



## PUTIN'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD SYRIA

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*This article examines why Russian-Syrian relations were not especially close during the first five years of Putin's presidency and why the relationship suddenly improved at the beginning of 2005. It will also examine how Putin has sought to maintain good relations with Syria and Israel simultaneously, and how various future scenarios might affect Russian-Syrian relations.*

Despite their many common interests (including opposition to American "hegemony" in general and to the American-led intervention in neighboring Iraq in particular), Russian-Syrian relations have not been particularly close during most of the Putin era. Russian-Israeli relations, by contrast, became very close under both Putin and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Since Syrian President Bashar Assad met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow in January 2005, however, Russian-Syrian relations have improved dramatically. Russia has even agreed to sell an advanced air defense missile system to Syria over both American and Israeli objections. Russian-Syrian cooperation deepened since then despite Damascus's increasing isolation over its role in the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. Yet while increasing cooperation with Syria, Putin has sought to maintain close ties to Israel. While this has not been easy, he has been relatively successful at this delicate balancing act--at least so far.

Why did Russian-Syrian relations flounder during the first five years of the Putin presidency despite their common interests, including a mutual desire to improve them?

Why did their relationship suddenly improve at the beginning of 2005? Can Putin maintain good relations simultaneously with Syria and Israel even though hostility between these two countries remains strong? Where do Russian-Syrian relations appear to be headed? Each of these questions will be addressed in turn.

### FLOUNDERING AT FIRST

In July 1999--just a few weeks before Vladimir Putin became President Boris Yeltsin's last prime minister, and just a few months before he became president of Russia himself--Syria's longtime dictator, Hafiz Assad, paid his last visit to Moscow. *Izvestia* noted at the time that Syria still owed Moscow as much as \$12 billion from Soviet times and that "Russia virtually froze cooperation with Damascus pending a resolution of the debt issues. But Moscow has now softened its position and reestablished ties."<sup>1</sup> *Izvestia* listed three reasons why Moscow wanted good relations with Damascus: 1) "Moscow in particular is capable of persuading Syria to make peace with Israel," 2) the fact that Tartus on the Syrian coast was Russia's only naval base in the Mediterranean, and 3) that Damascus was prepared to pay "cold cash" (a figure of \$2

billion was mentioned) for Moscow to upgrade its old Soviet weapons as well as sell it new Russian ones (including anti-aircraft systems).<sup>2</sup>

Russian-Syrian ties then seemed set to improve on the basis of Moscow not insisting that Damascus repay its entire Soviet-era debt in return for Damascus buying Russian weapons. The deal seemed to be quite a sensible one: in exchange for Moscow's "flexibility" on the debt (which the Kremlin undoubtedly knew Damascus was not likely to pay much of anyway), Syria would become what the Russian arms industry desperately needed: a cash paying customer. Yet although envisioned in 1999, this deal would not become a reality until 2005.

Delay in reaching this deal may have been inevitable due to the leadership changes that both countries experienced during the year following Hafiz Assad's visit to Moscow. In Russia, Putin became acting president upon Yeltsin's resignation in December 1999 and only became president in his own right after the elections of March 2000. In Syria, Hafiz Assad died in office in June 2000, and his son, Bashar, was officially elected president the following month. It is doubtful, though, that these two leadership transitions could have delayed the improvement of Russian-Syrian relations for long, especially if both governments sought this.

Indeed, both governments did. In October 2000, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov went to Damascus and met with the new President Assad as well as with the Syrian foreign minister.<sup>3</sup> Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Shara, in turn, visited Moscow in April 2001,<sup>4</sup> and was soon followed there by the Syrian Defense Minister, Marshal

Mustafa Tlas, in May 2001.<sup>5</sup> Syrian Vice President Abdel Halim Khaddam came to Moscow in January 2003 and met with Putin.<sup>6</sup> As early as April 2001, the Russian press announced that President Putin was planning a trip not only to Egypt and Israel (which he would visit in April 2005), but also to Syria and Lebanon (which he has not yet visited).<sup>7</sup>

Despite their efforts to improve relations, there were some important differences between Moscow and Damascus. Moscow has long sought to play a greater role in the Washington-dominated Arab-Israeli peace process. Even when Putin was still prime minister, *Nezavisimaya gazeta* noted that "the Syrian front is virtually the only one where Moscow could play a lead role in the peace process."<sup>8</sup> Yet soon after Putin became president, Syria and Lebanon (whose foreign policy Damascus controlled until the political upheaval that took place there in early 2005) boycotted a February 2000 Moscow meeting of the Multilateral Steering Group for Middle East Peace.<sup>9</sup>

Russian-Syrian differences over how to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict were again evident in March 2002, when Russia along with 13 other members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) voted in favor of Resolution 1397 calling for the coexistence of an Israeli and a Palestinian state, while Syria (a non-permanent member of the UNSC) abstained on the measure. In addition, although Russia did vote in favor of a UNSC resolution proposed by Syria and Sudan (which the United States vetoed) calling upon Israel not to expel Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat from the occupied territories, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Yury Fedotov indicated Moscow's lack of

enthusiasm for the measure by saying that "the vote should not have been rushed"<sup>10</sup> What these instances indicate is that Moscow has been unwilling to support Syria's harder line on the Arab-Israeli issue, while Damascus has not been willing to moderate its position in order to align itself more closely with Russia.

Both Russia and Syria opposed American efforts to obtain UNSC support for intervention in Iraq in 2002-03, as well as the American-led intervention which both toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and has sought to pacify Iraq ever since. The Russian press noted on several occasions that Syria might be next on America's list of countries to invade.<sup>11</sup> There appears to have been no suggestion on Russia's part, though, that Moscow would do anything to protect Syria if this scenario occurred. *Kommersant* even asserted that, "The main addressee of the State Department's harsh anti-Syrian declarations is most likely not Damascus, but Moscow."<sup>12</sup> None of this could have been reassuring to the Syrian government.

Nor was Moscow willing to sell Damascus all the weapons that it wanted to buy. According to Russian press accounts, Moscow would not approve a Syrian request to purchase Russian S-300 air defense missiles, which have a 200 km range.<sup>13</sup> Nor could Damascus have been pleased when, in response to Israeli Prime Minister Sharon's plea that Putin not sell the much shorter range Iglá man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS) to Syria for fear that they would wind up in the hands of Hizballah,

Putin declared that "Russia will never help Israel's enemies."<sup>14</sup>

Under Putin in particular, Russian ties to Israel have grown quite close. Trade between the two countries has increased greatly, and Russia and Israel cooperate in the security realm as well.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the Syrian defense minister "expressed concern" about growing Russian-Israeli security cooperation during his visit to Moscow in May 2001.<sup>16</sup> This cooperation was stepped up in the wake of the September 2004 Beslan tragedy. Shortly afterward, *Kommersant* predicted that "There is every chance that the information Israel is willing to share with Russia will indeed prompt Moscow to reassess its relations with 'traditional Arab friends' whose territories harbor the headquarters of a considerable number of extremist organizations."<sup>17</sup>

Finally, Russian press coverage during this period made it clear that Moscow and Damascus had been unable to reach agreement on the debt issue.

#### **THE 2005 BREAKTHROUGH**

Since the beginning of 2005, Russian-Syrian relations appear to have undergone a dramatic improvement. As was noted earlier, Bashar Assad visited Moscow and met with Putin in January 2005--his first visit since becoming Syria's president in mid-2000. On this occasion, it was announced that Moscow had agreed to write off 73 percent of Syria's now \$13.4 billion debt to Russia. Moreover, as *Vremya novostei* noted, Moscow allowed Damascus to repay the rest of the loan on terms extremely favorable to Syria: "The remaining \$3.618 billion will be paid off in

installments, with Syria paying \$170 million on the debt in 2005. Actually, only \$1.5 billion of the remaining sum will be repaid in 'cold cash' over the next 10 years. The Syrian side will invest the rest in joint projects within Syria.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, Russia agreed to sell to Syria the Strelets air defense missile system, consisting of vehicle-mounted short range surface-to-air missiles. According to a *Kommersant* commentator, this deal was worth up to \$100 million.<sup>19</sup> Putin himself confirmed that the deal had been "completed" in April 2005.<sup>20</sup>

Further, in March 2005, Russia's Tatneft signed an agreement to explore and develop new oil and gas deposits in Syria. Syria's oil minister, Ibrahim Haddad, described Tatneft as "the first Russian oil company in recent years to conclude a contract to extract oil in Syria," and expressed the hope that more Russian companies would become involved in Syria's oil and gas development.<sup>21</sup> In December 2005, the Russian company Stroytransgaz signed contracts with Syria to build a gas processing plant (worth \$200 million) and a gas pipeline (worth \$160 million).<sup>22</sup> That same month a preliminary agreement worth \$2.7 billion was reached for a Russian oil-refining and petrochemical complex to be built in Syria.<sup>23</sup>

What explains this improvement in Russian-Syrian relations? It is not possible to answer this question with complete certainty given that neither of these two governments is inclined to reveal much either about its foreign policy decision-making or its negotiations with other governments. Two events did occur, though, that appear to have increased each side's willingness to cooperate with the other.

One of these was the announcement in December 2004 that Moscow had agreed to write off 90 percent of Iraq's debt to Russia. This debt—which was about two-thirds the size of Syria's—had long been a contentious issue for Moscow. Saddam had not paid it when he was in power. Russia's efforts to persuade the United States either to guarantee its repayment or get post-Saddam Iraq to repay were also unsuccessful. Moscow's acquiescence to writing off 90 percent of the Iraqi debt appears to have resulted both from the recent write-off of 80 percent of Iraq's debt by Paris Club members as well as the hope that a post-Saddam Iraq would both honor previously signed oil agreements and grant future ones to Russian oil firms.<sup>24</sup>

Before finally agreeing to write off 90 percent of Iraq's debt, Putin had little incentive to write off a large percentage of Syria's debt. The new Iraqi authorities, the United States, and others would have seen this as setting a precedent for Moscow to write off as much or more of Iraq's debt. Once Putin agreed, however, to write off so much of Iraq's debt without any guarantee as to how much Russian business interests would benefit from this, the Iraqi debt issue was no longer an obstacle for him regarding Syria's debt. Like Baghdad either under Saddam or afterward, Damascus was highly unlikely to ever repay the full amount anyway. Yet because Russia enjoyed much greater access to Syria than post-Saddam Iraq, agreeing to write off most of Syria's debt was more likely to benefit Russian business interests—as has already proven to be the case both for the Russian arms and petroleum industries.

The other event, motivating Damascus to improve relations with Moscow, has been

## Putin's Foreign Policy toward Syria

Syria's increasing international isolation since September 2004 when the UNSC approved Resolution 1559 calling for the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon. Russia did not vote in favor of this Resolution, but did not veto it either; instead, it abstained.<sup>25</sup>

The Syrian government appears to have felt threatened both by menacing American statements about Damascus's support for anti-American insurgents in Iraq and by the international pressure for it to withdraw its forces from Lebanon. Unlike their divisions over the question of intervention in Iraq, the United States and the EU joined forces in working for the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon. As *Kommersant* observed:

Relations between Moscow and Damascus have [recently] grown stronger as Syria's position in the world arena has become ever more tenuous....To somehow shield itself from possible attacks from Washington, Damascus launched an urgent search for a strategic partner, and it ultimately settled on Russia. In late 2004, talks got under way on a new round of purchases of Russian weapons to the tune of \$ billion, and the Syrians reportedly promised to pay in cash this time.<sup>26</sup>

This willingness "to pay in cash this time" surely signaled to Moscow just how

desperate Damascus had become. Afterward, of course, the crisis in Lebanon would heat up and Syria would pull out all its troops (if not all its hopes for influence). It is unclear, however, whether America (with or without others) would have intervened if Damascus had not done so. Damascus's decision to withdraw indicated that it was unwilling either to risk this or a prolonged conflict with a newly (and surprisingly) aroused Lebanese population.

The Assad government was undoubtedly displeased that in March 2005, Moscow joined the West in calling for Syria to withdraw from Lebanon<sup>27</sup> and that Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov received anti-Syrian Lebanese opposition leader, Walid Jumblatt.<sup>28</sup> The fact that Damascus proceeded in its efforts to buy Russian air defense missiles, as well as in economic cooperation with Russian firms, indicated that while Russia was not all that firm an ally, it was not one that an increasingly beleaguered Syria could dispense with.

Indeed, Moscow proved this in late October 2005 when it successfully worked to weaken an American-British-French sponsored UNSC Resolution calling upon Syria to fully cooperate with the UN investigation into the Hariri assassination and the possible involvement of Syrian officials in it. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov claimed credit for eliminating from the draft provisions calling for diplomatic and economic sanctions against Syria.<sup>29</sup> Damascus, though, may have been disappointed that Moscow did not simply veto Resolution 1636 altogether since it calls

for the "possibility of considering further action against Syria" if Damascus does not cooperate.<sup>30</sup>

### **IMPACT ON RUSSIAN-ISRAELI RELATIONS**

As was noted earlier, a particularly close relationship developed between Putin and Sharon. Unlike the leaders of most countries who have either criticized Putin's policy toward Chechnya or been unwilling to endorse it, Sharon expressed wholehearted approval for Putin's tough approach--likening it to his own vis-à-vis the Palestinians. The two leaders developed a genuine rapport, and Putin has expressed concern on numerous occasions for the safety and well-being of Israel's large Russian-speaking population.<sup>31</sup> Trade between Russia and Israel is much greater than that between Russia and Syria. Important security cooperation has also developed between Russia and Israel, which increased even further after the September 2004 Beslan tragedy.<sup>32</sup>

In light of this, the sudden improvement in Russian-Syrian relations at the beginning of 2005 appeared to threaten the Russian-Israeli relationship. Israeli politicians and observers were especially upset that Putin was going ahead with the sale of air defense missiles to Damascus after Israeli and American leaders had repeatedly asked him not to do this. Several Russian observers noted that Russia's improved relations with Syria were coming at the cost of worse relations with Israel--a trade which some suggested was not in Moscow's interests.<sup>33</sup>

Yet despite the genuine unhappiness expressed by Israeli officials over Putin going ahead with the missile sale which they strongly objected to, both governments acted

to contain and minimize their differences. Some press reports indicated that Moscow would sell Syria the Iskander-E with a flight range up to 280 km that "could strike any target in Israel, including Dimona" (where Israel's nuclear weapons are believed to be located).<sup>34</sup> During his visit to Israel in April 2005, though, Putin himself acknowledged that while Russian arms manufacturers did indeed want to sell the Iskander-E to Syria, he "personally nixed the deal," thus showing his concern for Israel's security.<sup>35</sup>

Press reports at the beginning of 2005 also suggested that Moscow would sell Damascus the Igla (or SA-18) MANPADS with a range of five to eight kilometers. Russian officials appeared to be in a rush to sell these to Syria so that the deal would not be covered by the agreement on non-proliferation of MANPADS that would be signed during the February 2005 Bush-Putin summit in Bratislava.<sup>36</sup> The Israeli and American governments strenuously warned Russia that these MANPADS, if sold to Syria, could end up in the hands of terrorist organizations such as Hizballah. In the event, it was announced that Moscow would not sell MANPADS to Syria, but instead would sell it the Strelts missile system, which consisted of Igla missiles mounted on vehicles. Terrorists, Moscow argued, could not use these Iglas, since they did not include the man-portable firing platform. Putin himself told the Israeli press that this sale would not alter the military balance in the region against Israel.<sup>37</sup>

The Israelis expressed skepticism about these claims, but despite the warnings of some, the relationship did not appear to suffer unduly. One of the keenest Russian observers of Moscow's relations with the Middle East, Georgiy Mirskiy, predicted that "deliveries of

Russian missiles to Damascus will not prompt a row" with Israel.<sup>38</sup> Yevgeniy Satanovskiy, president of Moscow's Institute for the Study of Israel and the Near East and a strong proponent of close Russian-Israeli ties, said that the sale of Russian missiles to Syria would have "precisely the same effect on relations with Israel as the Americans' arms exports to Saudi Arabia, that is, simply none at all."<sup>39</sup>

Putin's visit to Israel (as well as Egypt but not Syria) in April 2005 and repeated expression of his concern for Israeli security while he was there indicated that the Russian-Israeli relationship was still close despite the sale of Russian air defense missile systems to Syria. Indeed, the fact that Moscow would not sell Syria the air defense missiles it apparently wanted most (S-300, Iskander-E, and Igla) due to American and Israeli objections must have been a clear indication to Damascus of how sensitivity to Israeli security concerns limits the extent to which Moscow is willing to cooperate with Syria.

During Lavrov's October 2005 visit to Jerusalem, though, it became clear that Moscow's closer ties to Damascus (as well as Tehran) were leading to increasingly strained Russian-Israeli relations. *Kommersant* noted on the occasion that, "Several months ago, President Vladimir Putin promised the Israelis that he would press Syrian President Bashar Assad to expel Palestinian terrorist organizations from his country, and Israel was awaiting explanations of why that had not happened."<sup>40</sup>

#### **WHAT DOES RUSSIA WANT FROM SYRIA?**

Although Israel and America are clearly unhappy about it, the recent improvement in Russian-Syrian relations does not appear to presage a firm alliance between Moscow and Damascus, but rather something much less. Indeed, as the air defense missile and the UNSC Resolution episodes demonstrated, there is only so much that Putin is willing to do for Syria.

In the post-Soviet era, Syria's isolation from America and the West had not benefited Moscow much. While the Soviet Union was willing to transfer large quantities of weapons to Damascus in exchange for just the promise of repayment, post-Soviet Russia has not been willing to do so. Nor was a Syria that did not feel unduly threatened willing to pay for any weapons it wanted from Russia. However, the American-led intervention in Iraq and combined European and American pressure on Syria both to withdraw its forces from Lebanon and over the Hariri assassination have heightened Damascus's sense of insecurity, thus increasing its incentive to turn to Moscow.

This is exactly the position that Putin wants Syria to be in. While Russia may not be willing or able to defend Syria, the combination of Syria's heightened sense of insecurity and its isolation from the West is what has allowed preferential access for the Russian arms and petroleum industries to Syria. (There have even been reports of negotiations between the Russian atomic energy industry and Syria, but these have not come to fruition.)

If Syria improved its relations with the West and made peace with Israel, Russia's position in Syria would be much weaker. Russian firms would have to compete with Western ones for Syria's business--something which they do not want to have to do. On the other hand, if a hostile Sunni fundamentalist regime came to power in Damascus, Russia could well lose the contracts, investments, and other benefits (including continued Russian naval access to Tartus) it now has or hopes to gain from the current regime.

Finally, Putin values the Assad regime's position regarding Chechnya. Syria--like Israel--does not support the Chechen rebels. Indeed, Chechnya's Moscow-backed president, Alu Alkhanov, was received both by Assad and his prime minister in Damascus in September 2005.<sup>41</sup> Neither a democratic nor a Sunni fundamentalist regime in Damascus would be so sympathetic toward Moscow on this. Indeed, a Sunni fundamentalist regime in Syria (or anywhere else) might actively support the Chechen rebels.

The present situation in Syria, then, is best suited for Putin to advance Russia's relatively modest, commercially motivated interests there. Nor does this seem likely to change in the immediate future. Moscow surely does not have to worry about its position in Syria being marginalized as a result of a Syrian-Israeli peace agreement or a Syrian-American (or even --European) rapprochement occurring any time soon. Nor does it seem likely that Syria will experience a democratic revolution that would bring a pro-Western government to power in Damascus. In addition, Bashar Assads quick withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon in the spring of 2005 shows that he is far more likely than

was Saddam Hussein in Iraq to take whatever steps are necessary to avoid an American-led intervention against his regime.

Moscow also understands that while both the United States and Israel have little love for Bashar Assad, their fear that he will be overthrown and replaced by a worse regime give them both some interest in Moscow helping to prop him up. For if Assad's regime begins to falter, there is little that Russia--or any other country--may be able to do to prevent it from falling. Furthermore, if an Islamic fundamentalist regime does replace Assad's, American, Israeli, and Russian interests will all suffer.

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#### NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Marianna Belenkaya, "Damascus and Beirut," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, October 10, 2000, pp. 1, 6 in *CDPSP*, November 8, 2000, pp. 23-24.

<sup>4</sup> Sergei Guly, "Bombs Fly, Trade Goes On," *Noviye Izvestia*, April 18, 2001, p. 3 in *CDPSP*, May 16, 2001, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Ivan Safronov, "Moscow Won't Leave Damascus Unarmed," *Kommersant*, May 25, 2001, p. 2 in *CDPSP*, June 20, 2001, pp. 17-18.

<sup>6</sup> Anatoly Andreyev, "Major Mending Job Under Way in Russian-Syrian Relations,"



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<sup>7</sup> Vladimir Belyakov, "Drive to the East," *Trud*, April 7, 2001, p. 4 in *CDPSP*, May 2, 2001, pp. 23-24.

<sup>8</sup> Aleksandr Reutov, "U.S. Seeks to Reconcile Israel and Syria," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, December 10, 1999, p. 6 in *CDPSP*, January 12, 2000, p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> Yelena Suponina, "An Old Friend Gets Belligerent," *Vremya MN*, February 2, 2000, p. 6 in *CDPSP*, March 1, 2000, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> Aleksandr Reutov, "U.S. Kills Resolution," *Kommersant*, September 18, 2003, p. 10 in *CDPSP*, October 15, 2003, pp. 16-17.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Valentina Kulyabina and Stanislav Lyubimov, "Threatened with Democracy," *Vremya novostei*, March 31, 2003, p. 1 in *CDPSP*, April 30, 2005, pp. 3-4; Leonid Gankin, "Antiterrorist Coalition's Next Target," *Kommersant*, April 11, 2003, p. 10 in *CDPSP*, May 7, 2003, pp. 18-19; and Dmitry Sidorov and Aleksandr Reutov, "U.N. Smoked Out of Iraq," *Kommersant*, August 21, 2003, p. 9 in *CDPSP*, September 17, 2003, pp. 6-7.

<sup>12</sup> Mikhail Zygar, "Action Serial," *Kommersant*, September 18, 2003, p. 9 in *CDPSP*, October 15, 2003, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> Aleksandr Reutov, "S-300 Systems Will Not Be Sold to Syria Yet," *Kommersant*, April 18, 2001, p. 10 in *CDPSP*, May 16, 2001, pp. 17-18; and "General Says Syria Sought Missiles," *The Moscow Times*, April 16, 2003, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Zakhar Gelman, "Sharon Treated to Kosher Dinner," *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, October

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<sup>15</sup> For more on this subject, see Mark N. Katz, "Putin's Pro-Israel Policy," *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Winter 2005), pp. 51-59.

<sup>16</sup> Safronov, "Moscow Won't Leave Damascus Unarmed."

<sup>17</sup> Grigory Asmolov and Aleksandr Reutov, "Counterterrorism Cooperation," *Kommersant*, September 7, 2004, p. 9 in *CDPSP*, October 6, 2004, p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> Aleksandr Samokhotkin and Yelena Suponina, "\$10 Billion Gift to Bashar Assad," *Vremya novostei*, January 26, 2005, p. 2 in *CDPSP*, February 23, 2005, pp. 18-19. Different Russian sources give slightly different figures as to Syria's overall debt to Moscow and the amount to be written off.

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<sup>20</sup> "Putin: Russian-Syrian Missile Deal Completed," *The Jerusalem Post*, April 21, 2005, p. 9.

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<sup>22</sup> "Russia's Sroytransgaz to Build Gas Processing Plant in Syria," ITAR-TASS, December 5, 2005 (FBIS); and "Russia's Sroytransgaz to Build \$160 Mln Gas Pipe in Syria," Prime-Tass, December 5, 2005 (FBIS).

<sup>23</sup> "Russian Company, Syrian Government Sign Accord on Building Oil Refining

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Complex,” ITAR-TASS, December 28, 2005 (FBIS).

<sup>24</sup> Valeria Korchagina, “Putin Urges Iraq to Welcome Business,” *The Moscow Times*, December 8, 2004, p. 1. See also Mark N. Katz, “Playing the Angles: Russian Diplomacy Before and During the War in Iraq,” *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Fall 2003), pp. 49-50; and Pyotr Orekhin and Igor Naumov, “They Twisted Our Arms,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, November 23, 2004, pp. 1, 3 in *CDPSP*, December 22, 2004, p. 22.

<sup>25</sup> “Security Council Declares Support for Free, Fair Presidential Election in Lebanon; Calls for Withdrawal of Foreign Forces There,” UN Press Release SC/8181, September 2, 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Mikhail Zygar and Valery Yaremenko, “A Friend in Need,” *Kommersant*, March 4, 2005, p. 9 in *CDPSP*, March 30, 2005, pp. 19-20.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Ivan Groshkov, “Lebanon on the Agenda,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, March 11, 2005, p. 6 in *CDPSP*, April 6, 2005, pp. 17-18.

<sup>29</sup> Andrei Zlobin, “Veto Stays in Pocket—Moscow Saves Damascus from Economic Sanctions,” *Vremya novostei*, November 1, 2005, p. 2 in *CDPSP*, November 23-30, 2005, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Katz, “Putin's Pro-Israel Policy.”

<sup>32</sup> Asmolov and Reutov, “Counterterrorism Cooperation.”

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Boris Volkhonsky, “What's at Stake,” *Kommersant*, February 17, 2005, p. 9 in *CDPSP*, March 16, 2005, p. 4; and Natalya Gevorkyan, “What's at Stake,”

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<sup>34</sup> Marina Grishina and Andrei Zlobin, “Eastern Dances 'On the Needle,’” *Vremya novostei*, January 14, 2005, p. 2 in *CDPSP*, February 2-9, 2005, pp. 18-19.

<sup>35</sup> Natalya Melikova, “Not Allowed to Wail,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, April 29, 2005, pp. 1-2 in *CDPSP*, May 25, 2005, p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> Leonid Gankin, Grigory Asmolov, and Ivan Safronov, “Israel Pricked by a Needle,” *Kommersant*, February 17, 2005, pp. 1, 9 in *CDPSP*, March 16, 2005, pp. 3-4.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Nadezhda Sorokina and Yevgeniy Shestakov, “Russia Manages to 'Show Flag,’” *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, April 29, 2005 (FBIS).

<sup>39</sup> “Politicians Discuss Putin's Summit,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, April 22, 2005 (FBIS).

<sup>40</sup> Grigory Asmolov, “Sergei Lavrov Speaks Pro-Arab with Jews,” *Kommersant*, October 28, 2005, p. 10 in *CDPSP*, November 23-30, 2005, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> Musa Muradov, “Kremlin Shows Arabs the Right Kind of Chechens,” *Kommersant*, September 22, 2005, p. 11 in *CDPSP*, October 19, 2005, p. 15.