

Dangerous Drift: Russia's Middle East Policy

Oct 1, 2000



In-Depth Reports

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, Russian superpower presence in the Middle East faded, and since 1991, a vision of Russian national interest in the region has been missing. Pushed by a succession of narrow domestic corporate and bureaucratic interests, as well as by various Middle Eastern interests in Russia, Moscow has been drifting along in the Middle East rather than pursuing a strategy with a purpose. Its most active relationships in the region with Israel and Iran are to a large degree the result of, respectively, Israeli and Iranian interests in Russia, rather than Russia's strategic interest in them. In other words, the various policies it has pursued or had thrust upon it have sent mixed signals to the region concerning the degree of Russia's interest in the Middle East.

In this Policy Paper, Russian foreign policy expert Eugene Rumer, examines the bilateral relationships between Russia and key Middle Eastern countries Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Egypt, along with Moscow's expanding web of economic and military ties to Iran. Why is Russian aiding Iran's ballistic missile and WMD programs, if these programs will likely endanger Russian security in the future? The key to understanding Moscow's conduct in the Middle East, Rumer argues, lies first and foremost in Russia's weakness, chaotic policymaking, and lack of a coherent foreign policy strategy.

- 30 pages

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