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RUSSIA AND THE ARAB WORLD AMID THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF RUSSIA'S RELATIONS WITH EGYPT, SYRIA AND YEMEN

This article analyzes Russia's engagement with the Arab world in the context of the ongoing transformation of the international order, characterized by the erosion of Western dominance, the rise of multipolarity, and intensified competition among major powers. Against this backdrop, the Russian Federation has sought to expand and diversify its presence in the Middle East and North Africa, positioning itself as a flexible strategic partner for Arab states pursuing greater autonomy in foreign and economic policy.

This study examines Russia's bilateral relations with three Arab countries – Egypt, Syria, and Yemen – in order to explore how different patterns of engagement take shape across the region. These cases were selected intentionally, as they represent distinct forms of interaction, ranging from relatively stable strategic cooperation to more conflict-driven and diplomatically cautious approaches.

The analysis relies on a comparative framework structured around four key dimensions: political and diplomatic interaction, economic and trade cooperation, security and military relations, and cultural and humanitarian ties. Both qualitative observations and selected quantitative indicators are used to assess the depth and character of Russia's involvement in each case, although the availability and reliability of data differ across countries.

The findings indicate that Russia does not follow a single, uniform policy model in the Middle East. Instead, its policies are adjusted to local political conditions and the stability of partner regimes. In Egypt, relations are shaped primarily by economic projects and sustained political dialogue, which together form a relatively stable basis for cooperation. Syria presents a more complex trajectory: Russia's role, initially defined by direct military support, has gradually evolved – particularly after the political changes of late 2024 – toward a more negotiated and conditional presence. In Yemen, by contrast, Russia has maintained a relatively low-profile approach, focusing on diplomatic engagement and humanitarian issues rather than direct involvement in the conflict.

Overall, Russia's position in the Arab world cannot be described as uniform or dominant. It is better understood as context-dependent and shaped not only by broader transformations in the international system but also by the strategies of regional actors themselves. This suggests that Moscow is attempting to operate within an increasingly multipolar environment while avoiding overextension and preserving strategic flexibility.

Keywords: Russia, Arab world, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, foreign policy, international relations, multipolarity, economic cooperation.

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Халықаралық тәртіптің трансформациясы жағдайындағы Ресей және араб әлемі: Ресейдің Мысырмен, Сириямен және Йеменмен қатынастарын салыстырмалы талдау

Мақалада батыстық үстемдіктің әлсіреуі, көпполюсті жүйенің қалыптасуы және жетекші әлемдік державалар арасындағы бәсекеңі күшеюімен сипатталатын халықаралық тәртіптің трансформациясы жағдайында Ресей Федерациясының араб әлеміндегі саясаты талданады. Осы ахуалда Ресей Таяу Шығыс пен Солтүстік Африкадағы қатысуын кеңейтуге әрі әртараптандыруға ұмтылып, сыртқы саяси және экономикалық автономиясын нығайтуды көздейтін араб мемлекеттері үшін өзін икемді стратегиялық әріптес ретінде ұсынады.

Бұл зерттеу Ресейдің үш араб елімен – Египет, Сирия және Йеменмен екіжақты қарым-қатынасын зерттеп, аймақтағы өзара әрекеттесудің әртүрлі үлгілерінің қалай қалыптасып жатқанын зерттейді. Бұл жағдайлар әдейі таңдалды, себебі олар салыстырмалы түрде тұрақты стратегиялық ынтымақтастықтан бастап қақтығыстарға толы және дипломатиялық тұрғыдан сақтық тәсілдерге дейінгі әртүрлі өзара әрекеттесу түрлерін білдіреді.

Талдау төрт негізгі өлшемнің айналасында құрылымдалған салыстырмалы модельге негізделген: саяси және дипломатиялық өзара іс-қимыл, экономикалық және сауда ынтымақтастығы, қауіпсіздік және әскери ынтымақтастық қатынастары, мәдени және гуманитарлық байланыстар. Ресейдің қатысуының тереңдігі мен сипатын бағалау үшін әр жағдайда сапалық бақылаулар да, жеке сандық көрсеткіштер де қолданылады, дегенмен деректердің қол жетімділігі мен сенімділігі әр түрлі елдерде әр түрлі болады.

Нәтижелер Ресейдің Таяу Шығыстағы бірыңғай саясат моделін ұстанбайтынын көрсетеді. Оның орнына оның саясаты жергілікті саяси жағдайларға және серіктестік режимдердің тұрақтылығына сәйкес реттеледі. Египетте қарым-қатынастар, ең алдымен, ынтымақтастықтың салыстырмалы түрде тұрақты негізін құрайтын экономикалық жобалар мен тұрақты саяси диалог арқылы қалыптасады. Сириядағы жағдай күрделірек болып көрінеді: бастапқыда тікелей әскери қолдаумен анықталған Ресейдің рөлі біртіндеп дамыды, әсіресе 2024 жылдың аяғындағы саяси өзгерістерден кейін – келіссөздер мен шартты қатысуға қарай. Йеменде, керісінше, Ресей қақтығысқа тікелей қатысудан гөрі дипломатиялық өзара әрекеттесу мен гуманитарлық мәселелерге назар аударатырып, салыстырмалы түрде ұстамды көзқарасты ұстанады.

Жалпы Ресейдің араб әлеміндегі ұстанымын біркелкі немесе басым деп атауға болмайды. Ол контекстке тәуелді және халықаралық жүйеде кеңірек өзгерістермен ғана емес, сонымен қатар аймақтық ойыншылардың стратегияларымен де қалыптасады деп жақсы түсініледі. Бұл Мәскеудің шамадан тыс кеңеюден аулақ болып, стратегиялық икемділікті сақтай отырып, барған сайын көпполярлы ортада әрекет етуге тырысатынын көрсетеді..

Түйін сөздер: Ресей, араб әлемі, Мысыр, Сирия, Йемен, сыртқы саясат, халықаралық қатынастар, көпполярлық, экономикалық ынтымақтастық.

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Россия и арабский мир в условиях трансформации международного порядка: сравнительный анализ отношений России с Египтом, Сирией и Йеменом

В статье анализируется политика Российской Федерации в арабском мире в условиях трансформации международного порядка, характеризующейся ослаблением западного доминирования, формированием многополярной системы и ростом конкуренции между ведущими мировыми державами. В этих условиях Россия стремится расширить и диверсифицировать своё присутствие на Ближнем Востоке и в Северной Африке, позиционируя себя в качестве гибкого стратегического партнёра для арабских государств, ориентированных на укрепление внешнеполитической и экономической автономии.

В данном исследовании рассматриваются двусторонние отношения России с тремя арабскими странами – Египтом, Сирией и Йеменом – с целью изучения того, как формируются различные модели взаимодействия в регионе. Эти случаи были выбраны намеренно, поскольку они представляют собой различные формы взаимодействия, от относительно стабильного стратегического сотрудничества до более конфликтных и дипломатически осторожных подходов.

Анализ основан на сравнительной модели, структурированной вокруг четырех ключевых измерений: политическое и дипломатическое взаимодействие, экономическое и торговое сотрудничество, отношения в сфере безопасности и военного сотрудничества, а также культурные и гуманитарные связи. Для оценки глубины и характера участия России в каждом случае используются как качественные наблюдения, так и отдельные количественные показатели, хотя доступность и надежность данных различаются в разных странах.

Результаты показывают, что Россия не следует единой модели политики на Ближнем Востоке. Вместо этого ее политика корректируется в соответствии с местными политическими условиями и стабильностью партнерских режимов. В Египте отношения формируются в первую очередь экономическими проектами и устойчивым политическим диалогом, которые вместе образуют относительно стабильную основу для сотрудничества. Ситуация в Сирии выглядит более сложной: роль России, первоначально определявшаяся прямой военной поддержкой, постепенно эволюционировала – особенно после политических изменений конца 2024 года – в сторону более переговорного и условного присутствия. В Йемене, напротив, Россия придерживается от-

носителем сдержанного подхода, сосредоточившись на дипломатическом взаимодействии и гуманитарных вопросах, а не на прямом участии в конфликте.

В целом, позицию России в арабском мире нельзя назвать единообразной или доминирующей. Ее лучше понимать как зависящую от контекста и формирующуюся не только более широкими преобразованиями в международной системе, но и стратегиями самих региональных игроков. Это говорит о том, что Москва пытается действовать во все более многополярной среде, избегая чрезмерного расширения и сохраняя стратегическую гибкость.

Ключевые слова: Россия, арабский мир, Египет, Сирия, Йемен, внешняя политика, международные отношения, многополярность, экономическое сотрудничество.

Introduction

The early twenty first century has brought a re-distribution of power across the international system, with regional actors and non-Western coalitions shaping outcomes once dominated by a single pole (Lo, 2015; Moeini et al. 2022). In this context, Russia has re-engaged the Arab world through pragmatic diplomacy, selective hard power, and economic outreach reflecting lessons from the post-Soviet period and recent regional upheavals. The Arab uprisings and proxy conflicts created new openings and constraints for external powers. Russia's choices have sought to balance risk and opportunity while positioning Moscow as a reliable interlocutor for governments prioritizing regime stability, security cooperation, and insulated economic projects.

This article uses three cases to capture variation in Russia's approach. Egypt represents a large state with diversified economic potential and complex security needs. Syria illustrates a wartime alliance that elevated Moscow's role in conflict management and post conflict bargaining. Yemen offers a platform where Russia has maintained diplomatic presence and humanitarian engagement while avoiding deep military entanglement. Comparing these cases across common dimensions allows us to move beyond single country narratives and identify how Moscow calibrates policy instruments to different partner profiles.

Several claims structure the inquiry. First, Russia's engagement is path dependent but not confined to Cold War alignments. Second, policy choices reflect assessments of regime durability, geographic access, and third-party competition. Third, instruments of influence are modular and recombinable, explaining variation in depth and tempo across the three relationships. Finally, outcomes are shaped not only by Moscow's preferences but also by the room for maneuver available to Arab governments seeking external backing without surrendering autonomy.

Literature review

Scholarship on Russia's engagement with Arab states has evolved from post-Cold War retrenchment narratives toward analyses of renewed regional activism combining diplomacy, security instruments, and economic outreach. A major strand focuses on Syria (Ahmed, & Nair, 2025; Hamilton, Wilde, & Wimberly, 2021; Ma'oz, 2023; Mikail, 2021) as the pivotal case that reshaped perceptions of Moscow's reliability as a partner and crisis manager and on Egypt (Al-Hamati, 2022; Ofek, 2017; Springborg, & Williams, 2021; Taha, 2024), with which Russia has historically developed pragmatic relations. Yemen has attracted far less attention in Russia-focused scholarship, yet regional studies show how Moscow maintains a low-intensity diplomatic profile through humanitarian narratives and multilateral engagement, preserving options for future political and economic involvement (Issaev, & Korotayev, 2020; Kłyszcz, 2025).

Building on this, studies of regional order making depict Syria as a testing ground for selective risk taking and coalition building with local regimes seeking external support without surrendering autonomy.

Researchers also emphasize Russia's promotion of a multipolar world order aimed at revising elements of Western dominance and asserting itself as a peer among major powers. This vision resonates in parts of the Global South, including Arab states that often view Western leadership as selective or inequitable (Dalay, 2022; Trenin, 2018).

Across these literatures, a common theme links Russia's Middle East policy to status seeking, strategic autonomy, and the management of asymmetries with Western coalitions. While these works note the modular and adaptive character of Russian influence, they rarely apply a unified comparative framework across political-diplomatic, economic, security, and cultural-humanitarian dimensions. This study addresses that gap by employing a struc-

tured four-lens comparison of Egypt, Syria, and Yemen.

Materials and methods

This study analyzes Russia's relations with Egypt, Syria, and Yemen. Each case reflects a distinct engagement profile, with Egypt a strategic partner, Syria a former military ally, and Yemen a diplomatic mediator.

Each case is assessed along four dimensions:

- political-diplomatic engagement
- economic-trade ties,
- security-military cooperation, and
- cultural-humanitarian links.

Evidence draws on primary sources (official documents, trade and defense data, UN records, government statements) and secondary sources (academic studies, policy reports, and media analyses, 2020–2025). To translate qualitative evidence into comparable results, the study applies a simple scoring scheme: for each dimension, measurable indicators (high-level visits, trade volumes, arms transfers, cultural exchanges) are compiled and compared across cases; performances are then classified as Low (1), Medium (2), or High (3) based on relative intensity, recent trends, and corroborated qualitative judgments.

Russia and Egypt

Russia's political relationship with Egypt has deepened significantly over the past decade (Al-Anani, 2021), reaching an institutionalized peak with the signing of a Comprehensive Partnership and

Strategic Cooperation Agreement in 2018, which came into force in 2021 (Presidential Library). This agreement elevated bilateral ties to a strategic level and established a framework for regular high-level consultations across political, security, and economic spheres.

Economic cooperation forms another cornerstone of the Russia–Egypt partnership, driven by large-scale projects and expanding trade volumes. A prominent example is the construction of Egypt's first nuclear power plant at El Dabaa by Russia's state corporation Rosatom, a \$26 billion project scheduled for completion by 2028, symbolizing Moscow's long-term role in Egypt's energy infrastructure. Bilateral trade surpassed \$5 billion in 2023, underscoring Egypt's position as a leading economic partner. The trade balance reflects complementarity: Egypt exports agricultural and manufactured goods, while Russia supplies key commodities, including wheat, which plays a vital role in Egypt's food security.

Security and military cooperation between Moscow and Cairo have a long historical lineage rooted in the Soviet–Egyptian alliance of the 1950s to 1970s, with ties reviving strongly since 2013. Seeking to diversify its arms suppliers, Egypt has become one of Russia's major defense clients, acquiring MiG-29M and Su-35 fighter jets, helicopters, air defense systems, and coastal missile platforms. Despite U.S. pressure, Cairo has pursued these deals, underscoring its strategic autonomy in defense procurement. Annual meetings of the Joint Military Cooperation Committee and the “Defenders of Friendship” airborne exercises since 2016 have reinforced military interoperability.

Table 1. Russia–Egypt Economic Snapshot (Trade and Wheat, 2020–2025)

Indicator	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 (Est.)
Bilateral trade turnover (USD, billions)	3.9	4.1	4.7	5.6	6.6	7.5–9.0
Major Russian exports to Egypt	wheat, grain, oil products	wheat, fertilizers, grain	wheat, oil, metals	oil products, wheat, machinery	wheat, fertilizers, oil products	same mix, slight growth
Major Egyptian exports to Russia	fruits, textiles	fruits, vegetables, clothing	fruits, textiles, chemicals	vegetables, textiles	fruits, textiles, manufactured goods	fruits & manufactured goods
Flagship project value	El Dabaa nuclear, \$25B	ongoing construction phases	reactor component deliveries start	accelerated financing & works	core component installation	major civil works phase

Continuation of the table

Indicator	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 (Est.)
Russian direct investment flows (USD)	60M	75M	85M	91.5M	95–110M	120M
Russian tourists to Egypt	0.5M (pandemic impact)	1.0M (routes reopen)	1.2M	1.5M	1.3–1.4M (post-2024 disruptions)	1.5M projected recovery

Source: Al-Anani (2021); The Egyptian Center for Economic Studies (2025)

Cultural and humanitarian relations form the social foundation of the bilateral partnership, building on decades of goodwill from Soviet assistance during Egypt's postcolonial development. Both governments have worked to deepen cultural and educational exchange, with 2020 designated as the "Year of Human and Cultural Interaction," promoting exhibitions and academic partnerships, though some initiatives were postponed due to the pandemic. Educational collaboration is significant, with around 16000 Egyptian students enrolled in Russian universities in 2023 (HED magazine, 2023), alongside the establishment of new branches of Russian technical institutions in Egypt. Russian language programs are also expanding in Egyptian universities.

Russia and Syria

Russia and Syria formed an alliance during the civil war, with Russia backing the Syrian government politically since 2011 and intervening militarily in 2015. Moscow's support for President Bashar al-Assad included vetoing unfavorable UN Security Council resolutions and reflects both historical ties from the Cold War period and Russia's con-

temporary strategic calculus of preventing regime change by Western or Islamist forces. Diplomatically, Russia has shielded Syria on the world stage by repeatedly using its UN veto power, emphasizing principles of sovereignty and non-intervention (Hinnebusch, & Saouli, 2019). In 2023, when Syria was readmitted to the Arab League after years of regional isolation, Moscow publicly welcomed the decision as a validation of engagement with Damascus. Overall, the political bond is one of patron and client, with Russia's diplomatic and political capital heavily invested in Syria and the government's international legitimacy and reconstruction prospects closely linked to Russian advocacy.

The economic dimension of Russia–Syria relations, while secondary to the military aspect, has grown in importance as attention shifts toward reconstruction and long-term influence. Syria's economy has been severely damaged by more than a decade of war, losing an estimated hundreds of billions of dollars in GDP.

Table 2 summarizes the main indicators. These include bilateral trade, major export categories, reconstruction activity, cultural outreach, and humanitarian aid.

Table 2. Russia and Syria, key indicators 2020 to 2024

Indicator	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Bilateral trade, USD millions	150	180	420	980	1100
Top Russian exports	wheat, fuel	wheat, fuel	wheat, fuel	wheat, fuel	wheat, fuel
Top Syrian exports	citrus, olives	citrus, phosphates	citrus, olives	citrus, phosphates	citrus, phosphates

Source: Russia's Pivot to Asia (2024)

The security relationship between Russia and Syria has been the linchpin of their ties. In late 2015, at Syria's request, Russia launched a military intervention that significantly altered the course of the civil war. Russian Aerospace Forces operate from

Hmeimim Air Base in Latakia, while the Russian Navy uses the Tartus naval facility. Russia's military involvement in Syria went beyond symbolic support and developed into a relatively comprehensive form of cooperation with government forces. It included

the use of air power, intelligence sharing, advisory roles, and logistical coordination. Over time, this interaction became increasingly structured, at times resembling an integrated command arrangement with the Syrian Arab Army. Alongside this, Russia deployed more advanced military capabilities, such as Su-34 strike aircraft and S-400 air defense systems, which significantly expanded its operational reach. By around 2018, these efforts had contributed to the Syrian government regaining control over most major population centers. In this context, the long-term basing agreements at Hmeimim and Tartus can be seen not only as military assets but also as part of a broader strategic foothold, marking Russia's return to sustained power projection in the region after the Soviet period.

At the same time, it became increasingly clear that military instruments alone would not be sufficient to secure lasting influence. Russia therefore began to place greater emphasis on softer forms of engagement. Following the 2015 intervention, the Russian language was introduced in Syrian schools as a second foreign language, and educational exchanges expanded. By the early 2020s, tens of thousands of Syrian students were studying Russian, while several thousand enrolled annually in Russian universities. These initiatives were supported through scholarships, teaching staff, and educational materials, contributing to a growing cultural and institutional presence.

The political changes of December 2024 marked a significant shift in this trajectory. The collapse of Bashar al-Assad's government forced Moscow to reconsider the foundations of its engagement in Syria. Rather than relying on a single partner, Russia found itself navigating a more fragmented political environment. In practical terms, this led to a gradual transition from a model based on direct military patronage toward a more negotiated and conditional presence. While securing access to key facilities such as Hmeimim and Tartus remained a priority, Russia also entered into discussions with emerging actors regarding security arrangements, future cooperation, and economic involvement. As a result, its position in Syria has become less straightforward and increasingly dependent on ongoing bargaining, rather than on alignment with a single centralized authority.

Russia and Yemen

Russia's engagement with Yemen differs markedly from its roles in Egypt and Syria, both in scope and in the instruments it employs. Since the escalation of the Yemeni civil war in 2014, Moscow has largely avoided direct involvement, instead focusing on maintaining diplomatic flexibility. Its approach has been aimed at preserving communication channels with a wide range of actors rather than aligning itself firmly with any single side.

Formally, Russia continues to recognize Yemen's internationally acknowledged government, currently represented by the Presidential Leadership Council. At the same time, it has maintained contacts with other key players, including the Houthi movement in Sana'a and the Southern Transitional Council in Aden. This pattern of engagement reflects a deliberate effort to balance competing relationships while limiting exposure to the risks associated with deeper political or military involvement. In this sense, Russia's role can be described less as that of a decisive external actor and more as that of a cautious intermediary seeking to retain relevance in a highly fragmented conflict environment.

This balancing approach is also reflected in Russia's behavior at the international level and in the evolution of its diplomatic representation. Over the past decade, Moscow has adjusted its position in response to developments both within Yemen and in the broader regional context.

In table 3 Key Security Council actions and representation changes that anchor Moscow's balancing diplomacy.

Before the war, Yemen was already one of the poorest Arab countries, and the conflict has only worsened its economic indicators. Consequently, Russia–Yemen trade and investment are minimal relative to the other case studies. As of the mid-2020s, annual bilateral trade is estimated at only around \$400 million (Russia's Pivot to Asia, 2025).

Table 4 gives a short view of key economic and cooperation trends in Russia Yemen relations from 2020 to 2025. The values show stable growth in trade, steady project work, and rising educational links.

Table 3. Russia–Yemen Diplomatic Milestones and Representation (2015–2025)

Event	Year	Outcome
UNSC Resolution 2216 vote	2015	Russia abstained, remaining the only Security Council member not to support the resolution
Veto of UK-drafted UNSC text on Iran/Yemen	2018	Russia blocked the draft resolution, citing concerns over its wording and implications
Embassy status in Sana'a	2017	Embassy operations suspended; diplomatic staff relocated to Riyadh
Appointment of a new Russian ambassador to Yemen	2025	Yevgeny Kudrov appointed to the post
Establishment of an intergovernmental commission on trade and economic cooperation	2025	Agreement reached to convene the first session

Source: *Russia's Pivot to Asia (2025) Russia–Yemen bilateral relations: October 2025 update.* 2025.

URL: <https://russiaspivottoasia.com/russia-yemen-bilateral-relations-october-2025-update/> (accessed: 02.11.2025)

Table 4. Russia–Yemen Bilateral Trade, Investment, and Humanitarian Indicators (2020–2025)

Indicator	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 (Est.)
Bilateral trade turnover (USD, millions)	120	140	210	300	420	300–450
Major Russian exports to Yemen	cereals, fuel	cereals, fuel, medicines	wheat, fuel	fuel, wheat, medical supplies	cereals (wheat), fuel, medical supplies	same basket
Major Yemeni exports to Russia	coffee, seafood	coffee, honey	seafood, coffee	coffee, limited agri goods	coffee (Mokha), small seafood	same limited exports

Source: Mokha Center (2025)

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union maintained a substantial economic presence in South Yemen through infrastructure, industrial, and port projects. Although many of these initiatives have since deteriorated, elements of historical goodwill remain. In the post-Soviet period, large-scale Russian investment has been constrained by Yemen's instability, despite earlier interest in oil, gas, and liquefied natural gas projects in the 2000s that were later suspended as conflict intensified.

Russia's direct military and security engagement in Yemen is minimal, reflecting a deliberate strategy of avoiding entanglement in a fragmented war. Unlike in Syria or Egypt, Moscow maintains no troops, bases, or significant arms cooperation, relying instead on diplomatic and multilateral channels. Its main security role has focused on promot-

ing ceasefires, negotiated settlements, and counterterrorism in international forums.

Cultural and humanitarian ties also remain limited, yet Soviet-era connections continue to shape perceptions among older South Yemeni elites who studied in the USSR and retain familiarity with Russian language and culture, sustaining a residual level of goodwill despite the absence of large-scale contemporary exchanges.

Comparative analysis

Table 5 summarizes Russia's engagement across Egypt, Syria, and Yemen in four key dimensions. It highlights how Moscow's approach varies – from strategic partnership in Egypt and military alliance in Syria to diplomatic neutrality in Yemen.

Table 5. Comparative Summary of Russia's Relations with Egypt, Syria, and Yemen

Dimension	Egypt	Syria	Yemen
Political / Diplomatic	The relationship has reached the level of a strategic partnership (formally declared in 2018), with regular high-level presidential contacts. At the same time, Egypt continues to avoid rigid alignment and maintains a multi-vector foreign policy.	Russia's political influence has weakened compared to the peak period of its involvement. After the developments of late 2024, its role appears more constrained and increasingly dependent on engagement with new political actors.	Russia's political influence has weakened compared to the peak period of its involvement. After the developments of late 2024, its role appears more constrained and increasingly dependent on engagement with new political actors.
Economic / Trade	Economic ties remain substantial. Trade turnover fluctuates around \$5–6 billion, supported by major projects such as the El Dabaa nuclear power plant and the Suez industrial zone. Grain exports also play a key role for Egypt's food security.	Economic interaction remains limited due to the consequences of prolonged conflict. Trade volumes are modest (around \$1 billion), while reconstruction initiatives continue to face delays and uncertainty.	Economic cooperation is minimal. Trade is estimated at below \$0.5 billion and is largely limited to basic commodities such as grain, with virtually no major investment activity.
Security / Military	Military cooperation is present but not dominant. It includes arms contracts and periodic joint exercises, while no permanent Russian military presence exists on Egyptian territory.	This remains the most pronounced dimension of Russia's involvement. Military infrastructure, including bases in Khmeimim and Tartus, continues to underpin its position in the country.	There is no direct military involvement. Russia avoids security commitments on the ground, limiting its role to political statements and general counterterrorism discourse.
Cultural / Humanitarian	Cultural and educational exchanges have been gradually expanding, alongside tourism flows and joint academic initiatives.	Soft power instruments play a visible role, including language programs, scholarships, and humanitarian assistance, particularly in the post-conflict context.	Interaction in this sphere remains limited. While some residual goodwill from the Soviet period persists, current engagement is mostly confined to small-scale humanitarian efforts.

Source: The table compiled by the authors

This comparison shows that among the three cases, Russia's partnership with Syria is the most intensive and multidimensional, that dominates in both political and security spheres. Egypt demonstrates a strong and diversified relationship, particularly visible in economic cooperation and sustained diplomatic dialogue, yet it remains more balanced and pragmatic. Yemen stands apart as a case of cautious engagement, where Russia's role is largely diplomatic and humanitarian, with only limited economic and military involvement.

The collapse of Assad's government compels a reassessment of the Russian–Syria relationship. Russia no longer supports a single centralized leadership. Instead, it must adapt to a transitional power structure that includes Islamist groups, former opposition factions, and a provisional government. This change reduces Moscow's capacity for unilateral control but offers new opportunities for brokering reconstruction deals, securing bases, and re-estab-

lishing economic influence through negotiated cooperation rather than military dominance.

The analysis of Russia's engagement with Egypt, Syria, and Yemen suggests that Moscow's approach to the Middle East cannot be reduced to a single coherent strategy. Rather, it appears to be shaped by a combination of situational pragmatism and longer-term geopolitical considerations. In this sense, Russia's regional behavior reflects not so much a predefined model as a set of adaptive practices that respond to different political and security environments.

From the perspective of Russian policymakers, the key issue is how to sustain influence under increasingly diverse and, at times, unstable conditions. The Syrian case is particularly illustrative. While Russia's military intervention in 2015 played a decisive role in stabilizing the Assad government, the current phase seems to require a different toolkit. It is becoming increasingly evident that long-term

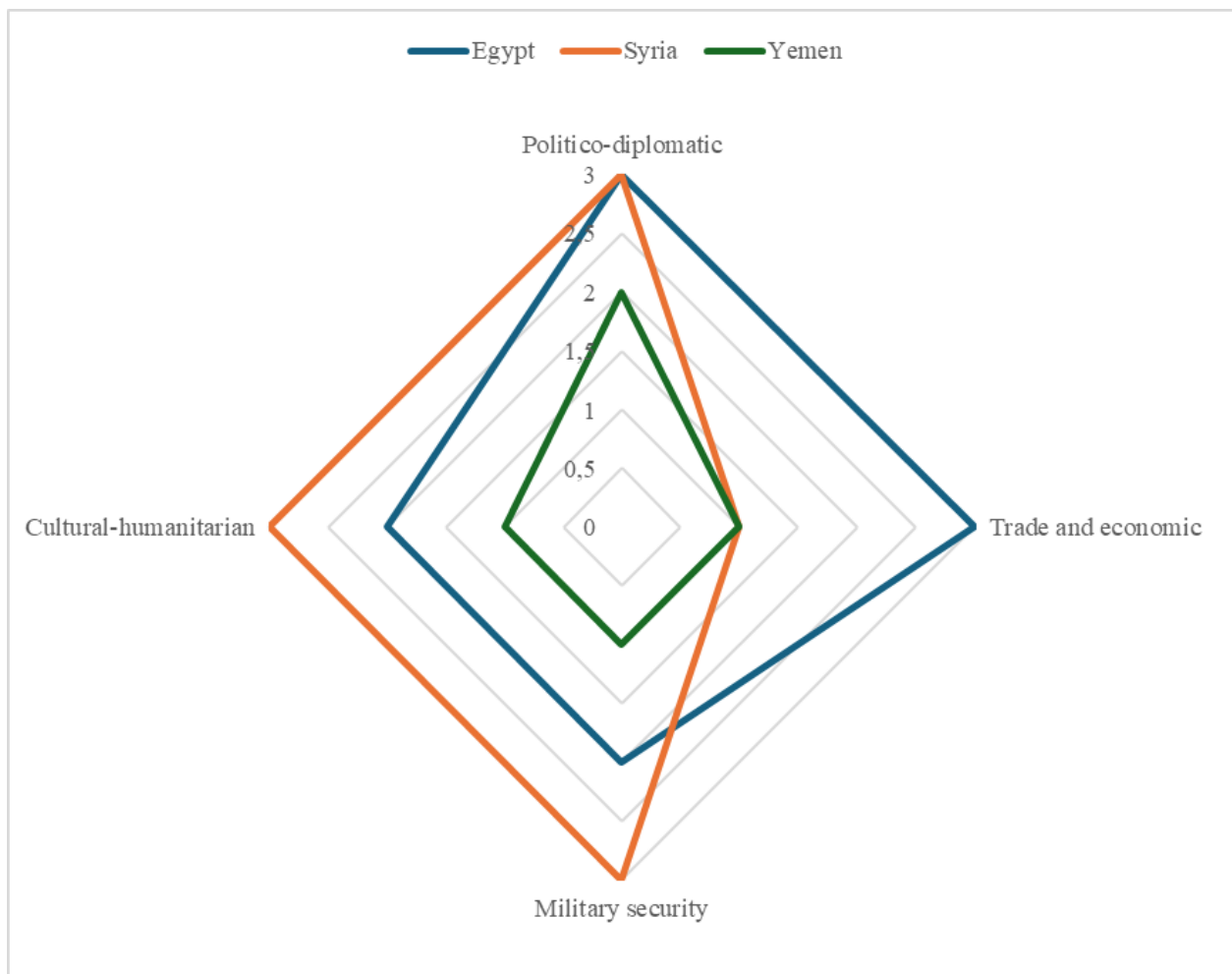
influence depends not only on military presence but also on the ability to engage in political processes and, where possible, contribute to reconstruction efforts. At the same time, the limits of such involvement – including financial constraints and international sanctions – cannot be ignored.

In Egypt, the situation looks markedly different. Here, cooperation has developed in a more structured and institutionalized manner, especially in areas such as energy and defense. However, it would be an oversimplification to interpret this partnership as a sign of exclusive alignment. Egypt continues to pursue a multi-vector foreign policy, balancing its relations with multiple global actors. This, in turn,

places implicit limits on the depth of Russian influence and requires a more nuanced and cautious approach from Moscow.

Yemen represents yet another configuration, where Russia's role remains comparatively restrained. Unlike in Syria, Moscow has avoided direct military involvement, opting instead for diplomatic engagement and participation in international humanitarian efforts. This strategy may appear limited in terms of immediate impact, but it arguably allows Russia to maintain a degree of political flexibility and avoid entanglement in a highly fragmented conflict. Whether this approach can translate into long-term influence remains an open question.

Figure 1. Comparison of Russia's Relations across Four Dimensions



Source: The figure compiled by the authors.

Revised Policy Implications and Recommendations

For regional actors themselves, engagement with Russia is best understood as part of a broader effort to diversify external partnerships. In an increasingly multipolar environment, reliance on a single external power is often seen as a strategic vulnerability. Egypt's cooperation with Russia, for example, can be interpreted in this light – not as a shift away from other partners, but as an attempt to expand its room for maneuver. In Syria, external involvement, including that of Russia, continues to shape the prospects for reconstruction and political normalization, although the outcomes remain uncertain. In Yemen, Russia's diplomatic presence adds another layer to an already complex network of external actors, offering additional, albeit limited, channels for dialogue.

From a Western perspective, Russia's role in the Middle East has, over time, become a relatively stable feature of the regional landscape. This raises an important question: to what extent should this presence be contested or accommodated? Efforts to fully exclude Russia from regional processes are unlikely to be effective and may even contribute to greater fragmentation. A more pragmatic approach could involve selective engagement in areas where interests overlap. These may include humanitarian assistance, counterterrorism, and certain aspects of post-conflict recovery.

That said, such coordination should not be viewed as a straightforward solution. It is likely to remain partial, situational, and shaped by broader geopolitical tensions. Nevertheless, even limited forms of interaction within multilateral frameworks could help reduce the risks associated with unmanaged competition. Ultimately, the effectiveness of these mechanisms will depend not only on institutional design but also on the willingness of key actors to engage in sustained and, at times, difficult dialogue.

Conclusion

Russia's relations with Egypt, Syria, and Yemen provide a useful lens through which to examine how Moscow has re-established its presence in the Middle East. Rather than following a single strategic blueprint, Russia appears to rely on a set of context-dependent approaches. In Syria, especially by the mid-2020s, its role has been gradually evolving: what initially took the form of a close military alliance is increasingly complemented by

efforts to position itself as a political intermediary and stakeholder in reconstruction processes. This involves navigating between security commitments, economic interests, and engagement with emerging political actors. At the same time, Russia's partnership with Egypt has developed along more stable and institutionalized lines, while its involvement in Yemen remains cautious and largely diplomatic in nature.

If one looks more closely, several observations can be made. To begin with, the intensity and format of Russia's bilateral relations vary depending on how Moscow defines its interests in each specific case. Syria stands out as the most resource-intensive direction, combining military, political, and symbolic investments. Egypt, by contrast, represents a model of influence built through economic cooperation, arms deals, and sustained diplomatic contacts, without pushing the relationship toward exclusivity. Yemen occupies a different place altogether: here, Russia has preferred to avoid deep involvement, limiting itself to mediation efforts and humanitarian engagement. Such variation suggests that flexibility, rather than consistency, is a defining feature of Russia's regional behavior.

At the same time, Russia's policy in the Middle East unfolds within a broader international context that both creates opportunities and imposes constraints. On the one hand, rising global tensions might have been expected to reduce Moscow's room for maneuver. On the other hand, many states in the region have avoided openly isolating Russia. This can be seen in continued economic interaction, relatively neutral diplomatic positioning, and voting patterns in international organizations that do not always align with Western expectations. Taken together, these trends point to a certain resilience of Russia's regional ties and reflect a wider shift toward a more fragmented, and arguably more multipolar, international order.

Looking ahead, Russia's ability to maintain and expand its role in the Middle East will likely depend on how it balances assertiveness with cooperation. Full integration into multilateral initiatives related to peacebuilding, reconstruction, and security could strengthen its position and make its involvement more sustainable. Conversely, if interaction with other external actors becomes increasingly confrontational, this may limit Russia's options and contribute to further fragmentation in the region. In that scenario, regional states themselves could face renewed pressure as great-power competition intensifies.

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