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## Beyond Tartus: The Broader Impact of Assad's Fall on Russian Military and Economic Interests

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*This research paper examines the implications of the collapse of the Assad regime for Russia's military and economic interests, particularly regarding the crucial naval base in Tartus, which is Russia's sole Mediterranean base, ensuring its projection of power in the region and securing its maritime supply routes. The loss of this base would not only weaken Russia's regional military reach but also undermine its global naval strategy. The paper also analyses its extensive investments in Syria, underpinning its economic leverage. Beyond immediate losses, it highlights how the overthrow of Assad's regime could weaken Russia's influence in the region, disrupt energy partnerships (notably Iran and other regional actors). Furthermore, the regime change could dent Russia's image as a reliable ally, challenging its status as a global power, i.e. reducing its international credibility and bargaining power. Ultimately, the findings suggest that despite Russia's cultivation of its alliances, its overdependence on Assad reveals its fragility in its geopolitical standings, which would, therefore, require some significant tactical realignments.*

**Keywords:** *naval base, investments, fragile geopolitical standings.*

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### INTRODUCTION

The Syrian conflict has been a focal point for global attention, with Russia stepping into the spotlight through its indomitable support for the Assad regime. For Moscow, Syria is more

than just an ally; it's a pivotal asset. However, the collapse of the Assad regime could seriously threaten Russia's military and economic standing, putting Moscow in a perilous position. This paper focuses on the repercussions of this collapse, focusing on its financial, energy, and military stronghold in Tartus, its sole Mediterranean naval base.

A post-Assad Syria could destabilise Russia's military logistics, limiting its ability to project power in the Mediterranean and its operational reach in the Middle East and North Africa. Tartus serves as a vital hub for naval operations, and its loss would compel Russia to seek alternative alliances, potentially at a huge cost. Economically, the collapse of the Assad Regime jeopardises Russia's huge investments made over the years from energy contracts to reconstruction projects. Beyond immediate military and economic concerns, the collapse of the Assad Regime could destabilise Russia's regional alliances, specifically with Iran and Hezbollah. Furthermore, it would challenge Russia's position as a reliable global partner, which would lead to a diminishing influence of Russia in Middle Eastern affairs as well as in the North African Region.

This paper analyses potential strategies that Russia can use to mitigate these risks, including alliances, securing alternative access to military, and leveraging diplomatic channels to retain its influence in Syria. Ultimately, this paper highlights the fragility of Russia's position, as overdependence on the Assad regime exposes vulnerabilities that will lead to Moscow rethinking its regional strategy, testing its resilience as a global power.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The collection of literature explores Russia's intervention in Syria multidimensionally. Scholars like Afridi and Jibran (2018)<sup>1</sup> provide a neo-realistic framework to explain Moscow's actions as a projection of power against Western hegemony, while Allison (2013)<sup>2</sup> explores practical considerations such as sales and naval access in Tartus.

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<sup>1</sup> Manzoor Khan Afridi and Ali Jibran, 'Russian Response to Syrian Crisis: A Neorealist Perspective' (2018) 38(2) Strategic Studies <<http://dx.doi.org/10.53532/ss.038.02.00150>> accessed 05 May 2025

<sup>2</sup> Allison Roy, 'Russia and Syria: Explaining alignment with a regime in crisis' (2013) 89(4) International Affairs <<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/23479395>> accessed 05 May 2025

Works such as Baker et al (2013)<sup>3</sup> and Shapir (2013)<sup>4</sup> highlight how Russia put into operation sectarian dynamics and military technology, for eg, S-300 systems, to legitimise its presence. Military analyses such as Gile (2019)<sup>5</sup> and Lavrov et al (2018)<sup>6</sup> elaborate on Russia's hybrid warfare tactics and operations, while Cafarella and Zhou (2019)<sup>7</sup> and Mikhail (2021)<sup>8</sup> caution about overdependence and its diminishing returns. Economic literature, like in Bergmann et al. (2023)<sup>9</sup>, portrays Syria as a testing ground for arms, while Stent (2016)<sup>10</sup> and Grajewski (2024)<sup>11</sup> interpret the intervention of Russia as a form of status-seeking behaviour.

Regional complexities are elaborated in Hale (2019)<sup>12</sup> and Kasapoglu (2020)<sup>13</sup>, who analyse how Turkey's involvement has created both challenges and opportunities for Russia. Martini et al. (2013)<sup>14</sup> and the EUISS report (2018)<sup>15</sup> Conceptualise Syria in a great power competition, portraying how Russia used the conflict to reassert its position as a global power. By incorporating these sources, this paper will move towards a speculative narrative, offering a multi-dimensional analysis that will connect military, economic, diplomatic, and theoretical dimensions while addressing the gaps in shifting power dynamics.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research, a multidimensional approach is used to explore what the fall of Assad means for Russia's military and economic interests. On the qualitative side, the study critically

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>4</sup> Yiftah Shapir, 'Syria, Russia, and the S-300: Military and Technical Background' (INSS, 20 May 2013) <<https://www.inss.org.il/publication/syria-russia-and-the-s-300-military-and-technical-background/>> accessed 05 May 2025

<sup>5</sup> Stephen J. Blank, *The Russian Military In Contemporary Perspective* (US Army War College 2019)

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>7</sup> Jennifer Cafarella and Jason Zhou, 'Russia's Dead-End Diplomacy In Syria' (Institute for the Study of War, 22 November 2019) <<https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ISW%20Report%20-%20Russia%E2%80%99s%20Dead-End%20Diplomacy%20in%20Syria%20-%20November%202019.pdf>> accessed 05 May 2025

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>9</sup> Max Bergmann et al., 'Seller's Remorse The Challenges Facing Russia's Arms Exports' (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 15 September 2023) <[https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-09/230918\\_Bergmann\\_Seller's\\_Remorse.pdf](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-09/230918_Bergmann_Seller's_Remorse.pdf)> accessed 05 May 2025

<sup>10</sup> Angela Stent, 'Putin's Power Play in Syria: How to Respond to Russia's Intervention' (2016) 95(1) Foreign Affairs <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43946630>> accessed 05 May 2025

<sup>11</sup> Nicole Grajewski, 'Syria Matters Russia' (*The Atlantic*, 03 December 2024) <<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2024/12/syria-matters-russia/680858/>> accessed 05 May 2025

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>13</sup> NATO Defense College, *Turkey's military policy in Syria: implications for NATO* (2020)

<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey Martini et al., 'Syria as an Arena of Strategic Competition' (RAND Corporation, 18 March 2013) <[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR213.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR213.html)> accessed 05 May 2025

<sup>15</sup> Blank (n 5)

examines documents such as government statements, military agreements, and international policy documents, as well as interviews with experts and geopolitical analysts. A review of the case studies about how Russia has reacted to regime changes in the past acts as a comparative lens.

On the quantitative side, the military expenditure data, arms trade statistics, investment flows, and bilateral trade agreements between Russia and Syria. Data from sources such as SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) and, World Bank is used in assessing the economic stakes for Russia.<sup>16</sup> Mapping of geographic and strategic military bases, transit routes, and resource pipelines further adds to the evaluation of the logistical consequences of the potential closure of bases.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the methodology tries to accumulate data from all these sections to provide evidence-backed regional changes, which will explore the cons of losing an ally like Assad that forms the heart of Russia's global strategy.

## **RUSSIA'S INFLUENCE IN SYRIA**

Russia and the Assad Dynasty in Syria had a very mutually beneficial relationship. After Hafez al-Assad first rose to power in 1971.<sup>18</sup> He almost immediately agreed to lease the port of Tartus on the Syrian coast to the Soviet navy. Tartus, then became an extremely strategically important asset to the Soviets as it was the only Soviet naval base located anywhere on the Mediterranean Sea, it enabled the soviet navy to use it as a resupply and replenishment base to support their operations in the Mediterranean without them having to pass through the NATO controlled Turkish Straits back to their domestic ports on the Black Sea.

Without Tartus, the Soviet navy would not have been able to operate anywhere in the Mediterranean, and thus they wouldn't have been able to credibly threaten NATO's southern flank from the Mediterranean while the base also served as a sort of Soviet's counterweight to America's primary Mediterranean naval base in Naples, Italy. The Soviets also rewarded the Assad in Syria for granting them the Tartus naval base lease by lavishing them with military and diplomatic support between 1950 and 1991, a whopping 94% of all of Syria's

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<sup>16</sup> Ohannes Geukjian, *The Russian Military Intervention in Syria* (McGill-Queen's University Press 2022)

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>18</sup> Roy (n 2)

arms imports came exclusively from the Soviet Union including hundreds of fighter aircraft and artillery piece, thousands of tanks and infantry fighting vehicles and notably more than 13,000 serviced air missiles and 7,500 anti-tank missiles, thousands of Soviet advisors were deployed to Syria to assist with the country's war against Israel during the Yom Kippur War in 1973 while Syria was the sole Arab state not to condemn the Soviet Union over its invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, their relations ran deep and they continued to remain close after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991<sup>19</sup>.

Russia remained the primary arms supplier of Syria while Syria continued to lease the port of Tartus to the Russian Black Sea fleet. In 2005, Syria agreed to allow the Russians to expand their naval facilities in Tartus in exchange for Russia riding off more than 70% of Syria's billion-dollar debt that was left over from the Soviet era.<sup>20</sup> As Russia's relationship with the West began to deteriorate after it invaded Georgia in 2008, Bashar al-Assad even allowed the Russians to transform Tartus into a permanent naval base and a station for nuclear-armed submarines at the base. Thereafter, Tartus likely to be a critically important component to Russia's overall conventional and nuclear deterrent strategies since it certainly enabled Russian warships armed with long-range missiles to operate in the Mediterranean within striking distance of NATO targets in southern Europe and it likely enabled their nuclear submarines to operate freely within the Mediterranean as well and all without them having to pass through the still NATO controlled Turkish straits back towards their home ports on the Black Sea to replenish and resupply.

After the civil war in Syria erupted against Basher al-Assad rule in 2011, Russia diplomatically supported his regime by using its position as a permanent member in UNSC to veto multiple resolutions by western and Arab countries that called for sanctions or military intervention in Syria while Russia dramatically stepped up the arms deliveries and made to Assad through their continued lease over the port at Tartus.<sup>21</sup> Then, in 2015, as it appeared that the Assad regime was on the brink of imminent collapse in Syria with dramatic rebel advancements, Russia initiated a massive full-scale military intervention in Syria to save Assad and to save their continued access to the port at Tartus. Around 20,000 Russian military personnel were deployed to Syria while the Russian navy and air force spent years

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<sup>19</sup> Cafarella (n 7)

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>21</sup> Stent (n 10)

relentlessly bombarding rebels and civilians across the country that killing thousands of people during the Russian intervention.

The Assad regime allowed the Russians to construct a new major air base for their aerial operations in the country at Khmeimim within Syria's Latakia province, which became the nerve centre for Russia's aerial operations throughout Syria and the Middle East. By 2017, the Russian military intervention largely stabilised Assad's position in Syria, and in return, Assad led Syria into signing an agreement with the Russians with granting a 49-year lease to both the naval base at Tartus and the new air base at Khmeimim (which will last until 2066)<sup>22</sup>.

Eventually, Russia was granted sole sovereign jurisdiction over both of the bases, wherein Russian personnel and material at the bases were granted full legal immunity from Syrian jurisdiction in the aftermath of both of these. They carved down in Syria and became enormously critical assets to Russia's geopolitical objectives. They enabled Russian naval and air power to be projected beyond the Black Sea into the Mediterranean and in the Middle East, and they most critically enabled Russia to expand its military operations into other theatres far away from Russia's borders.

They enabled Russia to be able to leak frog their military support from the Black Sea to Syria and the forces of Field Marshall Khalifa Belqasim Omar Haftar of the Libyan National Army during the Libyan civil war which enabled Russia's expeditionary adventures using the Wagner group and later the African countries like Sudan, the Central African Republic, Burkina Faso, Mali and Tartus in Syria being the critical bases in the center between Russia itself and Russia's military operations in Africa which serve multiple important objectives. By supporting Khalifa Haftar's forces in Libya, Russia hopes to disrupt Libya's normally large oil supply to Europe as much as possible and to build military bases located in Africa itself to project power even deeper South into the continent by supporting the governments in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.

Russia hopes to disrupt Niger's large uranium supply to the nuclear reactors in France and to disrupt France's influence in its former colonies in Africa as much as possible, a highly successful strategy that has contributed to the French being forced to withdraw their military

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<sup>22</sup> Afridi (n 1)

presences from Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger and Senegal all just since 2022 after the invasion of Ukraine. In many of these cases, especially in the Sahel States and in Sudan<sup>23</sup>.

The business model if you can even call it that Russia and the Wagner Group pioneered and established in Africa is basically that Russian flies in Mercenaries to stabilize unpopular or isolated African governments and then they fly out valuable minerals like gold and diamonds back to Russia that are hard to track, enabling Russia to evade the sanctions that have been imposed on them by the west after the invasion of Ukraine and it's the Russian bases in Syria that they secured after 2017 which made this entire strategy possible especially the major airbase at Khmeimim which acts as a refueling and logistical center.<sup>24</sup>

These were the reasons why Russia heavily supported Assad's government in Syria and intervened against the rebels in the country, and why Russia's interest in Syria perfectly aligned with Iran and Hezbollah's interest in Syria as well. But now with the collapse of Assad's government in Syria, Russia's enormous investment into propping it up in the country seems like it might go up in smoke and its continued access to Tartus and Khmeimim is more uncertain than it has ever been if the new government in Syria revokes Russia's leases and accesses to the bases it'll be catastrophic for Russia's current strategy.

Without the Tartus Naval Base, the Russian navy will lose the ability to freely operate anywhere as Turkey has invoked the terms of the 1936 Montreux Convention which prevents Russia from being able to move any of its warships through the Turkish Straits between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean or vice versa as long as the war in Ukraine continues.<sup>25</sup> Russia's ports on the Black sea are completely inaccessible to the Russian navy from the Mediterranean and if they lose access to Tartus Naval base, they'll also lose their only port on the Mediterranean region which will eliminate Russia's ability to operate submarines or warships anywhere in the Mediterranean without any nearby ports to use for resupply or replenishment, crippling Russia's ability to credibly threaten in NATO with warships and with nuclear armed submarines in the Mediterranean and the loss of Khmeimim air base means that Russia's ability to continue supporting their expeditionary operations across

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<sup>23</sup> Grajewski (n 11)

<sup>24</sup> Martini (n 14)

<sup>25</sup> Blank (n 5)

Africa will be severely crippled if not outright eliminated with multiple cascading consequences in the event.

Even before the regime collapsed in Syria, Russia was busy dramatically expanding its military footprint in Libya for months throughout 2024. Haftar, who currently dominates Eastern and Southern Libya, has allowed the Russians to open and operate four air bases across his controlled territory in exchange for Russia's military support to his side in the country's civil war, which the Russians spent 2024 expanding and building up their aircraft and troop presences in these air bases<sup>26</sup>. Haftar's territory in Libya being critical to supporting Russia's operations throughout the rest of Africa giving Russia an arc of continuous power projection that their aircraft transporting mercenaries and arms could take from Russia to Khmeimim in Syria to the air bases in Libya and then to locations throughout the African interior and vice versa in the other direction with gold and diamonds and other valuable minerals which will be disrupted if Russia lost their access to Khmeimim in Syria, as it would require more fuel for each flight.

Historically, Russia has also used the Libyan Port of Tobruk under Haftar's control to transport material and personnel towards their air bases deeper in the country but now faced with the potential loss of the Tartus naval base in Syria, Russia may attempt a pressure of Tar into following the Russians to expand their naval presence into Tobruk into a more permanent naval base that could replace Tartus but even if he agreed it would take years to construct the required onshore infrastructure to support as large of a fleet as the Russian originally had stationed at Tartus and it would also result in significant diplomatic push back from NATO and the US who sort of support Haftar's faction in Libya as well do it's unclear if that would even be a possible move for Russia to pursue.

This is all very complicated because it means with the loss of the bases in Syria, Russia will find itself coming to rely more on their bases in Libya and its relationship with Haftar while they'll also find themselves in a weaker position to support bases and to continue that relationship and similar to the situation in Syria whereas Russia and Turkey found themselves supporting opposites sides during that civil war. Turkey also supports the opposite side in Libya and backs the government of National Unity based in Tripoli. In Syria,

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*



the Turkish-backed rebels there sensed Russia's weakness as they focused everything on their all-consuming war in Ukraine.<sup>27</sup>

Now in Libya, Russia still heavily concentrated on trying to swallow Ukraine and with a probable loss of Russia's bases in Syria that will complicate their ability to continue supporting Haftar's government could it be possible that Turkey after their decisive victory supporting the winning side in Syria will also encourage the side they support in Libya to begin another renewed offensive against the Russian backside there too for several years since 2020, the civil war in Libya has remained frozen in place between Haftar in the East and the South and the Tripoli based government in the west largely because of an understanding between the respective outside supporters while the Syrian civil war was also frozen between 2020 and the end of 2024, the Turkish backed Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) rebel faction of the country was holed up and appeared to be cornered within Syria's Idlib province wherein 3 million Syrians lived there for years under the control of HTS and the Turks dreaded the thought of Russia and the Assad regime launching a renewed offensive into Idlib that had the potential of unleashing hundreds of thousands of refugees spilling across the border in Turkey thus if the Turks encourage their side in Libya to launch a renewed offensive against Russia's side then Russia can authorize their side in Syria to launch a renewed defensive against Turkey side in Idlib and spark that massive humanitarian disaster on Turkey's doorstep.

Russia cannot afford to let Haftar fall next after Assad but without they'll also find it much more difficult to keep hanging onto him, Turkey has long supported the Tripoli based government because they agreed to become the first country in world to recognize Turkey's maritime claims in the Eastern Mediterranean with the victory of Turkey backed HTS in Syria, it stands to reason that the new Turkish friendly government in Syria will also eventually extend the recognition of Turkey's maritime claims in the region as well and if they succeed in topping Haftar in Libya next. Turkey will have suddenly secured three countries in the eastern Mediterranean that will recognize their maritime claims in the region against the opposition of Greece, Cyprus and Egypt and so the legitimacy of the Turkish Maritime claims will be greatly strengthened that is the incentive that Turkey has to twist the

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<sup>27</sup> Grajewski (n 11)

knife into Russia's side in Libya next and it will be of no surprise that they don't try for the same and this would be even more advantageous to Turkey and detrimental to Russia.

For years following major offshore natural gas in the maritime zones of Israel, Cyprus and Egypt in the later 2010s, an alliance of countries consisting of those three plus Greece, Jordan, Italy and France have pursued a major infrastructure project known as the Eastern Mediterranean Pipeline or East Med, if it is ever completed East Med would be capable of transporting about 10 billion cubic meters of gas per year to European market from Cyprus, Israel and Egypt equivalent to about 3% of the EU's entire consumption of gas in 2023, the alliance also firmly rejects Turkey's maritime claims in the Eastern Mediterranean that would overlap with the plan round of the pipeline between Cyprus and the Greek Islanders of Crete while the pipeline would also completely circumvent all Turkish territory.

Naturally, then, Turkey is opposed to this Alliance in the East Med project as it's envisioned. The project has already been indefinitely stalled since the US withdrew its support for it in 2022 but if Turkey could push out Haftar from Libya and secure both Libya and Syria support for their maritime claims in the region, Turkey would acquire the leverage to try and force the East Med countries into rerouting the pipeline overland instead through Syria, this was never really a possible option until right this very moment because nobody would have routed the pipeline through Syria while it was still in active war zone if Turkey and their supported side in Syria can manage to stabilize the country though they can present the option of rerouting the pipeline from Cyprus, Egypt and Israel through Syria to link up with Turkey's already existing gas infrastructure onwards to Europe which would further undermine Russia's energy leverage over Europe in the process and that's nothing compared to another even larger possibility to further undermine Russia's energy influence in Europe that's been presented by the collapse of Assad regime as well the largest natural gas field ever discovered in the entire world by orders of magnitude is the South pars North Dome Field located in the center of the Persian Gulf between Iran and Qatar, this field so enormous it alone contains more gas reserves than the next 10 largest gas fields ever discovered all combined.

The field became the foundation of the Qatari state's modern gas industry and how the little country was able to become the third largest natural gas exporter in the world behind only Russia and the US. However, Qatar has always been restricted by how much gas they can

export out of the field because the country doesn't have any pipelines that can carry the gas out to markets over land all of Qatar's natural gas exports are done through Liquefying Natural Gas (LNG) exports instead where the gas is super cooled into its liquid form and loaded on a ships with refrigerated containers for transportations around the world.

To put the scale of the advantage of pipelined in a context, Norway is currently able to export nearly as much gas as Qatar does abroad despite having reserves that are only 7% of Qatar's because unlike Qatar, Norway has a web of pipelines that they used reliable and constantly transport gas to Europe through. If Qatar has pipelines that connected its world leading gas to Europe it could theoretically supply all of Europe's current gas needs all on its own for an entire century which would probably long enough to carry Europe all the way through towards full decarbonization in the late 2000s, Turkey and Qatar began establishing an alliance between them across the Middle East owing to their government's mutual support of political Islamism in the region and 2009 they first suggested the concept of building out a massive gas pipeline from Qatar through Turkey and onwards to the market in Europe.<sup>28</sup>

However, for the pipeline to reach Turkey from Qatar, there were only two possible geographic options to choose between; the pipeline could either be routed through Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iraq towards Turkey, or it could be routed through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Syria towards Turkey. The first option through Iraq was immediately discarded over that country's chronic instability at the time, and so the route through Syria was the one that was the most heavily pursued.

However, the Assad government in Syria quickly rejected the whole idea and refused to consider routing the pipeline through their territory at all even if they have received lucrative transit fees if they have agreed to it and they almost certainly rejected it because they were pressured into rejecting it by their pager in Russia who feared how badly a massive gas pipeline from Qatar into Europe would reduce their energy leverage over Europe in the process and this another massive the less disgusted reason why the Russians so heavily supported Assad during the later civil war in the country to guarantee that they would keep locking Syria space off the board for this pipeline into Europe from Qatar and so the Qatar

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*

Turkey gas pipeline was indefinitely shelved and multiple geopolitical issues in the region kept it shelved for the last 15 years.<sup>29</sup>

Syria collapsed into a civil war that further kept its territory off limits, Iraq continued to remain chronically unstable while Saudi Arabia even blockaded Qatar for years between 2017 and 2021 that kept its territory off limits to any potential Qatari pipelines as well but the Saudi blockade ended in 2021 and now with the Assad regime in Syria and installment of a government backed by both Turkey and Qatar, the prospect of opening Syria space on the board back up to the Qatari pipeline to Europe has emerged once again and this is how the collapse of Assad regime in Syria could end up most catastrophically hurting the Russians, it only took two days after Assad had fled the country for the country for the Turkish energy minister Alparslan Bayraktar to publicly suggest that the Qatar pipeline project could soon become revived once again were Syria to achieve its territorial integrity and stability which Turkey will no doubt in support even with military action against any remaining Rebel forces in Syria who are opposed to HTS.

If Syria can be secured and stabilized in the future, then the Qatar gas pipeline project routed through Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria to Turkey and onwards to Europe could soon become an actual reality and if that happens Europe will never have to buy a single drop of natural gas from Russia and the Kremlin will lose all its remaining energy leverage over Europe.

There are some in Russia who hope that in the future after the war in Ukraine is concluded one way or another, the Europeans will eventually return to business as usual with Russia and resume purchasing massive amounts of their natural gas again but if they had this pipeline from Qatar, the Europeans would have the choice of just never doing that and never finding themselves reliant on Russian energy and susceptible to Russian influence and pressure again instead of Russia being the most important link to Europe's gas supply.

Turkey is attempting to position itself as that most important link instead they are steadily becoming the invaluable crossroads between the marketplace in Europe and the gas supplies located all around them they already across their territory carry pipelines into Europe from Azerbaijan, Iran, Northern Iraq and Russia and in the future, they may add these additional

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*

pipelines from Cyprus, Israel, Egypt and Qatar and in the process they will become the Arbiter of Europe's gas supply and they establish the energy leverage over Europe that Russia used to have.

## CONCLUSION

The fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria represents a crucial shift for Russia's strategy in the Middle East. Assad has been Moscow's most dependable ally in the area, granting access to military bases and economic interests, notably in Tartus and energy investments. Losing these would significantly weaken Russia's naval capabilities and power projection in the region. While Russia maintains various alliances, the loss of Assad would be a considerable blow, forcing a reassessment of its strategy and potentially reducing its influence in the region. This study underscores the dangers of relying too heavily on a single strategic partner and emphasises the urgent need for Russia to develop greater resilience in its Middle Eastern approach.

## SUGGESTIONS

**Avoid Dependence:** Russia needs to avoid overdependence on a single nation or regime for critical military bases. The Syrian conflict exposed the vulnerability of relying on a single regime, which can become unstable. To prevent such situations, it needs to diversify its military base agreements with nations of a similar geopolitical nature, which will enhance its strategic depth and continuation of its operations.

**Build Relations with Non-State Actors:** Russia should establish connections with non-state actors, including militias, political movements, or economic interests, to safeguard its strategic interests and prevent a situation similar to what occurred with the Assad regime. This ensures a more flexible and enduring presence, especially in regions where state authority might be weak.

**Use of Organisations:** Russia, being a part of organisations like the BRICS and SCO, where it maintains a pivotal influence, could leverage this to make key coalitions that support the reallocation of military resources, enable joint operations, etc. Multilateral cooperation also provides immunity from Western pressure and diplomatic isolation.

**Gathering of Intelligence:** Russia to use its Intelligence Agency, i.e., Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), to monitor Turkey's moves to be ready in case of Greece, Cyprus, or Egypt to track military build-ups, alliance shifts, and geopolitical tensions. Intelligence will help Russia safeguard its assets, preempt threats and safeguard its interests.