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RUSSIAN A2AD STRATEGY IN SYRIA – BREAKING DIPLOMATIC ISOLATION

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INTRODUCTION

The Syrian conflict started in March 2011 when civil demonstrations sparked off a revolution against President al-Assad that soon escalated into a civil war. Western democracies accused President al-Assad's forces of committing atrocities, while China, Iran and Russia remained sceptical of Western intentions.[1] When President Putin started the 2015 Russian intervention in Syria upon President al-Assad's request, Russia's position with regard to diplomatic relations with the international community was already at an all time low, due to Moscow's support to the rebels in the Ukrainian Donbas region and its illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014.

The Russian decision to support al-Assad militarily in Syria led to a deployment of military forces in September 2015 with the intention to prevent the fall of the Syrian regime. The Russian presence was reinforced almost immediately through the installation of Anti-Access Area-Denial (A2AD) systems. These A2AD capabilities enabled Russia to assert control over the conflict in Syria and to leverage its military presence in order to break the diplomatic isolation by the West. This created a dilemma for the West as Russia and the Coalition against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) were trying to achieve different end states.[2] These opposed political goals and the presence of Russian

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[1] Joseph Lutta, "How Russian Intervention in Syria redefined the Right to Protect in armed conflict," *Russian Law Journal* VI, no. 2 (2018): 17.

[2] The Coalition against ISIL is also known as Global Coalition against Daesh and was formed in September 2014. The Coalition is committed to degrading and ultimately defeating ISIL/ Daesh. The Coalition's 79 members are committed to tackling ISIL/ Daesh on all fronts, to dismantle its networks and to counter its global ambitions. Beyond the military campaign in Iraq and Syria, it is tackling Daesh's financing and economic infrastructure; preventing the flow of foreign terrorist fighters across borders; supporting stabilisation and the restoration of essential public services to areas liberated from Daesh; and countering the group's propaganda. Global Coalition, "Welcome to the Global Coalition against DAESH." Last accessed on 29 April 2019, https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/

military assets in Syria necessitated de-confliction at the operational and tactical levels to avoid dangerous confrontations over Syria that might have created wider-reaching unintended political consequences. They also forced the involved parties to include Moscow at the negotiating table, as Russia had become a player with significant influence over the conflict.

This essay argues that Russia used the argument of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) to intervene in Syria and that Russia utilized its A2AD capabilities to support its own strategic objectives by preventing the Coalition from decisively influencing the outcome of the civil war and forcing the Coalition to re-open diplomatic channels with Russia. At first R2P will be briefly defined and put into context of the Syrian civil war. Then Russia's intervention and implementation of A2AD in Syria will be outlined and explain how it supported to break the Russian diplomatic isolation in the international relations.[3]

RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT IN SYRIA

In the Syrian conflict, R2P was a highly debated topic, that presented the United Nations (UN) with a difficult challenge. R2P in international humanitarian law is defined as a doctrine for humanitarian intervention "…under which one or more states may take actions inside the territory of another state in order to protect those who are experiencing serious human rights persecution, up to and including attempts at genocide."[4] After the Western driven intervention in Libya in 2011, Russia and China vetoed all UN resolutions

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[3] Robert Mason, "Russia in Syria: An unequivocal return to the Middle East?" *Middle East Policy*, XXV, no.4 (Winter 2018), 105.
[4] Lutta, "How Russian Intervention in Syria redefined the Right to Protect in armed conflict," 11.

regarding military intervention in Syria, assuming that the western countries would again try to force a regime change through the pretext of R2P.[5] Without a UN resolution on Syria, the Coalition had to find a different legal basis for its intervention. The mostly western Coalition started the campaign against ISIL already in 2014 and supported moderate rebel forces in Iraq and Syria with logistics, intelligence, reconnaissance and close air support. In the wake of the 2015 Paris terrorist attacks, the UN Security Council passed resolution 2249 (2015) calling upon UN member states to take all necessary actions to prevent future attacks from ISIL[6]. This resolution became then the legal reference for the counter-ISIL coalition. Due to the Coalitions support, these forces soon started to present a threat to the Syrian regime due to their advance towards Damascus and thus, in direct opposition to coalition efforts, became a target of Russian actions and air strikes.[7]

Meanwhile Russia argued that its support to Assad's regime fully fell under the remits of R2P, as Syria had requested Russian assistance to counter the anti-Assad rebel threat.[8] In Russia's view this was a legitimate request from an allied government. Some scholars argue that Russia fulfilled all three major pillars of R2P during its intervention: the responsibility to prevent atrocities by tackling the root causes, which were seen by Russia as the threat posed by the anti-regime forces; responding to humanitarian concerns

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[5] Lutta, "How Russian Intervention in Syria redefined the Right to Protect in armed conflict," 15.
[6] UN Security Council. Resolution 2249 (2015), S/RES/2249 (2015) at 7565th Meeting, 20 November 2015, Last accessed 27 April 2019. https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2249.pdf
[7] Christopher Phillips, *The battle for Syria: International rivalry in the new middle east (*London: Yale University Press 2016), 214.
[8] ibid. 218.

and providing humanitarian assistance to the population; and rebuilding the country through infrastructural development and support to post-conflict reconciliation.[9]

Clear deconfliction of concurrent operations under R2P between both sides was required and was initially established by a Russian general walking in to the US embassy in Iraq and informing on imminent Russian air strikes to enable the Coalition to move their forces out of the way. This initial contact developed over time into a commonly agreed upon deconfliction line along the Euphrates river and a deconfliction phone, which provided a direct line of communication between the operational headquarters.[10] After the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 had halted diplomatic relations, the initial Russian warning made the Coalition acknowledge the Russian presence and influence in Syria and forced the members of the Coalition back into diplomatic interactions with Moscow.

The argument can be made that "… the contradictory political motivations and competing objectives of the different parties led to a complicated conflict which might be escalated to a direct war between the intervening main powers."[11] Both, Moscow's and Coalition forces operated simultaneously in the same area using R2P as legal justification. These concurrent activities could easily have led to misunderstandings on the battlefield

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[9] Lutta, "How Russian Intervention in Syria redefined the Right to Protect in armed conflict," 13-14.

[10] Phillips, Christopher. *The battle for Syria: International rivalry in the new middle east* (London: Yale University Press, 2016), 218; and Joseph Threvithick,"Russian Su-25 Almost Hits US F-22 During Intercept Over Syria, But Is There More Going On*?" The War Zone*. 04 December 2017, last accessed 15 April 2019. https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/17000/russian-su-25-almost-hits-us-f-22-during-intercept-over-syria-but-is-there-more-going-on

[11] Lutta, "How Russian Intervention in Syria redefined the Right to Protect in armed conflict," 13-14; Zeinab A. Ahmed,"Russian Role in Syria in the Light of its Strategy towards the Middle East (2015-2018)," *Eurasian Journal of Social Sciences* 6, no.3 (2018): 45.

and unintended consequences beyond the Syrian conflict, which the international

community and the coalition against ISIL wanted to prevent.

RUSSIAN A2AD IN SYRIA

Russia and Syria were allies during the Cold War and Russia continued to support

the Syrian regime after the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. It provided financial aid,

supplied weapons and ammunition to the regime forces and by the end of 2012 its support

went beyond pure logistics when, due to manpower shortages of the Syrian regime,

Russia started to man ex-Soviet type Syrian air defence systems.[12]

Several definitions for A2AD exist, but for this essay the description from the

Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment will be used, understanding that its

references to the United States (US) can represent any adversary. It proposed that the aim

of A2AD strategies was twofold if A2AD was intended " [...] to prevent US forces entry

into a theater of operations, then area-denial (AD) operations aim to prevent their freedom

of action in the more narrow confines of the area under an enemy's direct control."[13] In

contrast to others, this definition included offensive capabilities rather than focusing on

purely the defensive nature of A2AD. The definition fits well for Russian A2AD efforts

and doctrine, because a combination of significant offensive capabilities from tactical

ballistic missiles to fighter jets and defensive assets were already used by Russia in

Kaliningrad and to a lesser extent in Crimea. [14]

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[12] Emil Aslan Souleimanov and Valery Dzutsati, "Russia´s Syria War: A Strategic Trap?" *Middle East Policy* XXV, no. 2 (2018), 42.

[13] Andrew F. Krepinevich and Barry Watts, "Meeting the Anti-Access and Area-Denial Challenge," Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 20 May 2003, ii, https://csbaonline.org/research/publications/a2ad-anti-access-area-denial.

[14] Sergey Sukhankin, "From 'Bridge of Cooperation' to A2/AD 'Bubble': The Dangerous Transformation of Kaliningrad Oblast." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*. 31:1. (2018). 26-28.

The effective combination of offensive and defensive Russian capabilities in a layered approach to achieve or secure regional influence under Russia's interests was re-produced on the battlefield of Syria. The approach was to build on existing capabilities and then gradually add layers, depending on what the regional security situation, the relationships and the geography allowed.[15] The Russian Federation possessed maritime capabilities in Syria before 2015, and later acquisitioned the Hmeymin airfield followed by airfield facilities at al-Assad International Airport in Latakia.[16] These locations were then used to install Russian weapons systems, to position ground-attack and air-superiority fighters, electronic warfare and intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) assets with the intention of limiting or deterring further outside or coalition intervention while gaining influence and control over the conflict.[17] The following paragraphs will detail the use of A2AD in the maritime, air and space domains to underline the challenges faced by the coalition when operating in the same area.

Initially, Russia deployed a limited number of regular ground troops to relieve the Syrian regime from the pressure of the continuing advance of anti-Assad rebels. This also served to secure Russian access to Tartus, the only naval base outside the former Soviet Union.[18] The presence of Russian ground forces in the conflict presumably obligated the Coalition to alter its planning for strike operations, as its member states had to avoid

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[15] Jonathan Altman, "Russian A2/AD in the Eastern Mediterranean - A Growing Risk," *Naval War College Review* 69, no. 1, (Winter 2016), 74.

[16] Spyridon Litsas, "Russia in the Eastern Mediterranean: Intervention, Deterrence, Containment," *Digest of the Middle East Studies* 26, no. 1 (2016), p 61.

[17] Christopher Phillips, *The battle for Syria: International rivalry in the new middle east (*London: Yale University Press 2016), 217.

[18] Altman, "Russian A2/AD in the Eastern Mediterranean - A Growing Risk," 74.

Russian casualties during operations so as to not complicate the situation further. The Coalition continued to support anti-regime forces, but now had to consider the presence of Russian military forces in close proximity to the regime forces, which in the long term slowed and later reversed terrain gains of the anti-regime forces.

Access to the Mediterranean Sea played an important role in Russia's decision to intervene in Syria as it supported its ambition for great power status by increasing the Russian military presence and maritime reach in the region and by strengthening the perception of Russia as a major player in the Syrian conflict.[19] From 2016 on, Russia continued to increase its military presence in Syria by fortifying its air base Hmeymim and naval base in Tartus.[20] This enlarged footprint was supported by deployment of anti-ship cruise missiles, tactical and strategic airlift capabilities, unmanned aerial vehicles, rotary and fixed wing aircraft, as well as long range double-digit surface to air missiles.[21]

The port had been a navy sustainment centre in the Cold War, able to support all major warships except aircraft carriers, and the Russian navy displayed a permanent commitment to Syria through the temporary presence of a repair ship.[22] When access to the port was threatened by the approach of anti-government forces, Russia's move into Syria enabled them to maintain a footprint and secure direct access to the Mediterranean Sea. Through the increased presence and construction in Tartus during Russia's intervention, the Black Sea Fleet's (BSF) reach into the Eastern Mediterranean was

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[19] Altman, "Russian A2/AD in the Eastern Mediterranean - A Growing Risk," 74.

[20] Souleimanov and Dzutsati, "Russia´s Syria War: A Strategic Trap?" 44.

[21] Litsas, "Russia in the Eastern Mediterranean: Intervention, Deterrence, Containment," 61.

[22] Christopher Harmer, "Russian Naval Base Tartus," *Institute for the Study of War* 31 (July 2012), 1, http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Backgrounder_Russian_NavalBaseTartus.pdf.

extended. This directly contributed to the increase Russia's control of access to the Black Sea from the Mediterranean, with the BSF now being able to operate and resupply in the eastern Mediterranean while limiting or challenging Western naval influence in the region.[23]

Moscow had been modernizing the BSF since 2014. The BSF became a credible force as it had been expanded to more than 20 warships, boats and several submarines capable of carrying long-range cruise missiles and operating long-range air defence systems.[24] Several of its units were deployed to the Mediterranean and later conducted cruise missile strikes against ISIL and, to the surprise of the Coalition, anti-regime forces.[25] The precision strikes were conducted along with a major media campaign and supported the Russian narrative of support to the regime forces, while displaying to the Western world that Russia was closing the technological capability gap and was willing to use its newly acquired capacity.[26] The increased presence of Russian warships close to Syria and its demonstration of long-range precision strike capabilities was likely intended to create uncertainty for interventionist Western countries regarding the possible response of Russia.[27]

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[23] Litsas, "Russia in the Eastern Mediterranean: Intervention, Deterrence, Containment," 58.

[24] Giuvară, Florentin-Gabriel, "Air Command and Control in Anti Access/Area Denial Environment," Air Operational Component Command Vol. 1 (Bucharest: "Carol I" National Defence University, 2018), 224 – 232, https://search.proquest.com/docview/2043187418?pq-origsite=summon.

[25] Codrin Misaras and Florentin Nanu, "A2AD," *National Defence University*, (April 2018): 24.

[26] Roger N. Mc Dermott and Tor Bukkvoll, "Tools of Future Wars- Russia is Entering the Precision-Strike Regime" *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 31, no. 2 (2018): 211-212.

[27] Haaretz. "Russia Deploys New Cruise Missiles to Mediterranean Off Syrian Coast," , 06 November 2018, https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/syria/russia-deploys-new-cruise-missiles-to-mediterranean-off-syrian-coast-1.6619453.

Russia strengthened its A2AD capacity further through deployment of air assets at Hmeymin airport, which had been used by Moscow prior to the Syrian conflict and became the centre of all Russian air operations inside Syria. Russia took a step by step approach in the air domain, eventually creating an extensive air defence bubble and bringing fixed and rotary wing aircraft to Syria. Simultaneously, significant investments were made by Russia to enlarge the airport's capacity, including the creation of infrastructure such as concrete shelters, protective walls at parking positions, hangars and buildings for command and control nodes.[28]

Permanent or rotational deployments of Sukhoi (SU) fighter-bombers (SU-24, SU-25, SU-34) depended on the required support for ground forces. [29] The basing of air dominance fighters such as the SU-30, SU-35 and SU-57 were hard to explain as the rebels had no own aircraft to support them or threaten Russian or Syrian forces.[30] The task of the most modern Russian fighters was more to be a visible demonstration of Moscow's resolve to deny or limit the free access of the Coalition to Syrian airspace. This allowed the regime forces to recover, gain and consolidate terrain without being targeted by Coalition aircraft. The possibility to fit high-precision weapons and cruise missiles to these fighters was not excluded and provided significant additional offensive capabilities

[28] Joseph Threvithick, "Russia Releases First Official Video Of Its Su-57s On Their Absurdly Short Trip To Syria," *The War Zone,* 03 January 2018, https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/24997/russia-releases-first-official-video-of-its-su-57s-on-their-absurdly-short-trip-to-syria.

[29] Tyler Rogoway, "Report Says Multiple Aircraft At Russia's Air Base In Syria Destroyed an Attack (Updated)," *The War Zone,* 03 January 2018, https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/17350/report-says-multiple-aircraft-at-russias-air-base-in-syria-destroyed-in-attack´;

[30] David Axe, "Putin's Jets in Syria are a Threat to the U.S." *The Daily Beast*, New York. 30 September 2015; Threvithick, "Russia Releases First Official Video Of Its Su-57s On Their Absurdly Short Trip To Syria."

which directly influenced the air, ground and maritime situation in the Eastern

Mediterranean and increased the risk for adversary and coalition forces. This would be in

line with current Russian belief that these types of weapons become relevant in regional

and local conflicts.[31]

During a drone attacked by rebels at Hemymin airport, several Russian aircraft

were damaged and the deployment of additional anti-aircraft artillery was a logical

consequence.[32] The defence of the Syrian airspace and the Hmeymin airport was

strengthened by layered short-range and long-range ground-based air defense systems,

including S-300 and S-400 systems.[33] These long range systems, capable of multiple

engagements simultaneously, created an air surveillance and defence bubble that

extended well into the Mediterranean Sea. These systems were not suited to defend

against drones or mortar attacks, but possessed the ability to detect approaching aircraft

and cruise missiles well beyond Syria and also had the capability to deny or limit access

to Syrian airspace. Through these systems the Coalition was forced to adapt its air

operations, to interact operationally with Russia to create a procedural separation of the

battlespace along the Euphrat river, and to acknowledge the Russian presence at the

diplomatic level.[34]

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[31] Mc Dermott and Bukkvoll, "Tools of Future Wars- Russia is Entering the Precision-Strike Regime," 202-203.

[32] Rogoway, "Report Says Multiple Aircraft At Russia's Air Base In Syria Destroyed an Attack (Updated)."

[33] Tom Balmforth, "After U.S. Strikes Syrian Air Base, Russians Ask: Where Were Our Vaunted Air Defense Systems?"RadioFreeEurope RadioLiberty, 07 April 2017, https://www.rferl.org/a/weher-was-the-s-300-s-400-missile-defense-systems/28417014.html.

[34] Threvithick, "Russia Releases First Official Video Of Its Su-57s On Their Absurdly Short Trip To Syria."

The appearance of Russian electronic warfare equipment in theater, especially electronic warfare aircraft and Global Positioning System (GPS) jammers, added another dimension to the already-present A2AD capability.[35] Through denial of space GPS signals Russia was able to degrade the Coalition's precision strike capabilities within the affected area and to increase the risk of de-routing the navigation of GPS-based weapons and their delivery platforms. The electronic warfare environment directly affected Coalition operations in the air and impeded their progress on the ground by limiting ISR, targeting and precision strike activities.[36]

This combination of multi-domain capabilities only partially supported the fight against the anti-Assad rebel forces, as they possessed neither maritime surface combatants nor fixed wing aircraft to attack the regime forces, but led to an A2AD environment.[37] On the other hand, it directly affected the Coalition, which pre-dominantly relied on executing air strikes, as it now had to operate within reach of Russian air defence and naval weapon systems. The need to deconflict air operations with Russia in order to prevent an unintended escalation of the conflict became obvious when Turkey shot down a Russian SU-24 and, after Israeli airstrikes had been conducted earlier in the area, Syrian air defence systems mistakenly shot down a Russian aircraft.[38]

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[35] Ben Brimelow, "Syria Is Now 'The Most Aggressive Electronic Warfare Environment On The Planet,' SOCOM Says," *Task & Purpose*, 26 April 2018, https://taskandpurpose.com/syria-aircraft-disabled-electronic-warfare.

[36] Brimelow, "Syria Is Now 'The Most Aggressive Electronic Warfare Environment On The Planet,' SOCOM Says."

[37] David Axe, "Putin's Jets in Syria are a Threat to the U.S." *The Daily Beast*, New York. 30 September 2015.

[38] Zeinab A. Ahmed, "Russian Role in Syria in the Light of its Strategy towards the Middle East (2015-2018)," *Eurasian Journal of Social Sciences* 6, no. 3 (2018), ; Robert Mason, "Russia in Syria: An unequivocal return to the Middle East?" *Middle East Policy*, XXV, no.4 (Winter 2018), 110.

The force with which Russia decided to support the al-Assad regime altered the outcome of the war. Prior to the intervention the rebels were close to overthrowing the Syrian leader, but with Russian support regime forces were able to destroy the opposition's ability to fight.[39] Ultimately though, the deployment of Russian military equipment and expertise with its offensive and defensive capabilities created an A2AD environment for the Coalition forces, in which coordination was required to de-conflict operations and in which the Coalition was unable to deliver the required support to the moderate rebel forces to decisively defeat ISIL.

Twice, in March 2016 and December 2017 Russia announced a partial withdrawal from the conflict.[40] This announcement was influenced by losses of Russian ground troops that caused the Russian population to become concerned about the possibility of long-term military engagement in Syria.[41] This withdrawal served to present the international community with an opportunity to bring all warring parties to the negotiating table, and suggested that Russia was not fully committed to restoring Syrian territorial control and sovereignty with al-Assad as the country's leader.[42] As a logical consequence to its withdrawal, Russia called for peace talks but the desired outcomes were not achieved because Western countries declined to participate.[43]

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[39] Zeinab A. Ahmed, "Russian Role in Syria in the Light of its Strategy towards the Middle East (2015-2018)."

[40] Mason, "Russia in Syria: An unequivocal return to the Middle East?" 105.

[41] Souleimanov and Dzutsati, "Russia´s Syria War: A Strategic Trap?" 45.

[42] Ralph Shield, "Russian Airpower's Success in Syria: Assessing Evolution in Kinetic Counterinsurgency," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 31, no. 2 (08 April 2018), 253.

[43] Lutta, "How Russian Intervention in Syria redefined the Right to Protect in armed conflict," 27.

The prevention of the fall of al-Assad might be one reason why Russia chose to support the Syrian regime with military force. Other reasons could have been that Russia pursued far more pragmatic intentions than supporting a failing regime. Several strategic goals were achieved due to Russia's presence in the Syrian conflict, including the establishment of a zone of influence, deflecting attention from the Russia-Ukraine crisis, and to allow Russia to be seen as participating as a valuable member of the international community by supporting the fight against ISIL by offering itself as a broker for conflict negotiations.[44] Lastly, the demonstration of Russia's modern military capabilities served as a warning to the West as well as an advertisement for potential future exports.

Dr. Mason, director of the Middle East Center in Cairo, provided a differing viewpoint and argued that, as a result of economic hardship, Russia was actually looking for new regional relationships, including with regional powers like Iran and Turkey, with the goal of securing access to natural gas resources, supply networks and increased defence cooperation.[45] This was a plausible reason for Russia's involvement in Syria, but the long standing relationship and existing support to al-Assad would have already created favourable conditions for privileged Russian access to energy infrastructure, resources and future defence cooperation in the region.

CONCLUSION

Moscow's perception of the Western use of the concept of R2P in Libya was to achieve regime change and to secure Western influence, so Putin used the argument of

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[44] Bastian Giegerich, "NATO's Strategic Adaption, the Warsaw Summit and beyond," *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, no. 1 (2016), 64.
[45] Mason, "Russia in Syria: An unequivocal return to the Middle East?", 104-105.

R2P in combination with al-Assad's request for assistance as legal justification to intervene in Syria. Russia interpreted R2P in its favor and deployed military capabilities, including credible A2AD, to ensure the survival of the current regime and to gain influence in the Eastern Mediterranean region. By denying the Coalition freedom of action over Syria and forcing the Coalition and international community to accept Russian influence, the political and diplomatic perception of Russia was changed. Russia became a major factor in the outcome of Syria's civil war and secured its influence in the future peace negotiation process and in diplomatic talks regarding Syria.

The Russian forces that operated under the pretext of R2P in support of the Syrian regime alone would not have altered the Western perception of Russian foreign policy, and especially of the Russian-backed operations in Ukraine and Syria.[46] Through the deployment of Russian offensive and defensive assets and by subsequently creating an A2AD environment in the Eastern Mediterranean and western part of Syria, the Western world was forced to consider Russia as a partner for the resolution of the conflict as the Coalition was unable to fully support the moderate rebel forces in their fight against the regime and ISIL.

The use of an A2AD strategy achieved several of Putin's goals. Firstly, Russia's intervention and direct support to the regime forces prevented the victory of anti-regime rebels and secured Russian influence with the Syrian regime. Secondly, from a Russian perspective, it stabilized the legitimate government in Syria and created the initial conditions for a political compromise.[47] In this compromise Russia now had to be

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[46] Bettina Renz, *Russia's Military Revival*. Polity Press, 2018, 38.
[47] Souleimanov and Dzutsati, "Russia´s Syria War: A Strategic Trap?" 43.

considered by the West as a major player without whom no solution in the conflict could be achieved.[48] Thirdly, it secured Russian military access in the region by Syrian long-term leases of the Tartus port and Hmeymin airport and secured a Russian influence in the peace process.[49] Finally, and most significantly, it opened a window in the diplomatic relations with the Coalition and international community by breaking the isolation of Russia that had occurred following the Ukraine/Crimea crises.[50] All of these goals would not have been achievable without the ability to limit or deny the coalition freedom of movement over Syrian territory and hindering strikes against ISIL and regime forces. The creation of an A2AD environment in the maritime, air and space domains forced the Coalition to re-consider the Russian Federation as a major factor at all levels. The diplomatic level had to acknowledge the Russian influence on the outcome of the civil war and that its goals were not fully achievable without Russia.

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[48] Mason, "Russia in Syria: An unequivocal return to the Middle East?",106.

[49] Emil Aslan Souleimanov, "Mission Accomplished? Russia's Withdrawal From Syria," *Middle East Policy* XXIII, no.2 (Summer 2016), 115; Robert Mason, "Russia in Syria: An unequivocal return to the Middle East?"

[50] Jane's, "Russian intervention in Syria likely intended to force the West to re-engage with Russia on its terms," Jane's Country Risk Daily Report, 08 October 2015.

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