

Abstract of Master thesis

Russia's Syria policy: geopolitical interests or defense of great power identity?

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Abstract:

Russia has been the dominating actor in Syria since the outbreak of the civil war in 2011. Researchers disagree what Russia motivates to block UN resolutions, support Assad, and intervene militarily in 2015. Academics have mainly focused on neorealist explanations. Constructivist arguments have been shortcoming so far as they miss a detailed theoretical justification and empirical evidence. This thesis aims to fill this gap by arguing that the objective utility of Syria is marginal. Instead, Syria provided Russia the opportunity to present itself as a global power, able to shape world affairs on eye level with the US. Therefore, this paper conducts a congruence analysis, which evaluates each theory's explanatory power. The analytical section is split into three parts. The first shows that events before Syria did not make a Russian intervention in Syria necessary, but that recognition of Russia's global power identity has been denied. That Russia's actions in Syria are not entirely congruent with neorealist expectations is shown by the second part. Finally, by conducting a content-analysis, several Russian narratives are evaluated that support the argument that Russia seeks recognition as a global power and intervenes in Syria to defend its identity and not its interests.

Prague, 24.07.2020

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