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Editor-in-Chief:

Igor Ivanov, RAS Corresponding Member, Dr. of History;

Author:

Yury Barmin

Drafting and copy editing:

Timur Makhmutov, PhD in Political Science; **Ruslan Mamedov**

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The views and opinions of authors expressed herein do not necessarily state or reflect those of RIAC.

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The full text of the working paper is available on RIAC's website. You can download it or leave a comment via this direct link – russiancouncil.ru/en/paper42

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Introduction

Israel has been an unofficial ally of Moscow in the Middle East since 1991, when diplomatic relations between the USSR and Israel were restored, having been severed following the Six-Day War in 1967. Throughout the rest of the 1990s, Russia was rapidly losing its political and economic clout in the region, while its relations with Israel only improved.

The relations between the two countries in the Middle East have always taken the form of an informal alliance, as Israel has traditionally been regarded as a key partner of the United States in the region, and Washington has historically guaranteed the country's security. In the words of the country's Minister of Defense, Avigdor Lieberman, Israel and Russia have developed "special relations" over the past few decades, despite the political pressure being exerted on Israel by the country's allies.¹ The deep historical ties between the countries serve as the basis for stabilizing their relations and in many ways give them a less politicized character.

The traditional focus on solving the Palestinian problem, which is rapidly losing relevance in the Arab world amidst all the talk about the Iranian threat, has started to wane in Russia–Israel relations too, as a direct consequence of Moscow's decision to pursue a more active policy in the Middle East. While Russia may have seen an opportunity to play a significant role in the Palestine–Israel settlement following the decision of President Donald Trump to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, the Israeli leadership now sees the Syrian conflict and the Iranian nuclear deal as the main issues on the bilateral agenda. It is these two events that have strengthened Iran's position, thus becoming a catalyst for threats to Israel's national security.

Against the backdrop of the escalation in the conflict between Israel and Iran, Russia's own relations with Israel are being put to test over Syria. This was demonstrated by the incident that took place on September 17 in which Syria downed a Russian reconnaissance aircraft Il-20 by mistake during an attack by Israeli F-16 jets on targets in Syria. While certain analysts have started to assert that Russia has taken on the role of the United States as a guarantor of Israel's security and survival in the Middle East, although it is hardly likely that the country's leadership sees it this way.² This notwithstanding, Israel has made it clear that it views Moscow, and not Washington, as the side that is capable of preventing the conflict with Tehran from turning into a full-scale war.³

¹ "We Have Not Joined the Sanctions Against Russia" // Kommersant. May 3, 2018 r.
URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3619258>

² Tuchman Mathews J. Russia Replaces America as the Power Player in the Middle East // Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 6, 2018.
URL: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/06/russia-replaces-america-as-power-player-in-middle-east-pub-75726>

³ Israel Says It's Counting on Putin in Syria, U.S. Isn't in the "Game" // Bloomberg, February 12, 2018.
URL: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-02-11/israel-says-u-s-not-in-syrian-game-as-russia-seen-dominant>

The Israel–Syria–Iran Triangle

Israel's Policy of Non-Involvement in the Syrian Conflict

When the war in Syria broke out, active discussion within the Israeli establishment took place as to what position the country should take with regard to the conflict. The comment made by then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that President of Syria Bashar al-Assad was “the devil we know” was no longer relevant in 2011.⁴ In Israel's estimation, the Arab Spring, which benefitted Tehran in many ways, would, if successful in Syria, greatly reduce Iran's influence in the region. This is why Israel took the firm stance that Bashar al-Assad had to go, although this did not actually evolve into a campaign to support the Syrian opposition.⁵

However, as Damascus grew weaker and the role of Iran in the military conflict increased, Israel's position started to change. This was primarily due to the commencement of the Russian Aerospace Forces' operation in Syria in the autumn of 2015. Just like the Sunni-majority countries in the region, Israel was counting on the Russian military presence to contain, and control, Bashar al-Assad and, more importantly, Iran. Thus, Israel expected the Syrian war to proceed in a more predictable manner, because neither the potential risk of radical forces coming to power in Syria, nor the comprehensive victory of the government forces, and therefore Iran, would be in Israel's interests.

The principle of Israel's non-involvement in the Syrian conflict, as well as its rejection of the possibility of replacing the Bashar al-Assad government that the country's leadership has repeatedly stressed at meetings with their Russian counterparts, has in many respects served as a guarantee for Moscow that Israel is concerned exclusively about its own national security.⁶ In other words, the threat to Damascus is a “red line” for Moscow, and Israel has thus far indicated that it does not intend to cross it.

Nevertheless, should Iran strengthen both its political and military positions in Syria, at the same time that the government in Damascus is stabilizing and restoring its control over the country's territory, this would radically alter the status quo in which Israel is deliberately distancing itself from the need to participate in the military conflict. The situation in Syria changed drastically in early 2018, when, on February 10, the Israeli Air Force incapacitated almost half of all the Syrian missile defence systems in response to a violation of its airspace by an Iranian drone launched from Syria. During the attack, one of Israel's F-16 fighter jets was shot down by the Syrian air defence system near Haifa.⁷ Given

⁴ Rabinovich I. The Devil We Knew // The New York Times, November 11, 2011.
URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/11/opinion/the-devil-we-knew.html>

⁵ Rabinovich I. Israel's View of the Syrian Crisis // The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings, Analysis paper, Number 28, 2012.

URL: <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Rabinovich-web-final.pdf>

⁶ Netanyahu Announces that Israel Will Not Get in Assad's Way, but Will Retail Freedom of Action in Syria // TASS. July 12, 2018. URL: <http://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/5367975>

the fact that the Syrian government is no longer in self-preservation mode, and the last opposition enclave in East Ghouta was swallowed up by the Syrian Army in April 2018 (a process that Moscow calls transforming the de-escalation zones “in line with peaceful settlement”⁸), it was just a matter of time before things started to heat up between Iran and Israel in the country’s southwest. The point here is not only that the southern de-escalation zone, just like all the similar areas in Syria, turned out to be nothing more than a temporary measure to freeze the conflict. The issue of Golan Heights, whose border had been peaceful for decades, and where the Israeli and Syrian militaries have served under the supervision of the UN Peacekeeping Mission, is becoming both a subject of political dispute and as potential zone of military escalation.

Escalation on the border of the occupied Golan Heights could radically change Israel’s position with regard to the Syrian conflict. In negotiations with Russia, the Israeli side openly insists on the Golan Heights issue being a “red line” and that “with or without an agreement, Golan Heights will remain part of Israel’s sovereign territory.”⁹ Israel’s policy of distancing itself from the conflict in its neighbourhood had become noticeably less pronounced. The events in the south of Syria are starting to resemble the 1982 Lebanon War, at least in terms of the scale of Israel’s military operations against Syria. The involvement of the Syrian air-defense systems that shot down the Israeli fighter jet on February 10 by default made Damascus a party to the conflict that is unfolding between Iran and Israel.

In conditions where Damascus is carrying out an offensive campaign near the borders with Israel together with pro-Iranian forces, as far as the Israeli’s military leaders (who are known for being uncompromising) are concerned, the line between the pro-Iranian forces and Damascus is being eroded. In other words, any provocation by Iran aimed at probing the “red lines” set by Israel automatically implies the involvement of Damascus, which could dramatically change Israel’s position on the need to remove the Bashar al-Assad government.

In addition to eliminating the supposed danger, the Israeli strikes on the positions of Iran and Hezbollah in Syria have two additional goals: to demonstrate to Damascus that its union with Iran is dangerous for the survival of the Bashar al-Assad government; and to let Moscow know that, in pursuing its policy in the region, it is not in Russia’s long-term interests to rely on Shiite militias. Moscow understands the risks associated with Damascus becoming directly involved in the confrontation between Iran and Israel in Syria. The influence of Iran, both operationally and politically, on the Syrian government has made its armed forces dependent on support from Iran, and it has made Russia depend-

⁷ Cooper T. The February 2018 Air War between Israel, Syria and Iran Was Brief and Violent // The National Interest, February 26, 2018.
URL: <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/the-february-2018-air-war-between-israel-syria-iran-was-24647/page/0/1>

⁸ Lavrentiev: Russia, Iran and Turkey May Adopt a Statement on the Results of the Talks in Astana // TASS, May 14, 2018. URL: <http://tass.ru/politika/5196508>

⁹ Meeting with Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu // President of Russia. April 21, 2016.
URL: <http://kremlin.ru/catalog/persons/40/events/51765>

ent on pro-Iranian units when carrying out its operations. Thus, the issue of Iran is extremely “toxic” for relations between Russia and Israel.

Military cooperation between Russia, Iran and Hezbollah within the framework of the coordination centre in Baghdad cannot but alarm Israel. Thanks to the joint military operations in Syria, where pro-Iranian units and the Syrian Army provide ground support and a Russian airborne tactical formation protects the skies, Moscow and Tehran have significantly deepened their military cooperation. In addition, according to certain media reports, Iran could, in violation of the UN embargo on the import of weapons, receive certain types of Russian weapons through Syria and also send equipment to Russia for servicing.¹⁰

In addition, during joint military operations with Russia, Hezbollah significantly improved the quality of its combat training and tactical planning and received access to better intelligence following joint work of the military staff of the Russian Armed Forces and Hezbollah in Damascus and Lattakia. What is more, Hezbollah has mastered its offensive military tactics in Syria, which could have grave consequences for Israel.¹¹ The country’s leadership seriously fears Hezbollah, the terrorist organization turned full-fledged army, which now boasts some 10,000 fighters in Syria.¹² Many in Israel are now wondering when, rather than if, and under what circumstances, another war with Hezbollah will break out.¹³

Throughout the Syrian conflict, Israel’s stance on the danger posed by Iran and Hezbollah inside the country did not always resonate with the Kremlin. For example, days before Russia launched its military operation in Syria in September 2015, President Putin held a meeting with Benjamin Netanyahu, in which he openly rejected the assertion of his Israeli colleague that Iran was, in collaboration with the Syrian Army, attempting to create a “second terrorist front” against Israel at Golan Heights, saying that “the Syrian Army, and Syria in general, is in such a state that it is not even entertaining thoughts about opening up a second front, as it is trying to save its own statehood.¹⁴” Nevertheless, the President of the Russian Federation did acknowledge that rocket attacks had taken place on Israeli territory. Several key Russian politicians have expressed the same position, including Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov,¹⁵ and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Mikhail Bogdanov.¹⁶

¹⁰ Neue Schmuggelroute zwischen Russland und dem Iran // Welt, 13. August 2017.

URL: <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article167624550/Neue-Schmuggelroute-zwischen-Russland-und-dem-Iran.html>

¹¹ Katz M., Pollak N. Hezbollah’s Russian Military Education in Syria // The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. December 24, 2015.

URL: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hezbollahs-russian-military-education-in-syria>

¹² Hezbollah Has 10,000 fighters in Syria Ready to Confront Israel, Commander Says // The Times of Israel, September 21, 2017.

URL: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/hezbollah-has-10000-fighters-in-syria-ready-to-confront-israel-commander-says/>

¹³ Karlin M. Israel’s Coming War with Hezbollah // Foreign Affairs, February 21, 2018.

URL: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/israel/2018-02-21/israels-coming-war-hezbollah>

¹⁴ Meeting with Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu // President of Russia. September 21, 2015. <http://kremlin.ru/catalog/persons/40/events/50335>

¹⁵ Lavrov: S-300 supplies to Iran do not threaten Israel // BBC Russian service, April 13, 2015.

URL: https://www.bbc.com/russian/rolling_news/2015/04/150413_rn_lavrov_on_s300

¹⁶ Russia: Iran’s Presence in Syria No Threat to Israel // Fars News Agency, July 1, 2018.

URL: <http://en.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13970410000406>

Despite Russia's clear position on Israel's security and the role that Iran plays in it, Moscow has clearly given the Israeli side considerable operational freedom when it comes to national security. Thus, Moscow refrained from criticizing Israeli operations to destroy convoys transporting weapons (often Russian) across Syrian territory for Hezbollah.¹⁷ That was, until the autumn of 2015, and later, when Israeli air operations obstructed Russian air defence systems deployed in Syria. What is more, former Minister of Defence of Israel Moshe Ya'alon confirmed that, since an emergency channel of communication between the Khmeimim Air Base and the Kiriya Command Centre in Tel Aviv was set up in 2015,¹⁸ Israel has not had to inform Moscow about forthcoming operations, since Russia independently identified Israeli fighter jets and did not consider it necessary to interfere in their operations.¹⁹

Iran's Future in Syria

Despite Moscow's operational dependence on pro-Iranian forces and the strategic proximity of the positions of Russia and Israel on Syria, Russia should not be expected to take the side of either Iran or Israel should an open confrontation break out between the two countries. From a strategic point of view, there is no good option for Moscow in this conflict, other than to strive for balance and to position itself as a referee. Whatever position it taken, Russia's balancing act between Iran and Israel will inevitably look like crisis management, and the political dividends from this role will be minimal. One example of this type of crisis response was the telephone call that Vladimir Putin made to the Prime Minister of Israel on February 10, 2018, which put an end to the escalation spiral between Israel and Syria.²⁰

Moscow aims to maintain a clear balance in the Iran–Russia–Israel triangle. In this context, in 2017, Sergey Lavrov stated that the Iranian units are in Syria legitimately, at the invitation of the Syrian government.²¹ In July 2018, he added that it is unrealistic to expect Iran to leave the country any time soon.²² At the same time, the Russian Foreign Minister criticized Tehran for declaring the need to destroy Israel.²³ Russia also maintains a balanced position on the issue of Golan Heights: All official statements and documents, including the Final Statement of the Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue held in Sochi,²⁴ as well as materials published

¹⁷ Report: Israel Hits Syrian Military, Hezbollah Weapons Convoy // The Times of Israel, November 30, 2016.

URL: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/report-israel-hits-assad-military-target-hezbollah-weapons-convoy-in-syria/>

¹⁸ Israel Explains about Communication Channel with the Russian Khmeimim Air Base in Syria // Vesti.Ru. May 5, 2018 r. URL: <https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=3014180&cid=5>

¹⁹ Israel Almost Shot Down Russian Jet in Syria, Says Former Defense Minister // The Jerusalem Post, May 6, 2018. URL: <https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Israel-almost-shot-down-Russian-jet-in-Syria-says-former-defense-minister-553618>

²⁰ Harel A. Putin's Phone Call with Netanyahu Put End to Israeli Strikes in Syria // Haaretz, February 15, 2018. URL: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/putin-s-call-with-netanyahu-called-time-on-israel-s-syrian-strikes-1.5809118>

²¹ Lavrov Calls "U.S. Wards" Most Dangerous Fighters in Syria // RBC, November 14, 2017.

URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/14/11/2017/5a0adab29a7947824af18f43?story=58c7ff469a7947398567fb3d>

²² Lavrov Believes Iran's Withdrawal from Syria is Unrealistic // RIA Novosti, July 4, 2018.

URL: <https://ria.ru/syria/20180704/1523924337.html>

²³ Lavrov Says Calls to Destroy Israel are Unacceptable // RIA Novosti, February 19, 2018.

URL: <https://ria.ru/world/20180219/1514900163.html>

²⁴ Final Statement of the Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue, Sochi, January 30, 2018 // The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, January 30, 2018.

URL: http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3046246

by the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation,²⁵ *de jure* recognize this region as a part of Syria. This notwithstanding, Russian fighter jets avoid violating the airspace of Golan Heights, *de facto* recognizing Israel's sovereignty over the region.

Against the background of escalation in the south of Syria, the Israeli media reported in late May that Russia and Israel had reached an agreement on Iran. In accordance with the deal, Israel agreed to return the areas in the southern de-escalation zone that border Golan Heights and Jordan, to the partial control of the Syrian Army. Russia, in turn, guaranteed that pro-Iranian Shiite forces would not be present on the border with Israel, and also undertook to withdraw foreign troops from the country.²⁶ The degree to which the agreement will be implemented in its current form remains unclear. However, in late July 2018, Russian Presidential Special Envoy for Syria Alexander Lavrentiev stated that Shiite units as well as heavy equipment and weaponry had been withdrawn to 85km from the demarcation line with Israel (yet at the same time confirming that Iranian advisers were permitted to be present in the Syrian Army within this radius).²⁷ It is not entirely clear what Moscow's position on the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Syria actually is, as the statements of Russian officials often involve mutually exclusive solutions. For example, in November 2017, the Minister of Foreign Affairs announced that Iran was in Syria legitimately at the request of the Syrian government and that Moscow had never promised to ensure the withdrawal of pro-Iranian troops from the country.²⁸ Nevertheless, in May, Russian Presidential Special Envoy for Syria Alexander Lavrentiev said that the entire foreign contingent, including Hezbollah and the Iranian forces, had to be withdrawn from Syria.²⁹

The events of recent months have proven that Israel is prepared, and would even prefer, to settle the issue on the southwest borders of Syria via negotiations through an intermediary. However, Israel makes it abundantly clear that its "red lines" – that is, the zero-tolerance stance on the presence of Iran and Hezbollah on the borders – have not shifted in the slightest. This is why the failure of Russian attempts to achieve a compromise settlement could lead to Israel's unilateral attempts to resolve the issue militarily, which will clearly affect both the Bashar al-Assad government and Russian interests in Syria.

The terms of the agreement between Russia and Israel on Iran have also not been disclosed. Like Russia, Iran has been officially invited to Syria by the government in Damascus. While Russia *de jure* can complain about the illegitimacy of the presence of U.S. troops in the country, similar, even veiled attacks on Iran would be seen as an unfriendly step, not only in Tehran, but also in Damascus itself.

²⁵ Briefing by the official representative of the Ministry of Defense of Russia (May 4, 2018) // The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, May 4, 2018.

URL: <http://syria.mil.ru/briefing/detail.htm?id=12173955@morfPressConferenceNew>

²⁶ Israel, Russia Said to Reach Secret Deal on Pushing Iran Away from Syria Border // The Times of Israel, May 28, 2018.

URL: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-russia-said-to-agree-on-pushing-iran-from-syria-border/>

²⁷ Lavrentiev: Iranian Forces Withdraw 85km from the Demarcation Line at Golan Heights // TASS, July 31, 2018.

URL: <http://tass.ru/politika/5417837>

²⁸ Lavrov: Russia Did Not Promise to Ensure Withdrawal of Pro-Iranian Troops from Syria // RIA Novosti, November 14, 2017. URL: <https://ria.ru/syria/20171114/1508787927.html>

²⁹ Lavrentiev: Foreign Contingent Must Leave Syria // RIA Novosti, May 18, 2018.

URL: <https://ria.ru/syria/20180518/1520883710.html>

According to some researchers, Iran has been able to set up permanent military bases inside Syria which can accommodate up to 10,000 servicemen under the command of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.³⁰ Russia stands to benefit from the weakening of Tehran's military positions in Syria, as it is a clear obstacle to a peaceful settlement, creating the illusion in Damascus that the military option for resolving the conflict remains open. However, Russia has very few political levers to enact such a recalibration of Iran's position in Syria. Tehran has already stated that no one has the right to demand Iran's withdrawal from Syria.³¹ Therefore, the Israeli campaign to prevent Iranian forces from taking root in Syria actually benefits Russia too, as long as it does not look like an open provocation. This could also have a negative effect on the future of the last de-escalation zone in Idlib, which the Russian Presidential Special Envoy for Syria has said will not be a site of any major military operations.³² The statements made by the President of Syria about the forthcoming campaign in Idlib,³³ and the fact that Iranian forces are concentrated on the border of the de-escalation zone in Idlib suggest that, as far as Tehran and Damascus are concerned, a military operation has not been entirely ruled out.

At present, there are doubts about Russia's ability – as well as the political expediency – of impeding the establishment of Iranian forces outside the southwest region, despite the reports in the Israeli media that Moscow prevented Iran from setting up a naval base in Tartus.³⁴ In all probability, the most that Russia can guarantee right now is a reduction in the presence of pro-Iranian troops within a given radius of the Israeli border; it may suggest extending the existing radius beyond the current 85 kilometres. In any case, Moscow was able to keep pro-Iranian forces from taking part in an offensive operation in the southwest of the country, and also, according to some reports, withdrawing a part of the Hezbollah units from the border areas in Syria to Lebanon.³⁵

Most likely, Moscow will have to insist on the partial demilitarization of southwest Syria and assume a significant role in guaranteeing security in the region. Thus, as part of the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution No. 350 adopted in 1974 on the disengagement of Syrian and Israeli troops at Golan Heights, the Russian Military Police helped re-deploy the UN Peacekeeping Mission to the demilitarized zone for the first time since 2012. In addition, Russia plans on deploying eight of its own observation stations along the demilitarized zone as a temporary

³⁰ Saban N. Iranian Economic, Administrative and Military Influence in Syria 2017 // OMRAN Center for Strategic Studies, May 23, 2018.

URL: <http://omranstudies.org/publications/reports/iranian-economic,-administrative,-and-military-influence-in-syria-2017.html>

³¹ Iran Rejects Russian Demand to Withdraw Troops From Syria // Radio Farda, May 22, 2018.

URL: <https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-rejects-russian-demand-withdraw-syria/29243304.html>

³² Large-Scale Operation in Syria's Idlib Out of Question, Says Russia's Chief Negotiator // TASS, July 31, 2018.

URL: <http://tass.com/politics/1015572>

³³ Idiz S. Is a Storm Brewing for Turkey in Idlib? // Al-Monitor, July 31, 2018.

URL: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/07/turkey-syria-russia-can-putin-afford-disregard-ankara.html>

³⁴ Iran Said to Be Building Military Facilities in Syria Near Russian Positions // The Times of Israel, March 23, 2018.

URL: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/iran-said-to-be-building-military-facilities-in-syria-near-to-russian-positions/>

³⁵ Exclusive: In Syria, a Russian Move Causes Friction with Iran-backed Forces – Officials // Reuters, June 5, 2018.

URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-deploymen/exclusive-in-syria-a-russian-move-causes-friction-with-iran-backed-forces-officials-idUSKCN1J1255>

measure to protect the UN contingent. However, it is entirely possible that Russia will have to maintain a permanent military presence in the region.

It appears that Iran was prepared to partially reduce its presence in southern Syria, at the very least in order to protect its own forces in the country. Just how long and how rigorously this zone can remain “Iran-free,” however, is up for debate. There are a number of reasons for this: the 85-kilometre radius includes both Damascus, with its strategically important (for Iran) crossing to Lebanon as well as the Sayyidah Zaynab Mosque, an important place of worship for Shiite Muslims. The presence of Iranian forces in the southwest is necessary primarily to support the land bridge from Tehran to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Thus, by securing limited Iranian presence in the region Moscow has been able to address the symptom, rather than the problem itself, meaning that it has managed to achieve only a temporary and localized de-escalation of tensions between Israel and Iran.

By withdrawing Shiite forces from the line of mutual disengagement of forces, Russia has been able to guarantee the security of Israel’s borders in the medium term. While the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Shiite groups are being redeployed to the regions of instability in the Deir ez-Zor and Idlib governorates, the issue of Iran’s military presence in Syria is likely to fade into the background of Russia–Israel relations. This notwithstanding, the Israeli side has made it clear to Moscow that the entrenchment of Iranian troops across the country is unacceptable, and there is a clear difference of opinions between Russia and Israel on this.

Outside the south of Syria, as well as the coastal regions and Hama, where Russia has a strong presence, Moscow will find it difficult to restrain Iran, particularly in conditions where Bashar al-Assad is skillfully maneuvering between the interests of the two countries. It will also not be easy for Russia to keep Iran from deploying its air defence systems and surface-to-surface missiles, which is yet another “red line” for Israel.³⁶

It is acceptable for Russia if the confrontation between Israel and Iran remains in a state where it has not developed into a war and is marked by the regular probing of each other’s “red lines.” Moscow cannot demand that Iran, an equal partner that has also been invited into the country by the Syrian government, reduce its military capabilities while Russia has managed to entrench itself in Syria by establishing two military bases there. Thus, Israel’s campaign to consistently undermine Iran’s military capabilities on the ground and weaken its influence partly fulfils the functions that Russia would like to take on itself but cannot for political reasons.

Most likely, Moscow will have to reconcile with Tehran’s desire to have a military presence in Syria, while at the same time having to assume the responsibility for monitoring the areas of Iranian deployment as well as the weapons that they will obtain.

³⁶ Magen Z., Michlin-Shapir V., Dekel U. Russia as Restraining Factor in the Iranian–Israeli Confrontation in Syria // INSS Insight No. 1062, May 29, 2018.
URL: <http://www.inss.org.il/publication/russia-restraining-factor-iranian-israeli-confrontation-syria/>

It should be noted that Russia has little influence when it comes to Iran's decisions with regard to Syria. A key player in limiting Iran's influence is none other than Bashar al-Assad himself, who has thus far skillfully balanced the interests of the two allies, using the complex dynamics between them to his advantage.

Iran's presence in Syria has evolved over the course of the conflict. In this context, the Syrian National Defence Forces, which is effectively a parallel army with approximately 50,000 personnel that are sponsored and trained primarily by Iran,³⁷ as well as the deliberate creation of homegrown groups under the protection of Iran, such as Hezbollah in Syria (Hezbollah fi Suriya),³⁸ suggest that withdrawal of foreign troops from the country will allow Iran to maintain significant influence on security issues across Syria, including in the southwest. For this reason, the issue that Russia will have to solve in the long term in Syria is not the number of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps officers and Shiite fighters from Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan deployed in Syria under the protection of President Bashar al-Assad, but rather how the Syrian Armed Forces will be made up in the post-war period and what role Iran will play in the implementation of the security sector reform.

The Nuclear Deal in the Context of the Israel–Iran Confrontation in Syria

Closely intertwined with the growing confrontation between Iran and Israel in Syria is the nuclear deal – the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – or rather, the United States' withdrawal from the agreement on May 8, 2018. Donald Trump's decision on the JCPOA was fully supported,³⁹ and partially reinforced, by the position of Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu, who presented an archive of documents allegedly proving Iran's ambitions to acquire nuclear weapons several days before the US announcement.⁴⁰

Both Russia and Israel should be concerned by the withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA, primarily because Iran's response could be asymmetrical and involve a more aggressive military strategy in Syria as well as attempts to take it out on one of Washington's key allies, Israel.

The incident that took place between Iran and Israel on May 10, 2018, when the elite Iranian Quds Force launched 32 rockets at Golan Heights from the Syrian territory to which Israel responded with strikes that targeted a number

³⁷ Mardasov, A. Russia and Iran on the Platform of Compromises // RIAC. August 30, 2017.

URL: http://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/interview/rossiya-i-iran-na-ploshchadke-kompromissov/?sphrase_id=14053344

³⁸ Smyth P. Lebanese Hezbollah's Islamic Resistance in Syria // The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. April 26, 2018.

URL: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/lebanese-hezbollahs-islamic-resistance-in-syria>

³⁹ Netanyahu: Israel "Fully Supports" Trump's 'Bold' Pullout from Iran Deal // The Times of Israel. May 8, 2018.

URL: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-israel-fully-supports-trumps-bold-pullout-from-iran-deal/>

⁴⁰ Rabinowitz O. What Netanyahu's Dramatic Speech about Iran's Nuclear Program Revealed – and Concealed // The Washington Post. May 4, 2018.

URL: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/05/04/what-netanyahus-dramatic-speech-about-irans-nuclear-program-both-revealed-and-concealed/?noredirect=on>

of military facilities and an ammunition storage, is noteworthy in this context.⁴¹ This event is important, first of all, because it was the first time that the Iranian side had committed such actions. The episode, which took place just two days after the decision of the US withdrawal from the JCPOA, may be interpreted as a harbinger of what the confrontation between Iran and Israel will look like in the event of an asymmetric response of the Iranian leadership to the actions of the United States. It also marks the merger of the Syrian conflict and the agreement on the nuclear programme into a single political file in the eyes of Israel.

The strategy of the United States and Israel on the JCPOA raises the suspicion that the withdrawal of the United States was a necessary move to push Iran to respond in kind and resume its nuclear programme. Even if Tehran does not make such a decision, the very fact that there is suspicion over Iran's intentions and mistrust will serve as an argument for the United States and its allies to pursue a more aggressive policy of isolation and deterrence. Israel has a clear understanding of the military solution to the Iranian nuclear problem, but it does not have a strategy for dealing with the issue politically. Military confrontation with Iran and a scenario of containment is a far more understandable strategy for the Israeli leadership than political confrontation in a state of coexistence. At the same time, it is clear that if the nuclear deal falls through it is Israel that is likely to pay the highest price.

Although Israel does not play a role in the negotiations on the Iranian nuclear programme as such, the issue of the nuclear deal is seen as part of the general policy to contain Iran by both the United States and Israel. Even if Israel is not a key player in diplomatic negotiations, it is clearly seen as the most important player in deterring Iran. It should be noted that Israel is capable of taking unilateral steps to degrade infrastructure that is connected to the Iranian nuclear programme. In March 2018, Israel admitted that it had been Israeli fighter jets that struck a Syrian nuclear reactor in 2007⁴², an admission that comes ten years later and serves as a clear signal to Iran that Israel is ready to launch a military strike on Iran if it believes the latter has resumed its nuclear programme.

Nevertheless, not everyone in Israel shares the view of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that the JCPOA was a historical mistake. For example, Chief of General Staff of the Israel Defense Forces Gadi Eizenkot expressed confidence that “right now the agreement, despite all its faults, works and prevents the implementation of the Iranian nuclear programme for the next 10–15 years.”⁴³ The agreement with Iran did not bring the country any closer to the nuclear bomb

⁴¹ Air Force Chief: Iranians Fired 32 Rockets at Golan on May 10 // The Times of Israel, May 22, 2018.

URL: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/air-force-chief-iranians-fired-32-rockets-at-golan-on-may-10/>

⁴² Israel Admits Bombing Suspected Syrian Nuclear Reactor in 2007, Warns Iran // Reuters, March 21, 2018.

URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-syria-nuclear/israel-admits-bombing-suspected-syrian-nuclear-reactor-in-2007-warns-iran-idUSKBN1GX09K>

⁴³ Despite Faults, Iranian Nuclear Deal Works, Israeli Military Chief Tells Haaretz // Haaretz, March 30, 2018.

URL: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-israeli-military-chief-despite-its-faults-iran-nuclear-deal-works-1.5962099>

that Netanyahu was talking about.⁴⁴ On the contrary, it was built on the fundamental distrust of Iran's nuclear ambitions and based on the need for verification.

It is within Israeli military circles that a more pragmatic position on the JCPOA has taken root, and it is with these figures that Moscow needs to build a more substantive dialogue on the Iranian nuclear issue. Judging by the fact that the discourse on Iran has changed in Israel since the United States pulled out of the deal, with the focus turning to Tehran as a source of regional problems, the dialogue between Russia and Israel is likely to be narrow, and the main challenge that Moscow will face in this context will be to return the focus to the nuclear programme.

The biggest dilemma for Russia within the framework of the Iranian response to the failure of the nuclear deal will be to balance the interests of the various circles of political elites in Iran. The Iranian leadership is not unanimous on the policy that should be pursued in response to the United States' withdrawal from the JCPOA. Clearly, the actions of Donald Trump left President of Iran Hassan Rouhani, who calls for joint work with Europe, Russia and China to preserve the deal, in the minority.

The President of Iran has made it clear to the European Union that the issue of whether the country remains part of the JCPOA depends entirely on the EU. Despite the fact that the Iranian leadership threatened to pull out of the deal as soon as President Trump had made his announcement, the decision was nevertheless put off until the European Union made its own decision on the matter. It is clear that, despite the warlike rhetoric, which often proves little more than populism, for Iran, the nuclear deal – or, more importantly, the economic benefits that come with the deal – is extremely important.

Iranian hardliners reacted sharply to the actions of the United States and will seek the resignation of the moderate President of Iran, since they do not believe in the ability of the European Union to preserve the deal without changing its terms or attaching the regional aspect of Iran's foreign policy to it.⁴⁵ The events that took place in Syria on May 10 make it clear that Tehran's asymmetrical response to the failure of the JCPOA in the form of intentional military escalation is an acceptable option for Iran, at least for a part of the establishment. In this context, Iran's campaign in Syria, led by Major General Qasem Soleimani, is becoming extremely risky for Moscow. As far as the United States, the European Union and Israel are concerned, negotiations on the nuclear deal could very well be combined with the files on Iran's ballistic missile programme, as well as its regional expansion. It should be noted here that the EU countries are more careful about expressing this position than the United States and Israel.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Iran Nuclear Deal Was "Recipe for Disaster", Says Netanyahu after Trump Pulls US out of Agreement // Independent, May 8, 2018.

URL: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/iran-nuclear-deal-latest-trump-benjamin-netanyahu-us-israel-a8342186.html>

⁴⁵ Dagres H. Iranian Hardliners' "I-Told-You-So" Moment // Atlantic Council. May 9, 2018.

URL: <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/iranian-hardliners-i-told-you-so-moment>

⁴⁶ Iran Says Will Not Renegotiate Nuclear Deal, Warns Against Changes // Reuters. May 3, 2018.

URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-usa/iran-says-will-not-renegotiate-nuclear-deal-warns-against-changes-idUSKBN1I41CO>

The position of Tehran and Moscow on this issue remains unchanged: In the negotiation process, neither Russia nor Iran (where the negotiations on the nuclear agreement are still being overseen by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran Abbas Araghchi) are prepared to make any amendments to the JCPOA and create new restrictive measures that are tied to the agreement.⁴⁷ However, judging by recent events in Syria, as far as the Iranian hardliners are concerned, Syria itself has become an unofficial response to the collapse of the JCPOA. In these conditions, Russia should clearly divide its negotiating tracks and categorically oppose attempts to “increase the pressure on Tehran due to circumstances unrelated to the JCPOA and which, to a large extent, have nothing to do with Iran’s nuclear programme.”⁴⁸ Moscow will probably not be prepared to use the Syrian problem as a lever of pressure in the multilateral negotiation on the Iranian nuclear deal, as it understands the lack of unanimity on these issues in Tehran.

⁴⁷ Iran’s Top Leader Sets Conditions for Europe to Save Nuclear Deal // Reuters. May 23, 2018.
URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-khamenei-conditions/irans-top-leader-sets-conditions-for-europe-to-save-nuclear-deal-idUSKCN110331>

⁴⁸ Ryabkov S. We Call on the United States to Refrain from Taking Unilateral Steps // RIAC. May 8, 2018.
URL: http://russiancouncil.ru/analytiks-and-comments/comments/prizyvaem-ssha-vozderzhatsya-ot-opromet-chivyykh-shagov/?sphrase_id=14479806

Palestinian-Israeli Settlement

Against the backdrop of the Syrian crisis and growing tensions in the Middle East, the issue of Palestinian-Israeli settlement is gradually losing its relevance, and many experts now see the Middle East Quartet as an outdated format.⁴⁹ Were it not for Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the transfer of the U.S. Embassy there, the Palestinian issue would have remained on the backburner of the global agenda. The debate on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has also been re-ignited because the positions of the President of the United States and the Israeli leadership have coincided for a long time and, marginalizing the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) in the settlement process, presented it with a *fait accompli*.

The "deal of the century," as it is being called in Washington, on the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict effectively eliminates key elements of the peace process (the establishment of the Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem and the return of Palestinian refugees),⁵⁰ which leaves the State of Palestine with no choice but to search for new allies. Naturally, President of the State of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas sees Moscow as a force that can return the processes that have taken shape in recent months into the framework of existing negotiating track, which the PNA has openly said to the Russian side.⁵¹

Russia has traditionally taken a clear stance on the issue of the Israel-Palestine settlement. President Putin has repeatedly expressed this position at meetings with his counterparts from Palestine and Israel, saying that Russia takes a principled position in support of the right of Palestinians to self-determination and that the result of the "settlement should involve the cessation of the Israeli occupation of Arab lands that began in 1967 and the creation of an independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital."⁵²

Russia first offered to host negotiations between Israel and Palestine in Moscow in 2005. The idea of holding direct talks between Mahmoud Abbas and Benjamin Netanyahu was brought up at the meeting between President of the Arab Republic of Egypt Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Vladimir Putin in August 2016.⁵³ The first direct meeting between the Palestinian and Israeli leaders since 2010 was supposed to take place in Moscow in September 2016, but the parties blamed

⁴⁹ Krasna J. Moscow on the Mediterranean: Russia and Israel's Relationship // Foreign Policy Research Institute. June 7, 2018.

URL: <https://www.fpri.org/article/2018/06/moscow-on-the-mediterranean-russia-and-israels-relationship/>

⁵⁰ Palestinians Have Seen Trump's "Deal of the Century" and Want Nothing of It // Middle East Eye. March 16, 2018.

URL: <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/trumps-deal-century-leaves-palestinians-feeling-angry-and-abandoned-824850253>

⁵¹ Palestinian Diplomat Wants Russia to Play Key Role in Middle East Peace Process // TASS, February 6, 2018.

URL: <http://tass.com/world/988606>

⁵² Putin: Russia Calls for the Establishment of an Independent State of Palestine // TASS, November 29, 2017.

URL: <http://tass.ru/politika/4768017>

⁵³ Vladimir Putin "Wants to Host Israeli-Palestinian Peace Talks in Moscow" // Independent. August 24, 2016.

URL: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/vladimir-putin-israel-palestine-conflict-peace-talks-moscow-egypt-al-sisi-a7207426.html>

each other for it never coming to pass. According to Mahmoud Abbas, the Israeli side unilaterally cancelled to meeting. Meanwhile, the Israeli leadership stated that the pre-conditions set by the Palestinian representatives were unacceptable.⁵⁴

Moscow made a number of attempts to organize a summit meeting, most recently in mid-June 2018, but all of them failed to materialize. Obviously, getting Netanyahu and Abbas to meet with Russian mediation is not an end in itself for Moscow, and such a meeting is not capable of resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. It could, however, help restart the peace process. But the initiative of Russian mediation, which has been unsuccessful over the past two years, threatens to turn from what was initially an intermediate goal into “a mission impossible” for Russian diplomacy.

Multiple international initiatives on Israeli–Palestinian settlement that already exist risk working against the role that Moscow hopes to play. For example, the French conference on Israel–Palestine settlement in 2016, which was actively promoted by former President François Hollande, went no further than a single meeting in Paris and did not restart the peace process. By spearheading mediation efforts Moscow risks once again demonstrating that re-launching the peace process in its current format is impossible. This will be another helping hand in the “deal of the century” promoted by Washington, and will open the path to a review of the terms of the negotiation process based on new “facts” created on the ground since the borders were determined in 1967.

For Russia, a more visible role in the Palestinian settlement would provide it with a unique opportunity to strengthen its clout in the Middle East outside the Syrian setting, meaning outside a military context. To some extent Moscow’s efforts on this front have to do with its positioning vis-a-vis the United States, Europe and Israel, and many experts agree that,⁵⁵ for Vladimir Putin, the fact of Russia’s participation in the peace process could be more important than the final settlement between Palestine and Israel.⁵⁶ In this context, the PNA’s expectation that Moscow will become the advocate of the Palestinian position in negotiations with Israel is misplaced, despite the fact that the two countries have similar stances on the issue.

For Mahmoud Abbas, getting Russia involved in the peaceful settlement serves both foreign and domestic policy goals. The Palestinian authorities, headed by Abbas, have been unable to form a sense of national cohesion for the people, while the administration is deeply localized and territorially fragmented. Many Palestinians are disappointed with the settlement strategy, which has relied on the American initiative for over 20 years now. Russia’s attempts to take a more active role in the peace process serve to reboot, in a sense, the internal Palestinian discourse and give additional internal political support to Mahmoud Abbas.

⁵⁴ Abbas: I wanted to Meet Netanyahu in Moscow but He “Didn’t Show Up” // The Times of Israel. May 4, 2017. URL: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/abbas-i-wanted-to-meet-netanyahu-in-moscow-but-pm-didnt-show-up/>

⁵⁵ Freedman R. Russia, Israel and the Arab–Israeli Conflict: The Putin Years // Middle East Policy Council, Vol. XVII, Fall, №3. URL: <https://www.mepc.org/russia-israel-and-arab-israeli-conflict-putin-years>

⁵⁶ Krasna J. Moscow on the Mediterranean: Russia and Israel’s Relationship // Foreign Policy Research Institute, June 7, 2018. URL: <https://www.fpri.org/article/2018/06/moscow-on-the-mediterranean-russia-and-israels-relationship/>

At present, Israel is not too keen on Russia's initiatives. Moscow is attempting to get Israel to negotiate on the Palestinian issue, but it is clear that Israel is counting on the American "deal of the century." Thus, in April 2017, for the first time ever, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation recognized West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine.⁵⁷ This step, which was received well by the Israeli media, should have set the negotiation process in motion, but the Israeli leadership approached it with great caution.

Despite the fact that Israel most likely does not see Russia's role as a mediator outside of international initiatives, Benjamin Netanyahu needs to give at least some leeway to Vladimir Putin's mediation initiatives. It is extremely important for the Israeli side to preserve its fragile partnership with Russia, as this partnership is closely linked with cooperation in Syria, while the deterioration in relations against the backdrop of disagreements on Palestine could very well undermine the dialogue on Syria. The issue of Israel's recognition as a Jewish state in the Middle East remains and, in light of Iran's growing role in Syria, the peace process becomes even more dependent on the regional context. This is another reason why the Israeli leadership may value Moscow's support.

Nevertheless, Moscow does not see Palestine and Syria as related contexts in its relations with Israel. What is more Russia sees the prospect of Palestinian settlements as a logical continuation of its role in the region, the process that was set in motion by the country's military campaign in Syria. At the same time, however, policy toolkits for Palestine and Syria files will remain different.

⁵⁷ Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation // Press Service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. April 6, 2017.
URL: http://www.mid.ru/ru/press_service/spokesman/official_statement/-/asset_publisher/t2GCdmD8RNlr/content/id/2717182

Conclusions and Recommendations

- The escalation between Israel and Iran in the southwest of Syria is a manifestation of contradictions that run far deeper than the Syrian context. Russian mediation in the settlement in this round of tensions freezes the existing conflict in the medium term, but does not resolve the deep contradictions that extend beyond Syria. To minimize the conflict potential between Iran and Israel “on the ground,” Russia will have to comprehensively review the modality of the pro-Iranian forces’ presence in Syria. Presence of pro-Iranian armed units in the country is an issue whose solution will be part of the political settlement and is likely to become an element in the security sector reform. Given the deep-rooted Iranian influence, primarily in the military sphere, one of Russia’s main tasks in Syria will be the reform of the security sector. Moscow must first of all implement the integration of the opposition’s armed units into the Syrian army and its internal forces, and also tackle the issue of foreign influence in the security sector. Russia has had experience in instituting the 5th Assault Corps, which is not formed on the basis of ethnic, religious or geographical principles and became an attempt to reduce the Iranian influence over the Syrian Army. It is likely that Moscow’s task in Syria moving forward will be to consolidate the Syrian Army by combining different pro-government and opposing groups to create an armed force that is free from external ideological influence.
- The conviction of Israel and the United States of the need to merge the negotiation files on the Iranian nuclear programme and Syria into a single track, as well as the growing understanding of this in Europe, present a clear risk for Moscow. Russia’s approach to the JCPOA is of an institutional, rather than a political nature. As a consequence, Moscow will be unwilling to discuss the issue of Tehran’s regional influence and its missile programme in connection with the JCPOA. Given the obvious focus of the Russia–Israel dialogue on security issues, it would be wise to discuss the Iranian nuclear deal in the EU–Israel–Russia format more actively with a view to including discussions of the technical details of the JCPOA in the bilateral Russia–Israel agenda as well.
- Russia’s role as an intermediary between Iran and Israel is justified in the Syrian context, where Russia’s own interests are dependent on the dynamics of the Iran–Israel confrontation, as well as in the context of the Iranian nuclear deal. Nevertheless, Moscow should not position itself as an intermediary between the two countries in order to achieve a complete reconciliation. Establishing a *modus vivendi* is a far more achievable goal than a comprehensive settlement. Moscow’s role of a broker and the attempt to carry out a clearly impossible task can work to Russia’s disadvantage, negatively affecting relations with both Israel and Iran, as well as with other regional players. The issue of Hezbollah will continue to be extremely toxic for Russia–Israel relations, and while Moscow does have

leverage over the group within the context of the Syrian conflict, it quite clearly has none outside the country, for example, in Lebanon. Given the position recently proclaimed by one of Israeli's ministers that "Lebanon equals Hezbollah,⁵⁸" it now appears that Moscow should confine itself to discussing Hezbollah in the context of the Syrian conflict and avoid talking about the organization's role in Lebanon, although attempts have been made to do this by the Israeli side.

- Russia's role in resolving the instability in the south of Syria and the balancing act it is playing between Damascus and Israel could create the prerequisites for a broader dialogue on Israel–Syria settlement. Given the attempts made by Israel in 2007 under Prime Minister Ehud Olmert with Turkish mediation, and again in 2010 by Benjamin Netanyahu to transfer Golan Heights to Damascus in exchange for peace, as well as the growing understanding in Israel that a dialogue with Damascus is necessary, Russia's role in establishing this dialogue could significantly increase. Strategically, right now, for Russia, the focus on Israel–Syria settlement is both feasible and promising, as it is the most achievable task and could help Moscow prove itself as a broker. Building trust between the leaders of Israel and Syria serves the interests of both sides and also partially limits Tehran's influence in Syria, which Bashar al-Assad may seek in the post-conflict period.
- Enhancing Russia's role in the Israel–Palestine settlement will most likely not bring the desired results, especially against the backdrop of the initiatives of the United States, which disrupt the peace process in the harshest possible way. The Russian initiative to organize a meeting between the leaders of Israel and Palestine will most likely not lead to the relaunch of peace talks due to deep disagreements that exist between the sides and traditionally impeded negotiations. Paradoxically, it is the shocking actions of the Donald Trump Administration that have the greatest chance to kick the peace process back into motion, but in a fundamentally different form. At this stage, Russia should focus on achieving intra-Palestinian reconciliation. The humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip is only getting worse against the backdrop of the Palestinian National Authority losing control of the West Bank, and the Palestinian unity government has not made any serious progress, meaning that the prospects for national dialogue are extremely low. In recent years, Russia has managed to build a rapport with PNA representatives, the Hamas Political Bureau and the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine, which regularly hold meetings with representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation in Moscow. Moscow's interim task in the Palestinian settlement should be to provide political and humanitarian assistance to reconciliation within Palestine and work towards launching the Palestinian unity government that was created in October 2017.

⁵⁸ Israeli Minister says "Lebanon equals Hezbollah" after election // Reuters. May 7, 2018.
URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-election-israel/israeli-minister-says-lebanon-equals-hezbollah-after-election-idUSKBN1180FW>

About the Author

Yury Barmin is an expert at the Russian International Affairs Council. As a researcher he focuses on issues related to the conflict in Syria. As a consultant Mr Barmin works with government and private clients advising them on issues related to the Russian policy in the Middle East. He is a contributor to Al Jazeera, Al Monitor, the Moscow Times and other publications. Mr Barmin holds an MPhil in International Relations from the University of Cambridge, his dissertation looked into the failed Arab Spring momentum in Bahrain and Kuwait. Mr Barmin is interested in current Gulf affairs.

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Notes

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RUSSIAN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL (RIAC)

1, B. Yakimanka street, 119180, Moscow, Russia

Tel.: +7 (495) 225 6283

Fax: +7 (495) 225 6284

E-mail: welcome@russiancouncil.ru

www.russiancouncil.ru