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Atıf Künyesi | Citation Info

Adıgozalova, M. (2023). Syria in Us Middle East Policy (2000-2011). *Akademik Tarih ve Düşünce Dergisi*, 11 (1), 760-775.

Syria in Us Middle East Policy (2000-2011)

Abstract

This article examines one of the most pressing topics related to an important area of US regional policy. As is known, after the terrorist attack in the United States on September 11, 2001, Washington made radical changes to its Middle East policy. The fight against terrorism and countries supporting terrorists has become a priority of US policy. The article examines the role of Syria in US Middle East policy. Before the Arab Spring, Syria had a prominent role in the Arab-Israeli conflict. This meant that political leaders, including those from the US, had to consider Syria's stance on Middle Eastern issues and the opinions of the Syrian Arab Republic's government on significant regional problems.

Keywords: *USA-Syria relation, US military intervention, Middle East, Libyan crisis, Arab Spring*

ABD'nin Orta Doğu Politikasında Suriye (2000-2011)

Öz

Bu makale, ABD'nin bölgesel politikasının önemli bir alanıyla ilgili en acil konulardan birini incelemektedir. Bilindiği üzere, 11 Eylül 2001 tarihinde ABD'de meydana gelen terör saldırısının ardından Washington, Orta Doğu politikasında radikal değişikliklere gitmiştir. Terörizmle ve teröristleri destekleyen ülkelerle mücadele ABD politikasının önceliği haline geldi. Bu makale

Suriye'nin ABD'nin Orta Doğu politikasındaki rolünü incelemektedir. Arap Baharı'ndan önce Suriye, Arap-İsrail çatışmasında önemli bir role sahiptir. Bu durum, ABD'dekiler de dahil olmak üzere siyasi liderlerin Suriye'nin Ortadoğu meselelerine ilişkin duruşunu ve Suriye Arap Cumhuriyeti hükümetinin önemli bölgesel sorunlara ilişkin görüşlerini dikkate almaları gerektiği anlamına geliyordu.

Anahtar Kelimeler: ABD-Suriye ilişkisi, ABD askeri müdahalesi, Orta Doğu, Libya krizi, Arap Baharı

Introduction

The Middle East is one of the main components of the international relations system. The region has enormous material potential, rich energy and human resources, and also has a favorable geographical and strategic location. Syria, one of the main powers in the region, took an independent political course in the Arab East starting from the second half of the 20th century and actively participated in the affairs of the world community. Syria has acquired the status of a regional power, exerting a significant influence on the overall course of the peace process in the Middle East. Following the establishment of the State of Israel in Palestine in 1948, the conflict in the Middle East started with the involvement of neighboring Arab countries. Syria, being one of the neighboring countries, has been involved in this conflict ever since. Before the Arab Spring happened, Syria remained a significant player in the Arab-Israeli conflict. As a result, politicians, including those from the US, had to consider Syria's stance on issues related to the Middle East and other major regional problems. In the 2000s, Syria, located at the center of two critical conflict zones such as Israel-Palestine and Iraq, became a valuable player due to its strategic location. During this period, Syria strengthened relations with Iran, stopped supporting the terrorist organization PKK and established good relations with Turkey. Since 2005, Syria, which again began to move closer to Russia, continued its strategic partnership with Ankara. Official Damascus has entered a period of softening relations with Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Jordan, which are the main players in the region. Syria was able to mitigate its isolation in the international world immediately after the Cold War. The United States, trying to protect its interests in the region, could not accept these challenges. The leading role of the United States in the region, especially after the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, played an important role in geopolitical processes in the region. Relations between Syria and the United States were unstable, and the United States distanced itself from cooperation with Syria as part of its interests and began to act against Syrian

government. The Near and Middle East region holds significant importance in the foreign policy of the US. Syria plays a crucial role in the execution of US geopolitical interests in this region. With the interests of Russia and European countries at stake in Syria, the US is taking an active approach. Understanding the nuances of US geopolitics related to Syria is critical in comprehending Washington's global and regional leadership policies in the Middle East, as well as the formation of a new world order in the present era. At a time when the crisis in Syria is still ongoing, studying the path and mechanisms for realizing US interests in the region is also relevant. The main goal of the study is to clarify the main characteristics and stages of US-Syrian relations within the framework of US Middle East policy, as well as to analyze the global and regional effects of bilateral relations on the eve of the Arab Spring. The research aims to explore various issues related to the US-Syrian relations. It will investigate the factors that influence these relations, as well as the role of Syria in the US Middle East policy. Moreover, it will analyze how the US intervention in Iraq affected the bilateral relations between the two countries. Lastly, the research will examine the results of the economic sanctions imposed by the United States on Syria. Various methods were utilized for this research including the principle of historicity and consistency, factual interpretation, comparative analytical analysis, and generalization.

The works of Western and Russian authors present different and contradictory approaches to American-Syrian relations. A, who conducts research as an employee of the US Military College. In his research paper, A.Geoffrey interpreted U.S. policy towards Syria as the fight against terrorism. Although it was emphasized at the beginning of the research that this study does not reflect the official policy or position of the US Department of Defense and the US government, it is clear that the Assad regime and the Syrian crisis pose a direct threat to the United States (Catlett, 2013). O. Roger, former director of the Center for Middle East Studies at Harvard University, has also researched U.S. policy in Suria. He regarded the processes taking place in the region as a struggle of geopolitical forces and preferred the position of the United States (Roger, O. R., 2004). The Israeli ambassador to the United States and one of the key figures in the negotiations on Syria, Rabinovich approached the problem from the point of view of Israeli-Arab relations (Rabinovich, 2009). Russian researchers stressed the importance of Russia's participation in the negotiations and highlighted Russia's role in preventing the collapse of Syria. Russian researcher A. Bedritsky in his works stressed that the basis of the Syrian policy of the United States is based on national interests, the desire to strengthen its influence in the region (Bedritskii, 2013). In his works on the problem,

A. Arkhipov brought to the fore the prospects of Russian-Syrian relations (Arkhipov, 2002). In Ahmedov's research, one can see criticism of the political courses of the West and the United States (Ahmedov, 2008).

1. General characteristics of relations between the United States and Syria in 2000-2011

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union greatly influenced the political situation in the Middle East. Syria began to emphasize its relationship with the United States and participated in the coalition against Iraq during the First Gulf War. At the first stage of the unipolar international system (1990-2002), Washington managed to involve Syria in some projects in the Middle East. Busy with the creation of the anti-Iraqi coalition, the United States has taken a course of normalizing relations with Syria. The two states cooperated in some regional projects. The US agreed to sign the Taif Agreement to strengthen Syrian hegemony in Lebanon in 1990 after Syria joined Operation Desert Storm (A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement., February 1995, p.27). Syria entered into a special alliance with Egypt and the monarchs of the Persian Gulf, and received \$2 billion in economic assistance from Saudi Arabia. However, negotiations between the government of Bashar al-Assad and Israel in 1992, 1993 and 1997, mediated by the United States, on the return of the Golan Heights were unsuccessful (Kuznetsov, 2016). Participation in the anti-Iraq coalition of 1991 strengthened the relationship between Syria and Washington, and made it possible to obtain Washington's tacit consent to Syria's policy in Lebanon. However, it was not possible to achieve significant agreement on peace issues between Syria and Israel. The end of the 20th and early 21st centuries was the starting point in the history of Syria. After the death of Hafiz Assad in 2000, his 35-year-old son Bashar Assad began to rule the country. The first period of Assad's presidency will be marked by an active foreign policy. The basic principles of Syria's foreign policy, relations with the United States and Iraq, peace processes in the Middle East, support for the Palestinian Intifada and Lebanese Hezbollah remained unchanged. The active foreign policy of the young president can be explained as an attempt to strengthen his position on a global and regional scale.

In the fall of 2000, in Saudi Arabia, Assad met with US Secretary of State M. Albright and discussed the issue of Hezbollah (Ahmedov, 2008). In February 2001, the first meeting took place with Secretary of State Colin Powell. The visit to Damascus was added to the Secretary of State's Middle East tour at the last minute. During this period, the new US administration made adjustments to its Middle East policy. This was primarily related to the Iraq problem and

compliance with sanctions against the regime of Saddam Hussein (Kamnaksh, 2006, p. 191). In the spring of 2002, Syria announced to Washington its intention to close some Palestinian headquarters located in Damascus, as well as to ban their activities in Lebanon. The State Department has told the Israeli government that it is ready to support "direct peace negotiations of al-Asad without any conditions with Israel." There were discussions around Assad about suspending aid to Hezbollah and Palestinian terrorist organizations. The United States, for its part, was ready to assist Assad in the fight against Muslim extremism in Syria itself, as well as invest in the country's economy (Sapronova & Khodynskaia-Golenisheva, 2017, p. 388). Official representatives of Damascus have repeatedly stated that they are not interested in confrontation with the United States and, if mutual interests are recognized, they are ready for dialogue and cooperation with Washington. After the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, security cooperation between the two countries intensified. In order to neutralize the Al-Qaeda terrorist group in Syria, the government conducted several operations on its territory. As part of these efforts, Syria allowed FBA officers to travel to Aleppo, interrogate people who knew the organizers of the territorial attacks, and provide the United States with intelligence about al-Qaida (Sharp, 2010, p. 4). This data made it possible to prevent terrorist attacks on US naval forces in the Persian Gulf.

A CIA report dated January 30, 2002, noted that Syria's nuclear program "is aimed at research and peacebuilding purposes." Having signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of nuclear weapons, Syria also opened its facilities to inspection by IAEA officials (Arkhipov, 2002, p. 15). Unfortunately, since 2003, relations between the two countries have deteriorated again. The new conservative administration of George W. Bush has taken a new political course aimed at reducing Syria's influence in the region. The US position towards Syria has made Damascus think that Syria is only a tool for the implementation of US Middle East plans. The US position was against the policy of Assad, who, as the leader of the country, tried to ensure his security and leadership in the region. (Sapranova & Xodinaskaya-Golenisheva, 2017, p. 385). The United States accused Syria of collaborating with Iraq and Iran, of stationing military forces in Lebanon and of supporting Palestinian terrorist groups, Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Palestinian Intifada (Kamnaksh, 2006, p. 193). The strengthening of the US position in the region created external risks for the internal stability and security of Syria. Official Damascus preferred double standards "with you and against you": by maintaining its line on regional problems (Palestine-Israeli conflict, the role of Iran, etc.), Syria thereby condemned global terrorism and expressed its readiness to provide support in the

fight against it. The US-Israel-Palestine summit, organized immediately after the inauguration of Bashar al-Assad, turned out to be unsuccessful, and the Palestinian Al-Aqsa Intifada began. As a result of the Second Gulf War, a direct threat to Syria's internal security was created. This situation forced Syria to form a system of flexible alliances and situational arrangements to reduce the effect of possible US hostile activities.

At the same time, the United States and its allies criticized the Syrian leader's domestic policy for "stubbornness and persistent rejection of dissent" and increased pressure on him. One of the most dangerous moments occurred in 2004, when the Pentagon was discussing a possible missile attack on Syria. Israel, a US ally, has been openly hostile to Syria due to Damascus' active participation in internal political conflicts around the Golan Heights and the water sector of Lake Tiberias (Galilee) and in neighboring Lebanon (Morozov, 2012 p. 92). Like H. Assad, the new president viewed Israel as a strong military enemy invading Arab lands and creating a threat to the unity of Arab countries.

2.US position in Israel-Syria relations

Until 2003, the main problems in US-Syrian relations were related to the Syria-Israeli conflict and Syrian interference in the internal political situation in Lebanon. The United States, Israel's strategic partner, has always defended the Israel's interests in the long-term conflict with Syria (Kissinger, 2002, p. 179). Israel's close relationship with the United States, especially since the end of the Cold War, has created favorable conditions for Israel. The presence of a strong mediator had an important influence on initiating the process of conflict escalation. To understand the essence of this problem, it is necessary to study the issues of regulating the Syria-Israeli conflict.

The interests of the United States, which plays a dominant role in this process, can be defined as follows: to remove Syria from the influence of Iran while maintaining the American-Syrian rapprochement (Rabinovich, 2009, p. 50), to strengthen the US position in the region, and to weaken the influence and position of the radical states of the region, mainly Iran and Iraq. As Israel and Syria accept US mediation, it is important that the third party play its role properly (Sagie, 2006, p. 57). For Israel, the US presence could act as a buffer against the will of Syria as well as a guarantor for Israel if an agreement on security measures is reached. However, the US defended its old position based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, based on the principles of comprehensive peace, land for peace, Israeli security, Arab recognition of Israel, and political rights for the Palestinians.

The United States is in a difficult position when it comes to the Syrian-Israeli process. On one hand, it is a superpower with both strategic and economic interests in the region. On the other hand, it also needs to play the role of mediator. Unfortunately, the US has not been handling these two roles very well. This is partly due to conflicts between the country's executive leadership and Congress, which has affected the US's overall role in the process. While the presidential administration wants to improve relations with Syria to further its interests, Congress is more cautious on the Syrian issue (Rabil, 2001). However, suspicions about Syria, which is seen as an authoritarian regime compared to Western-oriented and democratic Israel, have influenced the role of the United States. Syria saw that the United States had sided with Israel and that Israel's choices were superior to those of the United States (Sagie, 2006). Thus, although the US prepared the ground for negotiations and ensured dialogue between the parties, it failed to be a mediator who would persuade the parties and propose suitable solutions, revealing the power of sanctions. At the end of the process, the United States lost neutrality in the eyes of Syria. The above-mentioned situational factors - the collapse of the Soviet Union, the isolation of Syria - did not encourage Damascus. In particular, economic difficulties within the country and the problem of regime succession were among the issues that put Syria in a difficult situation (Sagie, 2006). Thus, the existing status quo for Syria was not sustainable. As for Israel, the Jewish state, which was extremely satisfied with the existing state of affairs, was in no hurry to solve the problem. The issue of the Golan Heights, which Israel occupied in 1967 and annexed in 1981, was resolved by signing an agreement with Syria in 1974, after which a lull ensued. Thus, we will not be wrong if we say that the reason why Israel and Syria are sitting at the same table is because of pressure and incentives from the United States.

Bashar al-Assad tried to overcome the disappointment that arose among the Syrian political elite after B. Clinton's tough position at the meeting with Hafez Assad in Geneva in March 2000. But the desired result was not achieved (Ahmedov, 2003). We see the same facts and concerns in the secret Syria-Israeli negotiations that took place from September 2004 to July 2006. These negotiations began in January 2004, when Bashar al-Assad, who was on an official visit to Ankara, asked Prime Minister of the Republic of Türkiye Erdogan if his country could become a mediator between Syria and Israel. Information from the Turkish ambassador to Israel that "Syria wants to reconcile with Israel" was rejected by the Israeli authorities. The reason for the refusal was cited as the negative opinion of the United States about Syria. The Turkish side stopped this initiative in

September 2004, saying that it could not involve a single Israeli official in the process. Secret negotiations began with former director general of the Israeli Foreign Minister Alon Liel and American businessman Ibrahim Suleiman, originally from Syria. The parties met 8 times with an interval of 2-3 months. Officials aware of the process were hesitant to formally discuss the plans and programs revealed during the secret negotiations. According to Ibrahim Suleiman, the most serious obstacle to the negotiations was the United States. According to the United States, it is not yet time for Israel to reconcile with Syria. Proof of the above-mentioned causes is the following statement of Suleiman: "There was a real need to have competent decision-makers in both Syria, Israel and the United States, as well as corresponding public opinion that could support them" (Gani, 2014). In 2005-2008, as a result of peace negotiations between Syria and Israel, which began with the mediation of Switzerland and continued through Turkey, partial moderation was observed in relations between Washington and Damascus. However, accusations of Damascus' support for resistance groups in Iraq and Operation Cast Lead, launched by Israel in Gaza in the last days of 2008, prevented a possible rapprochement between the two countries (Bedritskii, 2013, p. 33).

3. US invasion of Iraq and US-Syria relations

It should be noted that Syria participated in the operation of American and Arab troops called "Desert Storm" against "Iraqi aggression". The US expectation that Syria would support the military operations of the US and its allies against Iraq, as in 1991, did not materialize. In 1991, Iraq acted as the aggressor and attacked Kuwait. The international community has come to the defense of Kuwait. In 2003 the situation changed. Now Iraq has become a victim of aggression. Since the United States was unable to convincingly prove the presence of nuclear weapons in Baghdad, it was viewed as an aggressor and was unable to enlist the support of the most influential states in the world community. It should be noted that since September 11, 2001, the United States has received support from countries around the world, including Arab countries and Syria. Syria actively cooperated with US intelligence agencies in the capture of an al-Qaeda terrorist (Kosach, 2009). In April 2003, Bashar al- Assad called on the Arabs to accept a Pan-Arab defense pact. Commenting on the democratization initiative in the Middle East, he said that "not only in Syria, but in the entire region, no one believes in the US initiative" (Catlett, 2013, p. 7). In May 2004, Bashar al- Assad said in an interview with the Qatari television channel Al-Jazeera that "the United States and coalition forces were defeated in Iraq" (David, 2011). Of course, such statements caused serious discontent in Washington.

The US administration accused the Syrian government of hiding Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and providing shelter to the leaders of Saddam Hussein's regime after the occupation of Baghdad. Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa, in response to US accusations of allowing “terrorists” to cross its territory into Iraq, said that just as the US cannot completely close the border with Mexico, the Syrian government cannot do the same on the border with Iraq. It was also noted that accusing Syria of helping terrorists penetrate Iraqi territory is “an attempt to justify Washington’s inability to stabilize the situation in Iraq” (Sapronova & Khodynskaia-Golenisheva, 2017). The main purpose of US Secretary of State Colin Powell's visit to Damascus in early May 2003 was to convince the Syrian leadership to "stop supporting extremist Palestinian organizations and not give shelter to representatives of Saddam Hussein's regime." Colin Powell conveyed the demands of the US government to Syria. Damascus was demanded to return to Iraq \$3 billion, allegedly belonging to the Saddam Hussein regime and stored in Syrian banks. Colin Powell also pointed out that the United States is not planning military action against Syria. At a meeting with Bashar al-Assad, the US Secretary of State said in connection with the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq:

“A new balance of power has formed in the Middle East region, and it is desirable that Syria recognize the new reality and pursue an appropriate policy” (Yeddin, 2012, p. 85).

At a meeting held at the 59th session of the UN in September 2004, Colin Powell and Farouk al-Sharaa discussed trilateral cooperation between Iraq, the United States and Syria in order to prevent the infiltration of terrorists from Syria into Iraqi territory. The first meeting of military experts from these countries took place in Damascus at the end of September 2004, where practical measures related to these issues were discussed (Roger, 2004, p. 20). After this, the Syrian government began construction of a protective wall 3 meters high and 130 km long on the Syrian-Iraqi border with a total length of 600 km. Compared to the US State Department, the Pentagon has traditionally been more cautious about the prospects for the development of Syria-American relations. Thus, at the beginning of October 2004, Donald Rumsfeld noted in his statement that “*it is too early to talk about cooperation with Syria on the issue of closing the border with Iraq, since terrorists continue to cross the border in both directions*” (Gani, 2014, p. 19). He also noted that although the Syrians refuse to invest in Iraqi banks, they continue to cooperate with Iran, which finances Hezbollah, and maintain troops in Lebanon. The main reason for Rumsfeld's accusations was Syria's activities in Lebanon and its sympathy for Hezbollah forces. The US considered Syria's

traditional support for organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah to be equivalent to aid to al-Qaeda (Kosach, 2009, p. 228).

Despite the harsh pressure exerted on Syria after the end of hostilities in Iraq, the United States understood that without considering the interests of Syria it would be difficult to solve problems in the region. According to US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher, the issue of transporting oil from Iraq to Syria should be resolved in accordance with the interests of the two countries without US interference. In the spring of 2003, US Congressman Nick Rahal, who was in Damascus, said that the United States considers the interests of Damascus when transporting oil from Iraq (Ahmedov, 2008). The 2003 US invasion of Iraq did not change Washington's relationship only with the Iraqi Kurds and strengthened its relationship with the Syrian Kurds. US interest in the Syrian Kurds was evident in the events in Qamishli in 2004. After a football match between Kurdish and Arab factions, information reflecting the events that took place in Qamishli and its surroundings was in the top news. During the civil war that began in Syria in 2011, US cooperation with the PYD/YPG intensified and came to the fore. Over the past three years, the US has begun arming the PYD/YPG, which is fighting ISIS, and with its support has taken control of an important region in eastern and northern Syria. Of course, the first question that comes to mind is "what did Washington promise the PYD/YPG?" It is assumed that Washington's cooperation with the PYD/YPG is directed against the territorial integrity of Syria (Kuznetsov, 2016, p. 469). The reality that Washington must accept for the future of Turkish-American relations is that Turkey will not allow the formation of a Kurdish state on its southern borders. Ankara's Operation Euphrates Shield, Operation Olive Branch and subsequent steps have once again proven this.

4. US sanctions on Syria

On December 11, 2003, President George W. Bush signed the law on sanctions against Syria, and on May 11, 2004, he announced the beginning of their implementation. The main reason for the sanctions was George Bush's accusation of Syria for a sponsorship of terrorism. B. Assad also made great efforts to extend the term of Lebanese President Emile Lahoud, who supported a pro-Syrian policy. These attempts were interpreted as interference in Lebanese politics. The world community, led by the United States and France, reacted sharply to this issue, and the UN Security Council, in resolution No. 1539, demanded the withdrawal of all foreign armed forces from Lebanon (Ahmedov, 2006). Due to economic sanctions, the country banned the export of any goods from the United States, except medicines and food. The US Treasury Department was also

instructed to cease cooperation with the Commercial Bank of Syria. It was also proposed to freeze the accounts of people suspected of contact with terrorist organizations and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The sanctions did not apply to the supply of aircraft parts and telecommunications equipment to Syria. Syrian Prime Minister Mohammad Naji al-Atari called the sanctions "unfair and unfounded." Bashar al-Assad stated in this regard that "Washington is a source of instability in the Middle East, and its policy of exerting pressure and applying sanctions will not help solve the problems of the region and will lead to their aggravation" (Williams & Popken, 2012). Bashar al-Assad once again called on Washington for an equal dialogue.

On November 12, 2003, US senators decided to impose economic and diplomatic sanctions against Damascus. According to this decision, US-Syrian relations were reduced to a minimum, all investments were suspended, and the export of goods was limited. Washington demanded the immediate withdrawal of Syrian troops from neighboring Lebanon. It is clear that this decision of US senators was influenced by Syria's close ties with radical Palestinian organizations, Muslim volunteers went from Syria to Iraq and fought against US forces, etc. The Syrian leadership emphasized that it is not afraid of threats from Washington and its allies, and at the same time, Damascus is ready for dialogue (Ahmedov, 2008). There was no consensus on this issue in the United States itself. Senator Robert Byrd feared that taking tough measures against Damascus could have unintended consequences and drag the United States into a new military conflict in the Middle East. The US senator considered it necessary to continue the dialogue with the Syrian officials and force it to gradually change its foreign policy (Ahmedov, 2003). At the Tunis summit in May 2004, Arab leaders declared their "disagreement" with the latest US sanctions against Damascus. Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa "condemned" US sanctions against Syria and expressed solidarity with Damascus on behalf of Arab countries. On June 14-16, 2004, the 31st meeting of foreign ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (now the Organization of Islamic Cooperation) was held in Istanbul. The organization declared solidarity with Syria and "rejected" US sanctions against the country. The meeting participants called on the United States to "remove misunderstandings" through a "constructive dialogue" between Damascus and Washington (Sapronova & Khodynskaia-Golenisheva, 2017). Arab leaders could only do so much for their "Syrian brothers."

Facing pressure from the US and Israel, Damascus maintained stable political and economic relations with Russia, China and European countries (especially France and Germany). The main

purpose of the Syrian leader's visit to Beijing at the end of 2004 was to seek political support against US sanctions on Syria (Yeddin, 2012). During a visit to Damascus in mid-September 2003, EU Foreign Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten noted that US sanctions do not affect relations between European countries and Syria and that the EU does not agree with Washington regarding US laws abroad (Philonic, & Isayev, 2007). On October 19, 2004, after five years of negotiations in Brussels with the participation of Farouk al-Shaara and Cris Patten, the Syria-EU Partnership Agreement was implemented within the framework of the Barcelona Process. The signing of the agreement became possible after reaching a compromise formula for the clause on the fight against weapons of mass destruction and terrorism. Syria has become the latest country in the Mediterranean to sign a similar agreement with the EU. Patten described this agreement as "*not only commercial, but also political and geostrategic*" (Kosach, 2009, p. 112). Although Syria is listed by the State Department as a country that sponsors terrorism, several sectors of the country's economy have been opened to American investors (Sarab'ev, 2006). In a material on a project to tighten the sanctions against Syrian regime that prepared by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the US House of Representatives, it was noted that, despite the sanctions against Syria, there are nearly 400 US companies operate directly or through intermediaries in this Arab country. It was Russia and China that opposed US sanctions and protested harsh measures against Syria. Russia is also trying to defend its interests in Middle East politics and prevent the United States from strengthening its role in the region. As part of the crisis that began in Syria since the Arab Spring Russia is supporting the al-Assad regime.

In 2009, Barack Obama came to power and the peace process in the Middle East began. In early 2009, the United States revised its policy towards Syria to consider changes occurring in the country and region. As a result, both countries began to cooperate in solving regional problems. During the Arab Spring, Hillary Clinton initially supported the peacekeeping efforts of former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan aimed at a peaceful solution to the problem, but later supported direct assistance to the Syrian rebels through Saudi Arabia and Qatar (Bedritskii, 2013). Frequent visits by Washington and Damascus could lead to new meetings between Syria and Israel. However, with the "Syrian crisis", which began with the "Arab Spring" and continues to this day, bilateral relations entered a new phase.

Conclusion

Washington's policy in Syria shows that the practice of unilateral actions bypassing the UN, coercive methods and economic sanctions have proven to be ineffective, since they have not

received the support of the overwhelming majority in the world and even some close US allies. The consequences of Washington's unilateral sanctions and military intervention during the "Syrian crisis" caused political and economic damage to the United States itself. Washington's military intervention in Iraq and the threats it uses against Syria, Iran and other countries are considered by the world community as anarchism of the 21st century. In the United States, starting from the 1990s, especially during the era of Bush Jr., the attitude towards the Syrian regime was quite negative. Either in presidential speeches or in State Department quarterly and annual reports, states such as Syria, Iran and Sudan are characterized as "evil regimes" and "failed states." The reason of the US anti-Syrian position is undoubtedly Syria's uncompromising position towards Israel, which provides space for the political wing of Hamas, which does not recognize the legitimacy of Israel as a state. This position led to continued US military assistance to Israel. In general, the United States had two approaches to developing relations with Syria. According to supporters of the first approach, economic assistance should be provided to Syria depending on its policy in the region. This included respecting Lebanese state sovereignty and renegotiating relations with radical groups, most notably Hezbollah. In this case, the United States should support economic reforms in this country. However, such an approach was not constructive since the security of Syria and the stability of the ruling regime depend on the presence of Syrian troops in Lebanon and the return of the Golan Heights. Supporters of a tough approach to Syria saw the rule of al- Assad as a repetition of the policies of the previous regime and considered economic incentives a waste of time. Proponents of a second approach distinguished the intentions and actions of President Basha al- Assad and his father, despite the great similarity of the political course. In their opinion, al-Assad did not build his policy in accordance with the values of the United States, and although he does not meet the political goals of a superpower in the region, it is more profitable for the United States to maintain a dialogue with him until changes occur. Disagreements among the US political elite determined the line of official Washington, which alternates measures of cooperation and pressure regarding Syria. Although the United States seeks to mediate in resolving Syria-Israeli relations, its unilateral position, in particular support for Israel, has proven ineffective in this process. Analyzing US policy in Syria, we can certainly observe activity in the field of foreign policy during the administration of President Bush Jr. The "Great Middle East Project" of the president, first, provided for the implementation of security in this region through democratic changes. During the time, the United States was primarily led by neoconservatives, including Vice President Richard

Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz. The main objective of the Bush administration was to establish a democratic government in Iraq and spread this democracy to other countries in the Middle East. However, this plan failed, leading the Obama administration to be cautious of the Arab Spring in the region.

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