalicii*, <<http://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2015/10/05/611517-rossiya-pomeshalo-koalitsii>>.

11 *Bombir' bez kontsa nevozmozhno*, <http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2015/10/09_a_7812335.shtml>.

for the regime in Damascus.¹² However, since mid-2014, the Russian diplomatic efforts have gradually moved well beyond that and the Kremlin has assumed a more active diplomatic stance. Foreign minister Sergey Lavrov has repeatedly condemned the instability that the West has created in Iraq and Libya. The U.S., he added, “need to be trained that affairs can only be conducted on the basis of equality of rights, balance of interests, and mutual respect”.¹³ Russia sees in Syria the chance to set an alternative example on how to handle conflicts in the Middle East, and in doing so to restore the international prestige it has lost due to the Ukrainian crisis.

Russia’s diplomatic efforts followed a formal and a non-formal track, each pursuing another aim. On the informal diplomatic track, Russian diplomacy pursued the goal of uniting the opposition and bringing it to one table with the regime. Moscow hosted three rounds of consultative talks with various opposition groups and the regime, in January, April and August 2015. These talks were conducted by the head of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences, Vitaly Naumkin, resulting in the “Moscow platform provisions”.¹⁴ These provisions call among others for a settlement of the Syrian crisis by political means on the basis of the “Geneva communiqué” of June 2012, for the fight against terrorism, the preservation of Syrian statehood, reconciliation, and inter-Syrian national dialogue without any external interference. According to these principles, however, the issue of regime transition and democratic reforms is completely set aside. There is also no mention of the crimes perpetrated by the regime and how to handle them. This can hardly be a satisfying basis for broad sections of the opposition. Indeed, some regime opponents have boycotted some of the discussion rounds, which have been repeatedly accused of including only those parts of the opposition that are also accepted by the regime.

On the formal diplomatic track, Moscow’s second aim is to form a broad “antiterrorism coalition” against ISIS. Deputy foreign minister Mikhail Bogdanov, the Kremlin’s special envoy to the Middle East, has been instrumental to this aim. Increasingly, however, it has also been Sergey Lavrov and Vladimir Putin who have participated in these negotiations efforts. Especially since June 2015, Moscow hosted top politicians from all over the Arab world or sent its diplomats to the Mid-

dle East. On August 3, Lavrov met with his Qatari and U.S. counterparts, as well as with the former Chairman of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (National Coalition), Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib, in Doha. Lavrov held conversations with the Kuwaiti and UAE foreign ministers (August 10), and met at least twice with his Saudi counterpart, Adel al-Jubeir,¹⁵ since August 2015. Lavrov held talks with the Head of the National Coalition, Khalid Hodja, with Haytham Manna, former coordinator of Syria’s National Coordination Committee, and repeatedly with Iranian foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif (August 13, 14, and 17).

Vladimir Putin discussed the conflict with the Egyptian President (August 26), with the King of Jordan, with the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi (August 25), with the Turkish president (September 23), with the Saudi Defense Minister (October 11), with the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi (October 11), as well as with Israeli prime minister, Benyamin Netanyahu (September 21), who came to Moscow with top intelligence and military representatives. Finally, Vladimir Putin astounded everybody by welcoming Bashar al-Assad to Moscow on October 20. While Russian foreign policymakers have repeatedly claimed that Moscow does not cling to Assad personally,¹⁶ this visit demonstrated that the Kremlin recognized the current Syrian president as legitimate leader and legitimate negotiating partner. Putin later briefed the kings of Saudi Arabia and Jordan, as well as the presidents of Egypt and Turkey by phone on the talks he held with Assad.

Thanks to Russian mediation, there also was an enigmatic meeting between Syrian security chief Ali Mamlouk and Saudi politicians in early August in Jeddah: they met for the first time in four years in the presence of Russian representatives. However, this meeting remained inconclusive.¹⁷ Finally, while diplomats went in and out of Moscow, there was another guest, who arrived at the end of July: the visit of Qasem Soleimani, general of the Iranian Al-Quds Force, suggesting that Moscow was gauging its military options in advance, just in case of a failure of diplomacy.

12 Since 2011, Russia (together with China) has vetoed four draft resolutions against Syria in the UN Security Council. Security Council—Veto List, <http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/resguide/scact_veto_table_en.htm>.

13 <http://archive.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/newline/02EBC66354EF10E544257B0E0045AD41>.

14 Moscow Platform Provisions, 15.04.2015, <<http://geneva.mid.ru/>>.

15 Conflit en Syrie: Moscou et Riyad affichent leurs fortes divergences, <<http://www.lorientlejour.com/article/938664/conflit-en-syrie-moscou-et-riyad-affichent-leurs-fortes-divergences.html>>.

16 <<http://news.yahoo.com/syria-opposition-says-russia-not-clinging-assad-112738882.html>>.

17 The Saudis demanded that all foreign fighters leave Syria, including those of Hezbollah, in exchange for halting support for the opposition, cf. L’Arabie saoudite et la Syrie auraient repris contact grâce à Moscou, <<http://www.rfi.fr/moyen-orient/20150804-arabie-saoudite-syrie-rencontre-riyad-contact-russie-mamlouk-ben-salman>>; see also: <<http://www.newsru.co.il/mideast/07aug2015/saud8022.html>>.

The most remarkable meetings, however, took place in Vienna. The negotiations on October 23 gathered the Saudi, Turkish, U.S. and Russian foreign ministers. A week later, on October 30, delegations from 17 countries arrived in Austria, including Egyptian and Iranian delegations. To have Iran and Egypt at the negotiating table was an important demand of Russian diplomacy. With Saudi Arabia and Iran at one table, eventually, the two key contenders in Syria's proxy war finally can talk face-to-face. Only weeks earlier, the Saudi foreign minister had underscored that Iran was "the last country to talk to" on Syria. Finally, in the third round of talks in Vienna on November 14, spurred by the Paris terrorist attacks, negotiators agreed on an 18-month transition plan to establish a new Syrian government. This plan echoes an earlier Russian proposal for a reform process that would pave the way for presidential elections.

All in all, Russian diplomatic efforts yielded few tangible results, and mainly confirmed the divide between Moscow and Iran on the one hand, and Turkey and the Gulf States on the other: while all sides recognize the threat posed by ISIS, Russia and Iran want to postpone the issue of regime transition until ISIS is defeated or, at least, until the country is stabilized again. However, neither the Western-backed Syrian opposition, nor key regional players, can accept a deal under which Assad stays in power. While the Kremlin wants to include the regime in the fight against terrorism, the Gulf states and, to a lesser extent, the West cannot accept its involvement during a transition.¹⁸ Saudi Arabia, in particular, has rejected all of Moscow's overtures so far. Prospects of forging an anti-ISIS alliance that unites Syria's regional neighbors seemed unlikely until Russia stepped-in militarily.

Russia's Military Power Play

Russia's recent military build-up in Syria must be seen against this diplomatic backdrop. On the one hand, it complements the diplomatic effort and has contributed to a further acceleration in diplomatic activity. First, it has led to the emergence of a *de-facto* alliance against ISIS: Russia established communication on military operations at least with the U.S., with Israel, Iraq, Jordan and, most recently, with France. Second, Russia has asserted itself as key player in the conflict. Western leaders are eager to talk to the Kremlin on Syria and have even started conceding that the current regime has a role to play in any negotiations. Finally, whatever the outcome of the war, Russia will be part of the deal and have

boots on the ground in the strategic coastal provinces of Syria. On the other hand, the military activity hints at Moscow's diplomatic failure, so far. The clear drawback of having Russian soldiers in Syria is that they jeopardize Russia's position as a neutral mediator in the conflict. Despite Moscow's long support for Damascus, it also tried hard to present itself as an equidistant player that can talk on an equal footing to all sides. With Russia becoming a warring party, this position can hardly be upheld. However, Russia's influence on the regime has increased even further, and its position *vis-a-vis* Iran in Syria is strengthened. Damascus will rely even more on Russian support and will become more receptive to diplomatic pressure from Moscow.

Conclusions: A Common Enemy is Not Enough?

Russian perceptions on the Syrian civil war have remained largely consistent. They portray it as a fight against terrorism and highlight the negative influence of the West in the Middle East, the latter being a perspective with a long tradition since Soviet times. Media reports show that for Russia, the conflict in Syria is not only about Syria itself, but that it is about Russia's standing in the world, about its identity as global player. Syria is also a field on which Russia's relations with the West can be shaped. The aim of Russia's diplomatic effort has been to unite the Syrian opposition, the West, and the regime in the fight against ISIS. To attain this goal, it repeated the mantra of the fight against terrorism, in an attempt to split the political space into pro-ISIS and anti-ISIS camps. "Terrorism" is an ideal catchword for establishing such a division. However, this approach disregards that the Syrian regime itself cannot be put unequivocally in one or the other group: regime and the state¹⁹, as well as regime and terrorism are not disconnected in the Syrian civil war. These tight connections are one reason why this operation, pursued both diplomatically and now militarily, has failed so far. It disregards the variety of demands coming from different camps inside and outside Syria, from Syrian society and from various military and non-military players. Finally, the approach has met stern resistance from Saudi Arabia, for now. However, it might turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy: on the one hand, facing Russian airstrikes, many opposition groups might unite under the auspices of stronger, more radical factions, and Syria's National Coalition has already said it would boycott talks proposed by the UN because of Russia's interven-

18 John Kerry, Philip Hammond, Angela Merkel and Recep Tayyip Erdogan are the latest additions to the list of formerly staunch anti-Assad politicians, who at least seem willing to talk to the Damascus regime again.

19 Khedder Khaddour, *Shielded by the State: Assad's monopoly over Syria's public institutions*, <<http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=61027>>

tion. On the other hand, assured by Russian air power, the regime, too, might become more unyielding than it was before. Vitaly Naumkin has already complained about “Assad’s intransigence on issues related to negotiations with the opposition”.²⁰ However, the military effort in Syria seems, at first sight, to complement the diplomatic effort and to forge a *de-facto* alliance against ISIS. The Paris bombings pushed France to coordinate its campaign with Russia. Still, as long as Russia not only targets ISIS, but everyone who threatens the Damascus–Homs–Hama–Aleppo corridor and the Syrian coast, this *de-facto* coalition will remain unstable. Against the backdrop of the results of the Western bombing campaign in Syria and given Russia’s own experience in Afghanistan, the Kremlin knows well that this war cannot be won by military force, especially not by air strikes, alone. It also knows well that for the foreseeable future there will be no united Syria. Syria is already partitioned. Russia is merely deepening this partition.

Finally, while Russia has contradicted its own mantra of opposing foreign military interventions, it returned onto the international stage as a country which strives to be more than a “regional power”: it seeks international influence and recognition. The intervention in

Syria has also had a powerful effect on Russia’s domestic audience, since the Kremlin had promised such a return to world power status. Other promises of the regime did not materialize, like modernization or well-being, but this one demand seems have been fulfilled, and it might boost the current Russian regime’s position. The portrayal of the events in Syria also distracts from the events in Ukraine while, at the same time, they echo the perception of the conflict there. State media stress the malicious influence of the West, revolutionary regime change, and the following descent into chaos. Russia’s stance on Ukraine and its stance on Syria reflect and reinforce each other. Additionally, the Kremlin sends a mixed message to its own Muslim population: on the one hand, Moscow recently opened one of the biggest mosques in Europe, signaling that Islam is part of Russian tradition; on the other hand, it retains the authority to determine what constitutes legitimate faith and what it considers radical faith, both at home and abroad. Vitaly Naumkin explicitly mentions that Muslims have been “brainwashed” or “duped” by terrorists. Naumkin claims that what Russia is doing in Syria “serves the interests of the whole Islamic World”.

About the Author

Philipp Casula is a Post-Doctoral Researcher at the University of Zurich.

Further Reading

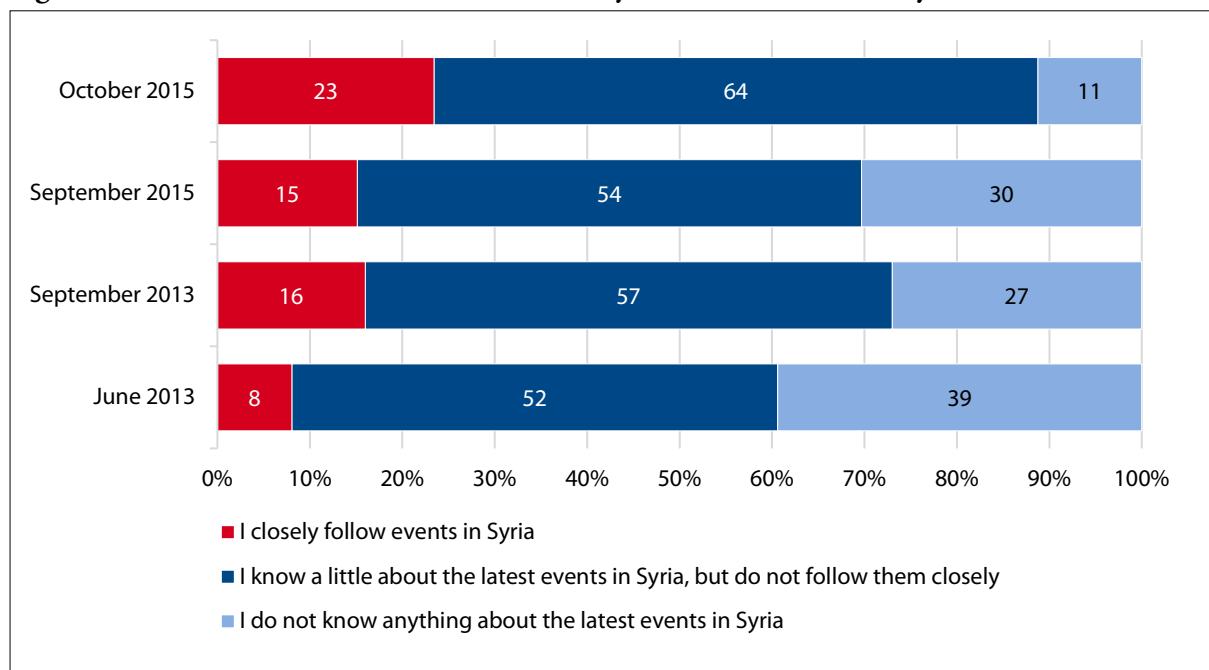
- Nikolay Kozhanov, Moscow revels in Middle Eastern mire, in *The World Today* August/September 2015: 16–18.
- Naumkin, Vitaly, Despite airstrikes, is Russia still working toward political solution in Syria, *Al-Monitor*, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/en/originals/2015/10/russia-syria-politics-isis-nusra-jihadist-saudi-arabia.html>>.
- Khaddour, Khedder, *Shielded by the State: Assad’s monopoly over Syria’s public institutions*, <<http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=61027>>.

20 Naumkin, Vitaly, Despite airstrikes, is Russia still working toward political solution in Syria, *Al-Monitor*, Russia Pulse, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/en/originals/2015/10/russia-syria-politics-isis-nusra-jihadist-saudi-arabia.html>>.

OPINION POLL

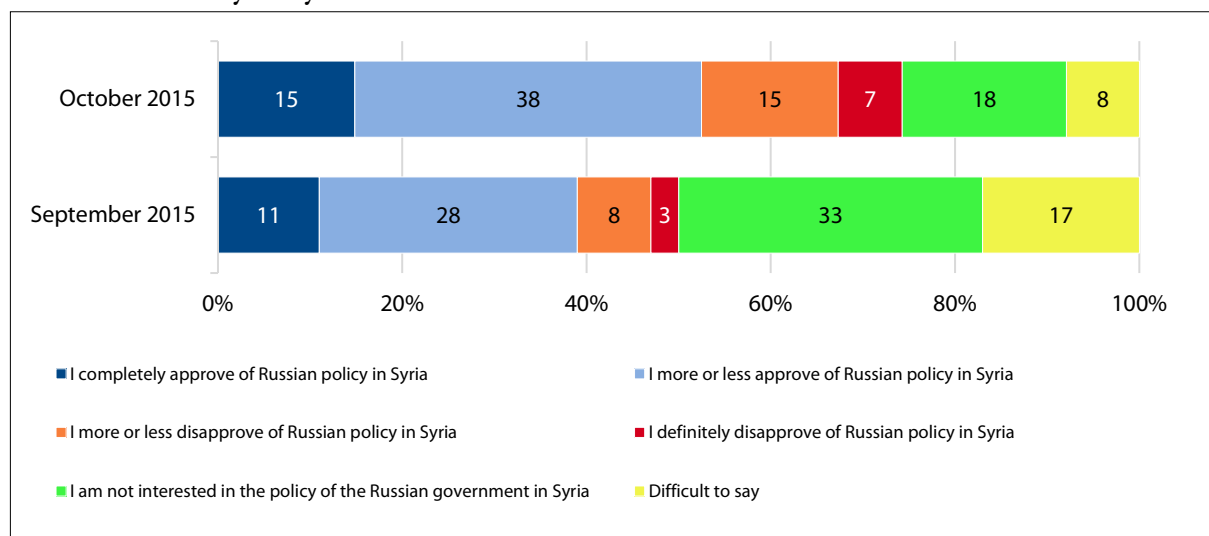
Russian Public Opinion on the Country's Military Engagement in Syria

Figure 1: Do You Follow Current Events in Syria? If Yes, How Closely Do You Follow Them?



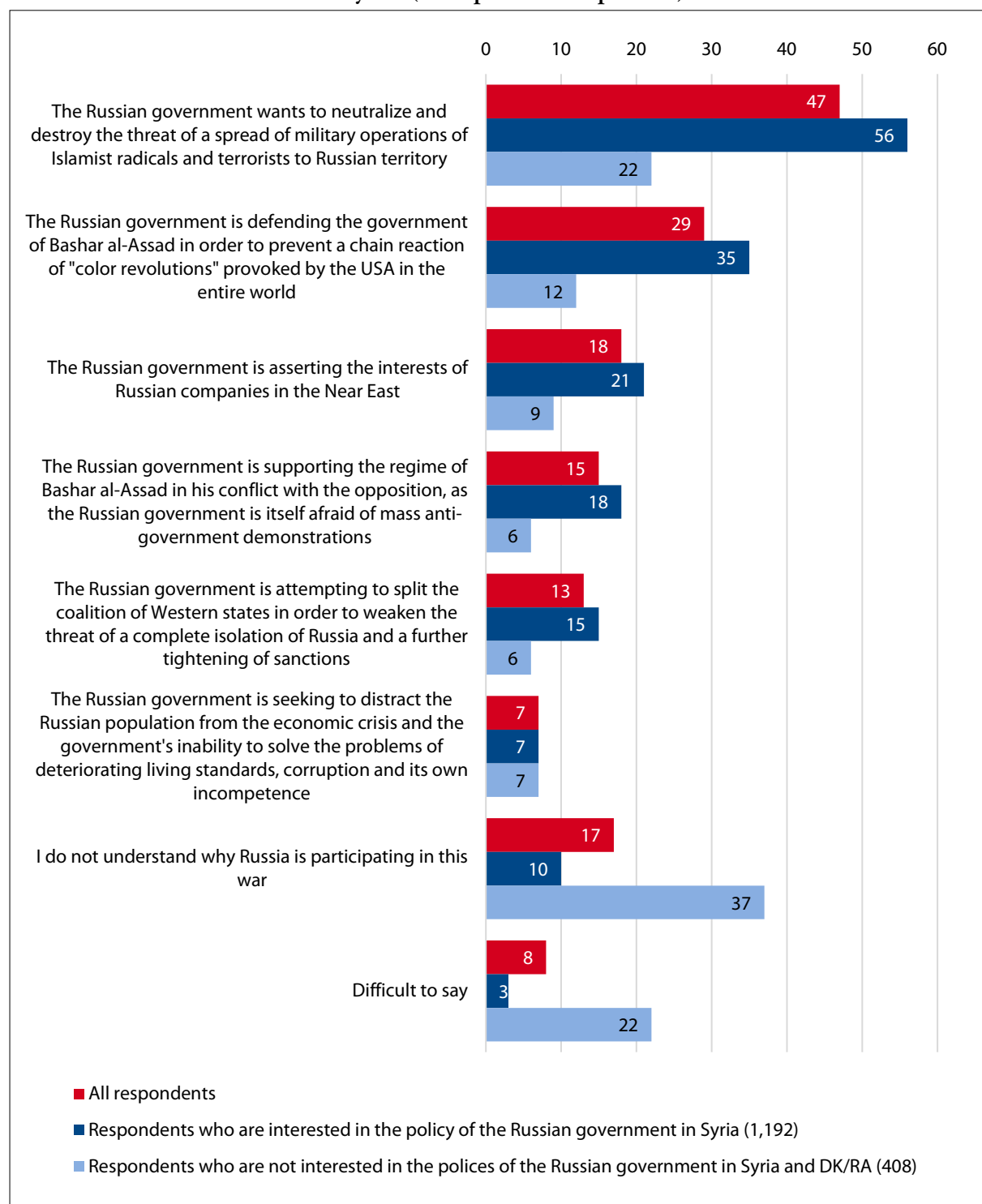
Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 23–26 October 2015, $N = 1600$ <<http://www.levada.ru/2015/10/29/uchastie-rossii-v-voennoj-operatsii-v-sirii/>>, published on 29 October 2015

Figure 2: Are You Interested in Russian Policy in Syria? If Yes, Do You Approve of Russian Policy in Syria?

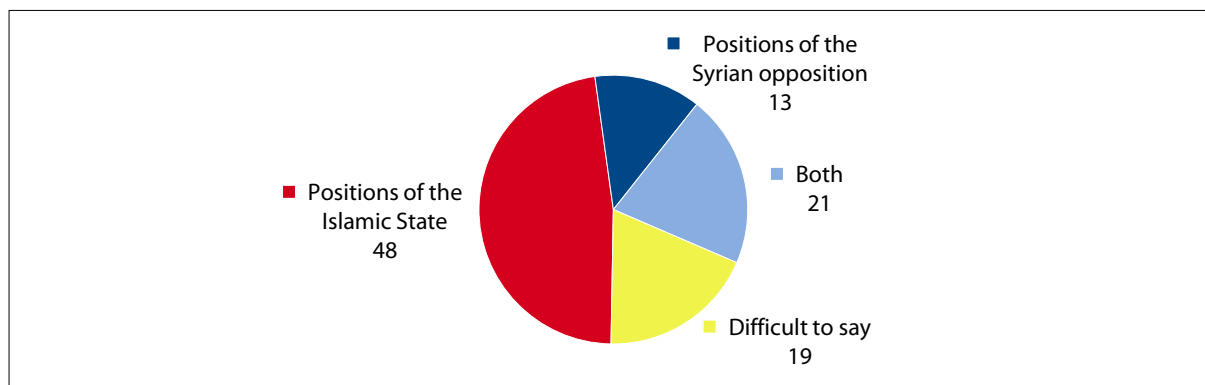


Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 23–26 October 2015, $N = 1600$ <<http://www.levada.ru/2015/10/29/uchastie-rossii-v-voennoj-operatsii-v-sirii/>>, published on 29 October 2015

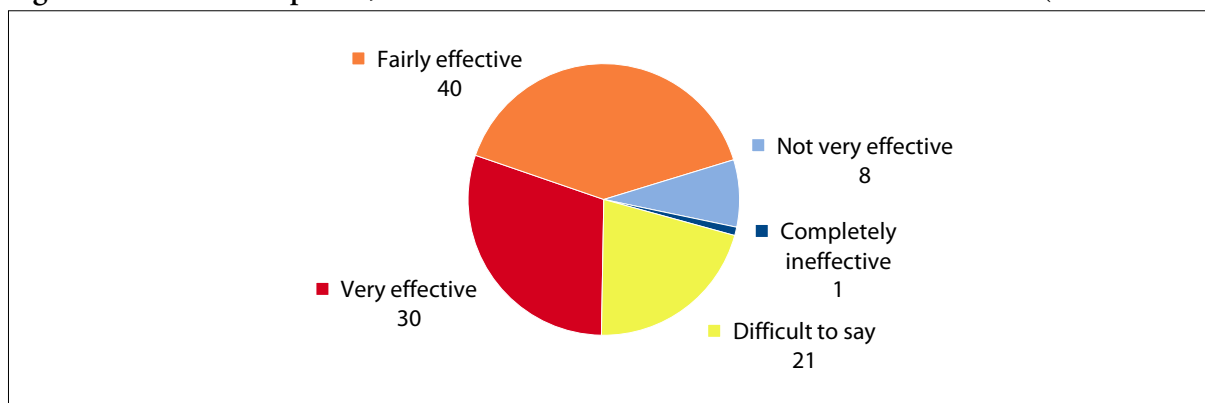
Figure 3: In Your Opinion, Which Goals Is the Russian Government Pursuing by Its Involvement in the War in Syria? (multiple answers possible)



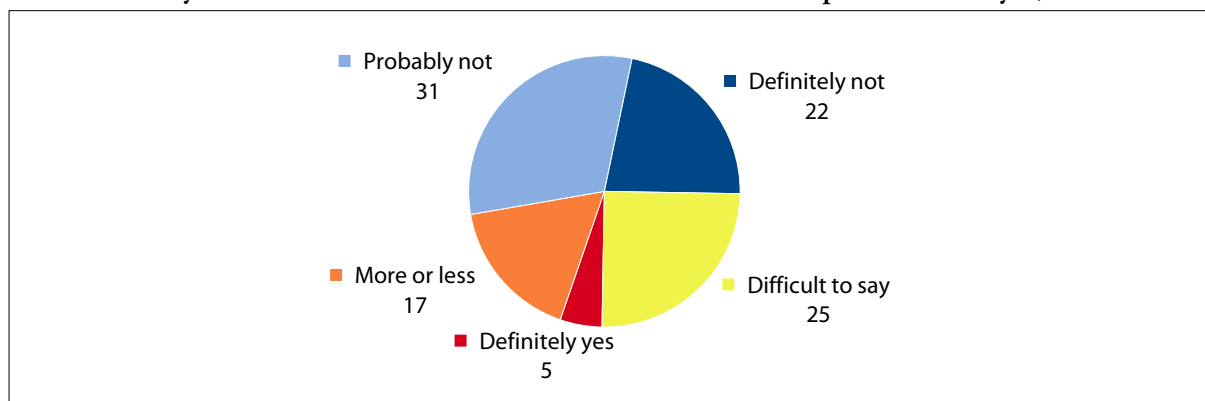
Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 23–26 October 2015, N = 1600 <<http://www.levada.ru/2015/10/29/uchastie-rossii-v-voennoj-operatsii-v-sirii/>>, published on 29 October 2015

Figure 4: What Are the Targets of the Air Strikes of the Russian Air Force in Syria? (October 2015)

Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 23–26 October 2015, $N = 1600$ <<http://www.levada.ru/2015/10/29/uchastie-rossii-v-voennoj-operatsii-v-sirii/>>, published on 29 October 2015

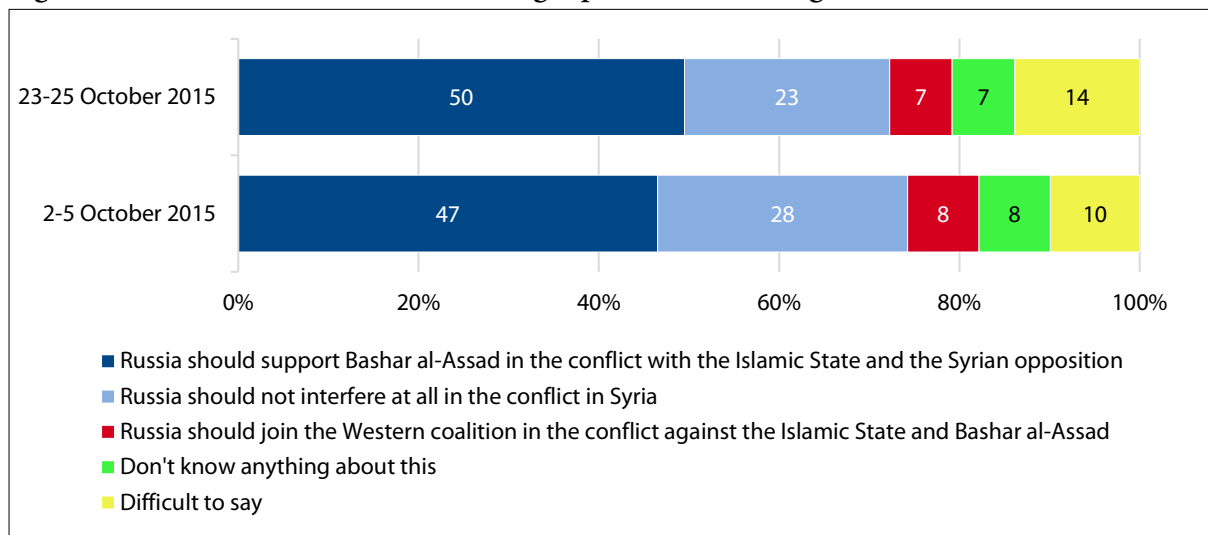
Figure 5: In Your Opinion, How Effective Are the Russian Air and Missile Strikes? (October 2015)

Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 23–26 October 2015, $N = 1600$ <<http://www.levada.ru/2015/10/29/uchastie-rossii-v-voennoj-operatsii-v-sirii/>>, published on 29 October 2015

Figure 6: What Do You Think, Does the Information Spread by Western Mass Media about Syrian Civilian Victims of the Russian Strikes Correspond to Reality? (October 2015)

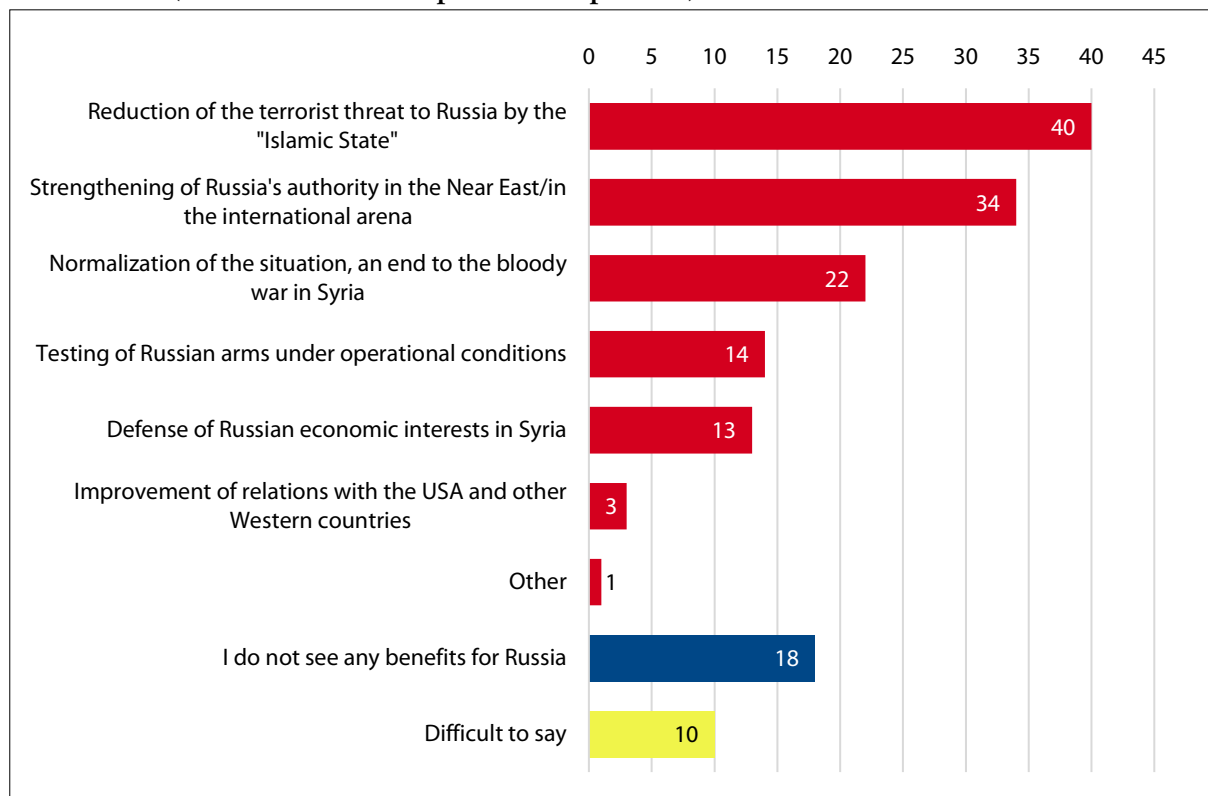
Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 23–26 October 2015, $N = 1600$ <<http://www.levada.ru/2015/10/29/uchastie-rossii-v-voennoj-operatsii-v-sirii/>>, published on 29 October 2015

Figure 7: With Which of the Following Opinions Do You Agree With Most of All?



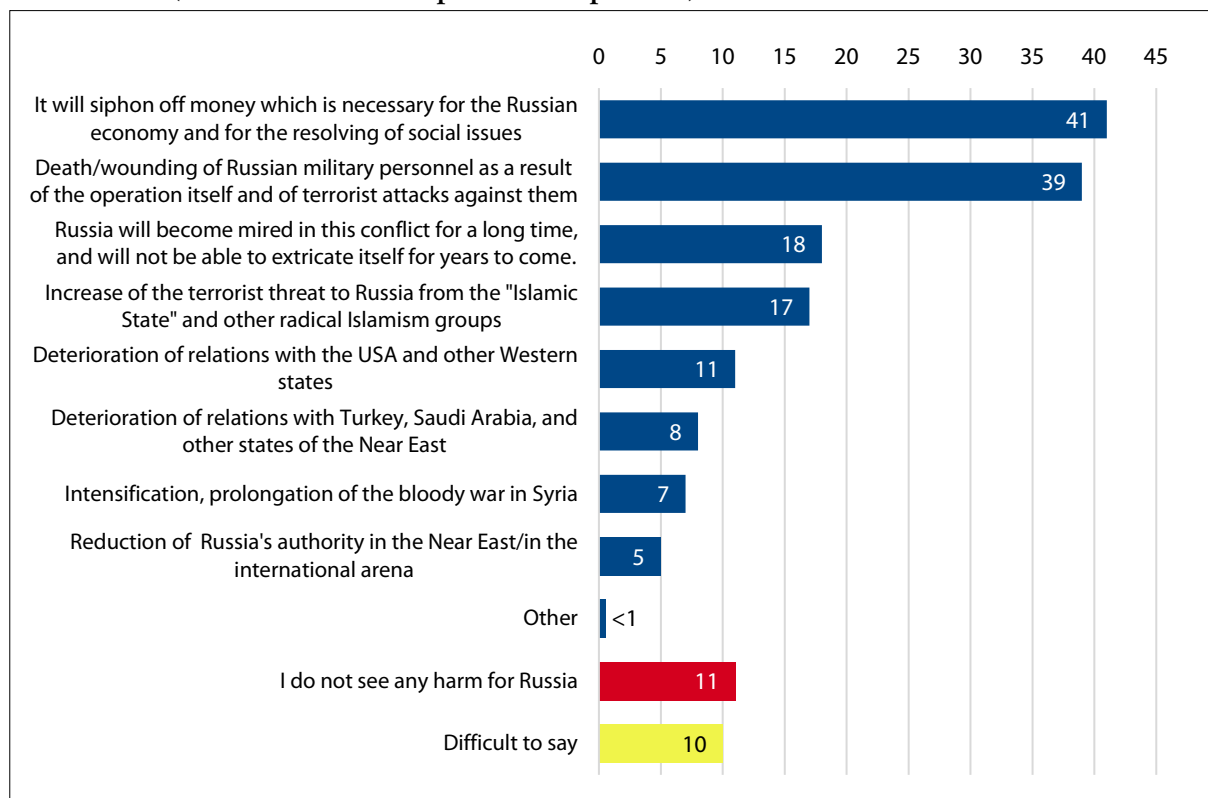
Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 23–26 October 2015, N = 1600 <<http://www.levada.ru/2015/10/29/uchastie-rossii-v-voennoj-operatsii-v-sirii/>>, published on 29 October 2015

Figure 8: What Are the Possible Benefits of the Russian Military Operation in Syria? (October 2015, multiple answers possible)



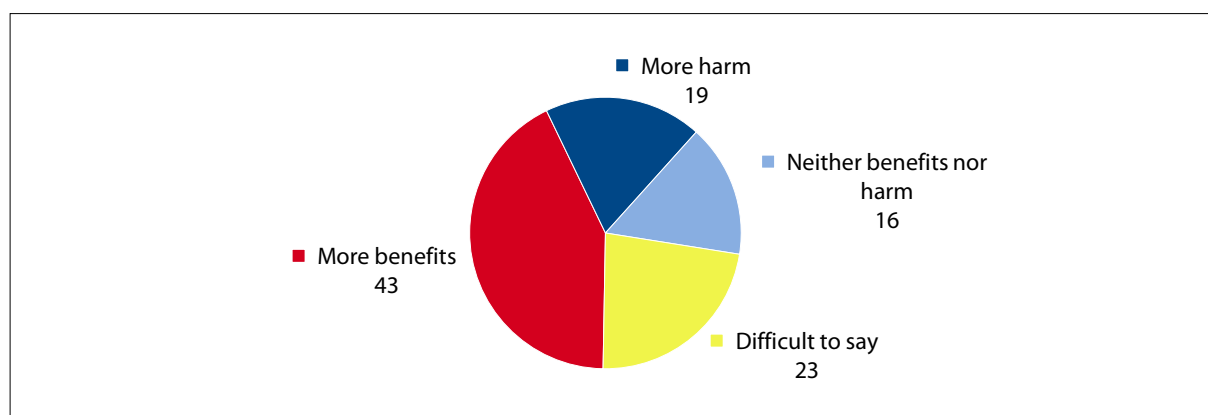
Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 23–26 October 2015, N = 1600 <<http://www.levada.ru/2015/10/29/uchastie-rossii-v-voennoj-operatsii-v-sirii/>>, published on 29 October 2015

Figure 9: What Is the Possible Harm of the Russian Military Operation in Syria? (October 2015, multiple answers possible)



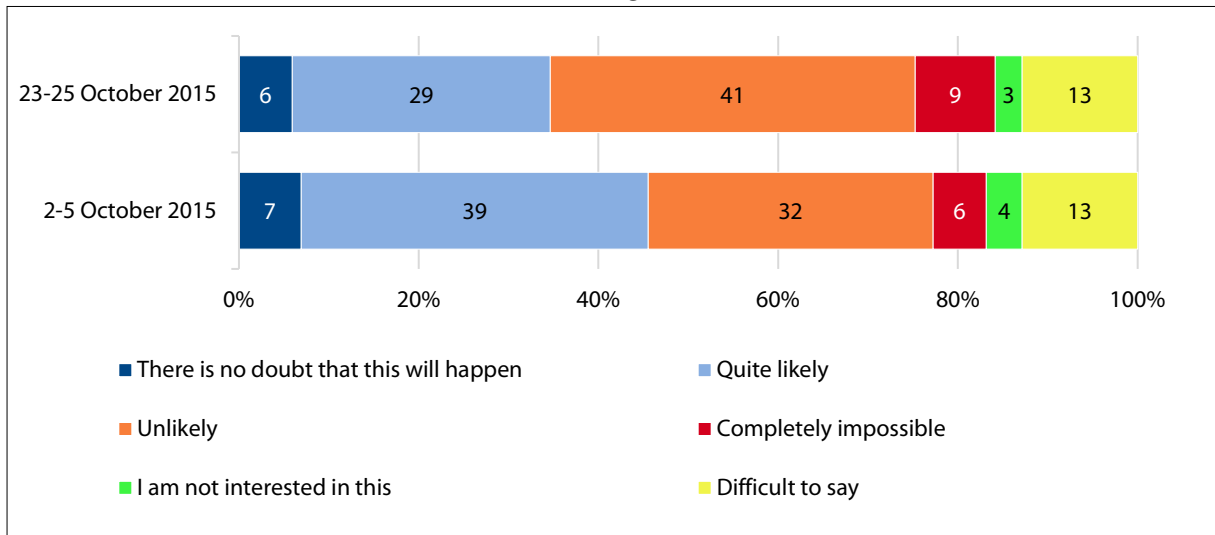
Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 23–26 October 2015, N = 1600 <<http://www.levada.ru/2015/10/29/uchastie-rossii-v-voennoj-operatsii-v-sirii/>>, published on 29 October 2015

Figure 10: What Do You Think, Will the Russian Military Operation in Russia Result in More Benefits or More Harm for Russia?



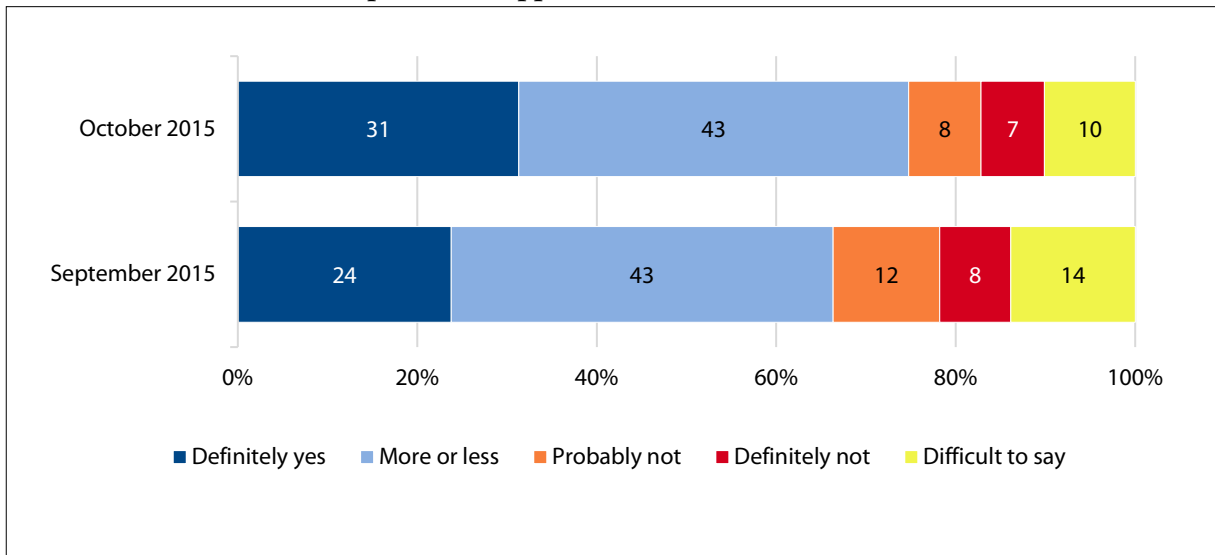
Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 23–26 October 2015, N = 1600 <<http://www.levada.ru/2015/10/29/uchastie-rossii-v-voennoj-operatsii-v-sirii/>>, published on 29 October 2015

Figure 11: What Do You Think, Is It Possible That Russia’s Armed Intervention in the Syrian Conflict Will Turn Into a “New” Afghanistan for Russia?



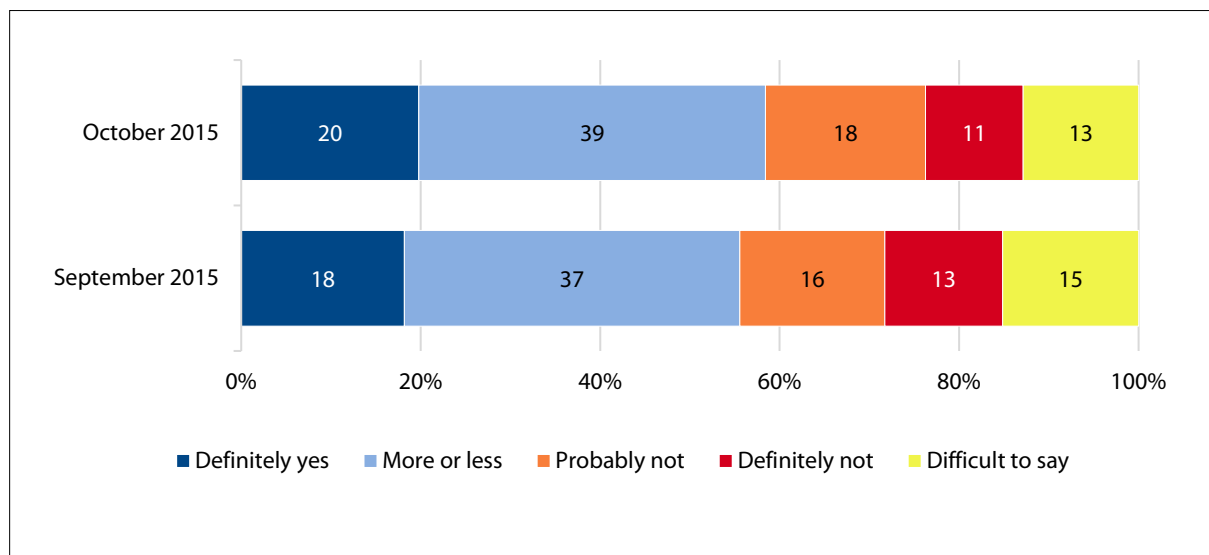
Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 23–26 October 2015, N = 1600 <<http://www.levada.ru/2015/10/29/uchastie-rossii-v-voennoj-operatsii-v-sirii/>>, published on 29 October 2015

Figure 12a: Should Russia Aid the Syrian Leadership by the Following Means: Political and Diplomatic Support



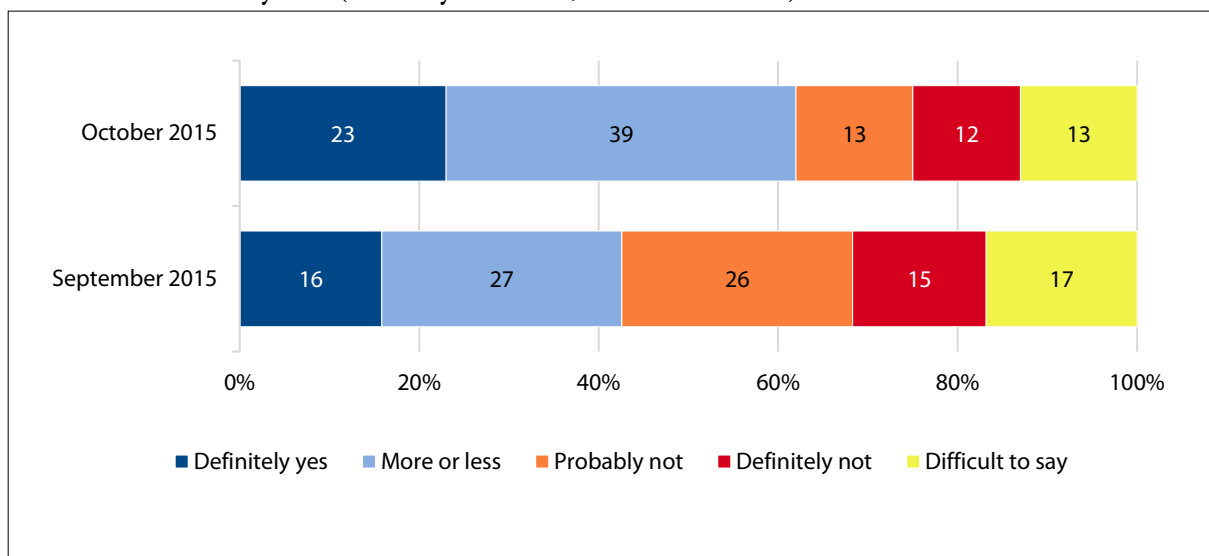
Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 23–26 October 2015, N = 1600 <<http://www.levada.ru/2015/10/29/uchastie-rossii-v-voennoj-operatsii-v-sirii/>>, published on 29 October 2015

**Figure 12b: Should Russia Aid the Syrian Leadership by the Following Means:
Humanitarian Aid**



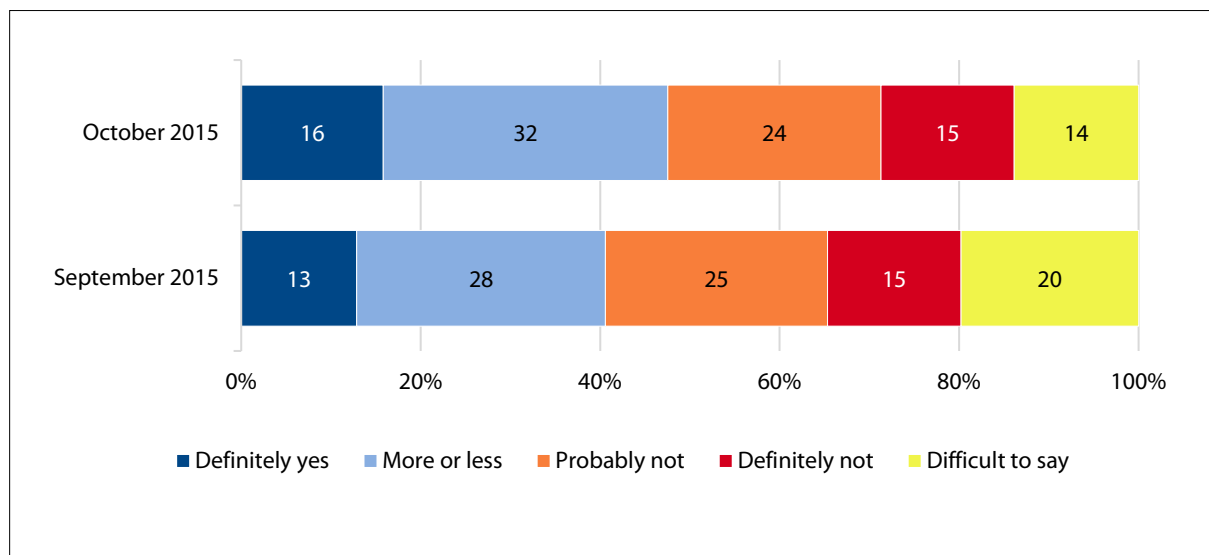
Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 23–26 October 2015, $N = 1600$ <<http://www.levada.ru/2015/10/29/uchastie-rossii-v-voennoj-operatsii-v-sirii/>>, published on 29 October 2015

**Figure 12c: Should Russia Aid the Syrian Leadership by the Following Means:
Military Aid (Military Advisors, Arms Deliveries)**



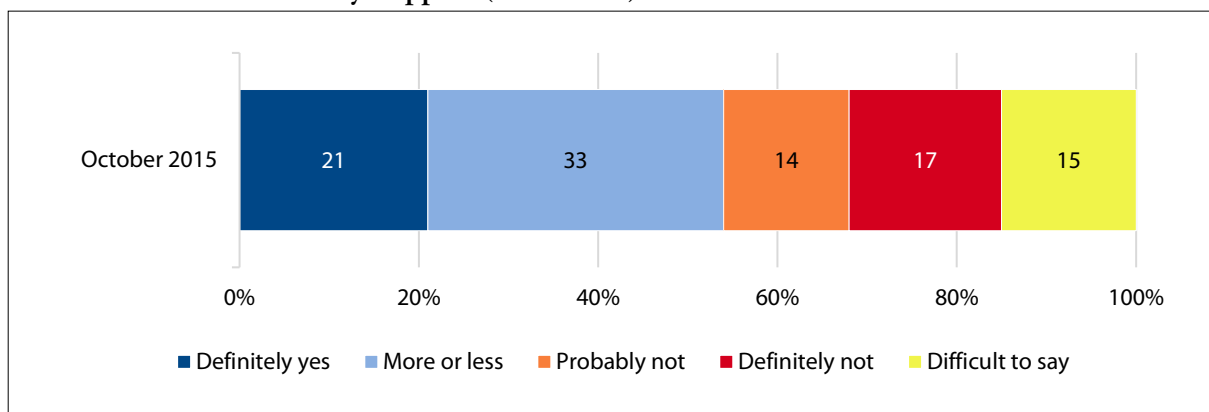
Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 23–26 October 2015, $N = 1600$ <<http://www.levada.ru/2015/10/29/uchastie-rossii-v-voennoj-operatsii-v-sirii/>>, published on 29 October 2015

**Figure 12d: Should Russia Aid the Syrian Leadership by the Following Means:
Economic Aid**



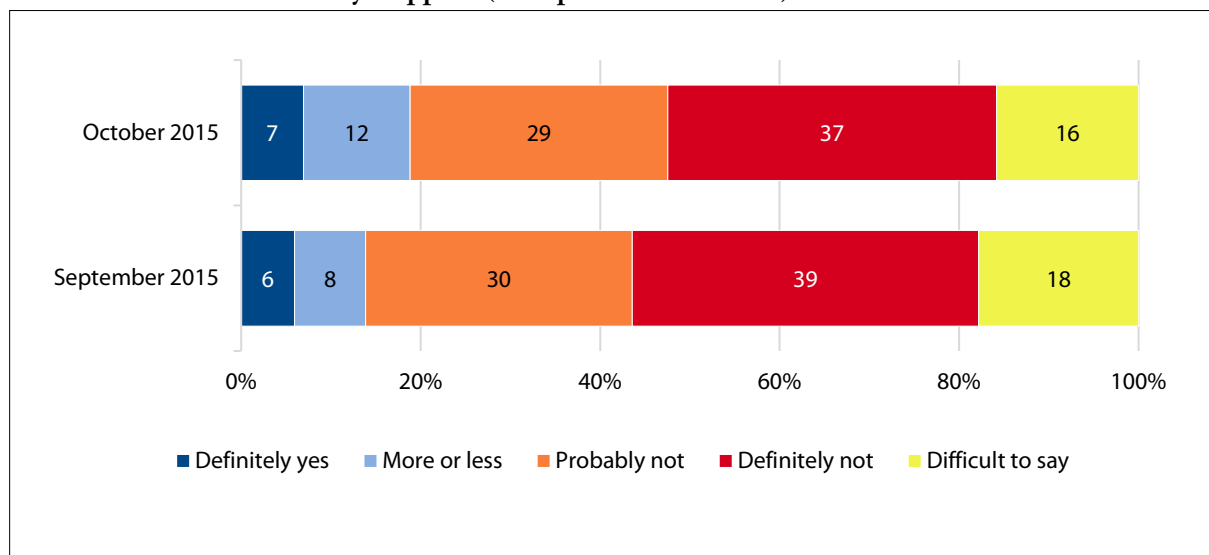
Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 23–26 October 2015, $N = 1600$ <<http://www.levada.ru/2015/10/29/uchastie-rossii-v-voennoj-operatsii-v-sirii/>>, published on 29 October 2015

**Figure 12e: Should Russia Aid the Syrian Leadership by the Following Means:
Direct Military Support (Air Strikes)**



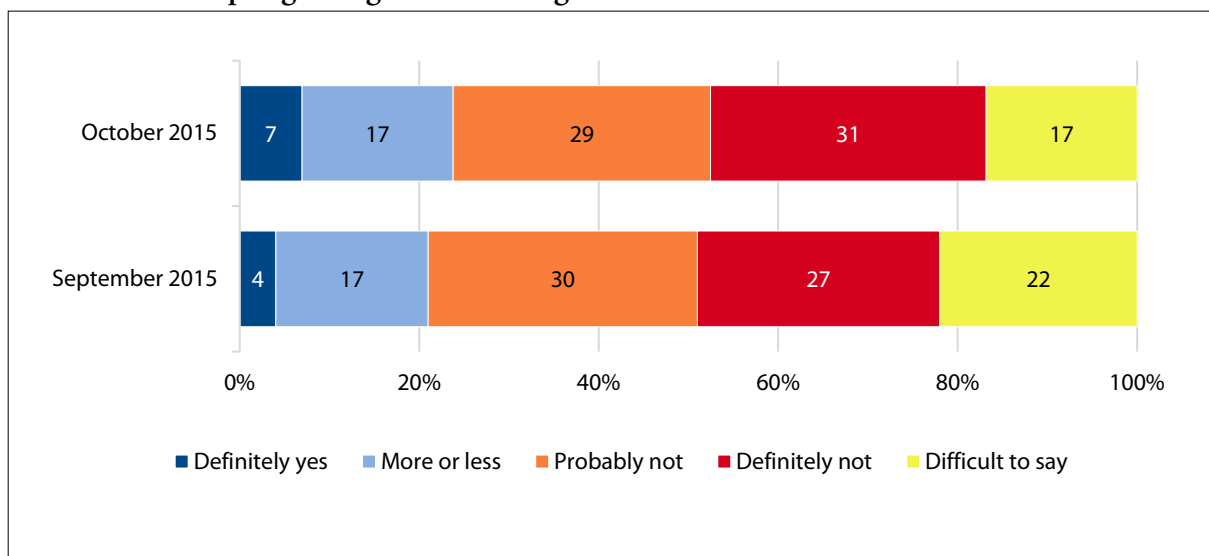
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**Figure 12f: Should Russia Aid the Syrian Leadership by the Following Means:
Direct Military Support (Troops on the Ground)**



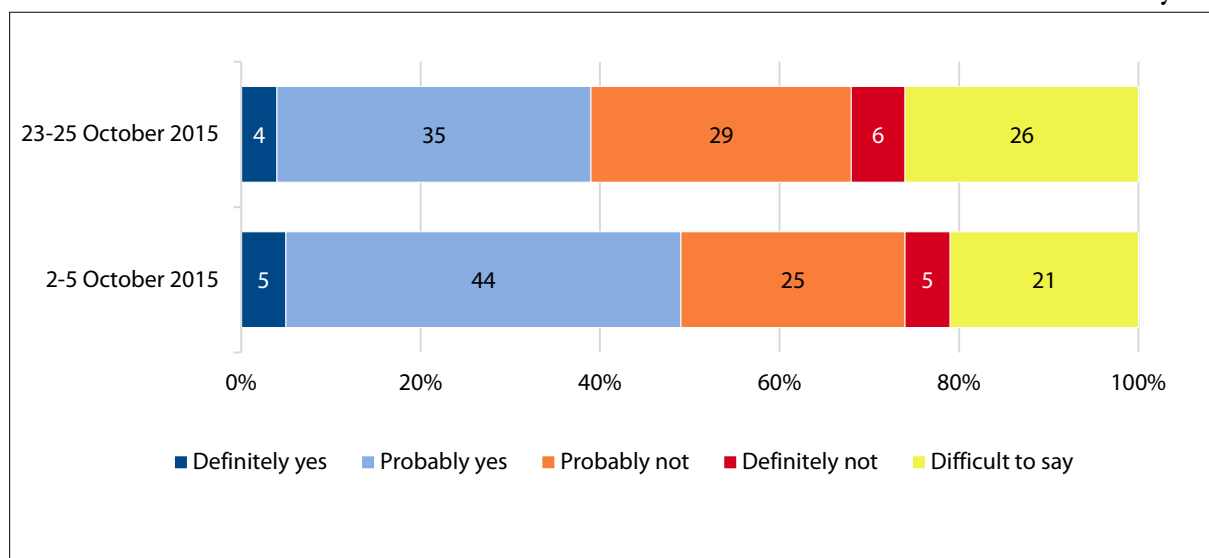
Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 23–26 October 2015, $N = 1600$ <<http://www.levada.ru/2015/10/29/uchastie-rossii-v-voennoj-operatsii-v-sirii/>>, published on 29 October 2015

**Figure 12g: Should Russia Aid the Syrian Leadership by the Following Means:
Accepting Refugees and Aiding Them**



Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 23–26 October 2015, $N = 1600$ <<http://www.levada.ru/2015/10/29/uchastie-rossii-v-voennoj-operatsii-v-sirii/>>, published on 29 October 2015

Figure 13: What Do You Think, Will the United States and the Countries of the West, on the One Hand, And Russia and the Present Leadership of Syria, on the Other Hand, Be Able to Find Common Ground on the Issue of a Settlement of the Conflict in Syria?



Source: representative opinion poll by Levada Center, 23–26 October 2015, N = 1600 <<http://www.levada.ru/2015/10/29/uchastie-rossii-v-voennoj-operatsii-v-sirii/>>, published on 29 October 2015

ABOUT THE RUSSIAN ANALYTICAL DIGEST

Editors: Stephen Aris, Matthias Neumann, Robert Ortung, Jeronim Perović, Heiko Pleines, Hans-Henning Schröder, Aglaya Snetkov

The Russian Analytical Digest is a bi-weekly internet publication jointly produced by the Research Centre for East European Studies [Forschungsstelle Osteuropa] at the University of Bremen (<www.forschungsstelle.uni-bremen.de>), the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH Zurich), the Resource Security Institute, the Institute of History at the University of Zurich (<<http://www.hist.uzh.ch/>>), the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies at The George Washington University, and the German Association for East European Studies (DGO). The Digest draws on contributions to the German-language *Russland-Analysen* (<www.laenderanalysen.de/russland/>), the CSS analytical network on Russia and Eurasia (<www.css.ethz.ch/publications/RAD_EN>), and the Russian Regional Report. The Russian Analytical Digest covers political, economic, and social developments in Russia and its regions, and looks at Russia's role in international relations.

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