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**GENERAL IMPLICATIONS OF RUSSIA-USA GEOSTRATEGIC  
APPROACHES TOWARD SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA:  
“SOFT POWER” VS. “HARD POWER” STRATEGIES IN ACTION  
(SUDAN CASE-STUDY)**

**Abstract:**

*Due to the escalation processes in Middle East and Persian Gulf, situation is being deteriorated and fueled in Sub-Saharan Africa and geopolitical uncertainties corroborating with emergence of asymmetric challenges (including illegal migration to the EU countries, spillover military conflicts from the Middle East region, fierce geopolitical competition between Russia and USA for dominance in Sub-Saharan Africa, ISIS and Al-Qaeda profound presence in the area linked with spreading international terrorism in this area, failed states dilemma, etc.) more transforming the region into “Rim of Instability” of global level. Despite of the international community efforts to deal with these challenges (particularly, with the great effort of the all four global power centers – the USA, Russia, EU and China as the national interests of even survival origin are foreseen in the region), it makes no sense to endorse stability climate and promote peacebuilding at the regional level. It is interesting to note that two global powers – Russia and USA are tailoring and exploiting in order to achieve their proper national interests and foreign policy missions, to implement new instrumental forms in order to promote these goals in aegis of the hybrid warfare strategies and to increase their so-called “soft power” leverages thereof. Herewith interesting to mention that both Russia and USA have different approaches toward regional engagement with proper leverages and Hard Power vs. Soft Power is a real description of the engagement cases.*

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*USA, Russia, “Soft Power” concept, “Hard Power” concept, asymmetric challenges, energy security, private-military company, Jihadist militant, geostrategy, Sudan*

## Introduction

The African region named Sub-Sahara has been drawn extensive attention after processes taken places in MENA from international society and Global Powers due to geostrategic and geopolitical implications. It is important to underscore that it represents the gravitational center of geopolitical games not only at global but mostly at regional scale. In Sub-Sahara region emerge on big scale new threats referred as “asymmetric threats” or “asymmetric challenges”. This has been causing immense security drawbacks at any political levels. According to lately adopted definition “asymmetry depicts the – situations in which states or agents with unbalanced power capabilities are in opposition to one another. For instance, the U.S. war against Al-Qaeda or ISIS is widely regarded as an asymmetrical conflict<sup>3</sup>”. Therefore Authors develop other term “asymmetric warfare” understand as unconventional type of warfare that aims at approaching strategic initiative with light model of warfare elements with deflation of stronger foe in time and in space. After explaining key definitions like “asymmetry” and “asymmetric warfare”, must be indicated a new type of threat classification – “asymmetric threat or challenge” that fully fit situational complexity arisen in the region of Sub-Sahara. As the definitions depose it has the clearest meaning “asymmetric threat – type of threats that impossible to predict its consequences”. These types of threats have some particular characteristics specified as follow:

- They are very unusual and irrelevant
- They have non-standard content in aegis of the classical conventional warfare doctrinal points
- They are very controversial and is impossible to deter from casual military capability provision
- This is very tricky to precisely and promptly counterstrike against them
- Their efforts are focusing in subvert an adversary’s supremacy not only in military, but also in informational and political context<sup>4</sup>.

In that aspect “asymmetric threats” have emerged in the region and are widely transfer from local and regional into global level. Among regional level

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<sup>3</sup> J. S. Nye, Jr. *Understanding International Conflicts: An Introduction to Theory and History*, New York 2007, p. 286.

<sup>4</sup> G. Magradze, V. Maisaia, *21<sup>st</sup> Century International Politics and “Cooperation Security” Theory: Myth and Reality – Regional and Global Levels*, Tbilisi 2017, pp. 25-26.

it is necessary to underline several "globally" threats and challenges to Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security environments. These are the following:

- Illegal Migration – from Sub-Saharan Somali have been immigrated to Yemen, i.e. Middle Eastern areas from 180 thousand till 2 million refugees causing humanitarian catastrophe at the regional level<sup>5</sup>. Mass migration, mainly illegal, constitutes one of the greatest security challenges to Euro-Atlantic Community. At the same time, the flow of refugees and migrants from the MENA region has been redirected to Egypt and Libya as a result. It is important to note that the instability of the MENA region is also closely interconnected with the political, economic and security evolution of other parts of Africa (notable Sub-Saharan Africa). For example, the threat posed by the Islamist extremist group "Boko Haram" which is based in north-eastern Nigeria and is also active in Chad, Niger and northern Cameroon, has spillover effects into neighboring parts of Africa. Three years of civil war in South Sudan have created Africa's largest migrant crisis with some 1.5 million refugees<sup>6</sup>
- International Terrorism
- Illegal Arms Trade
- Narco Trafficking
- Human Trafficking
- Transnational Organized Crime
- Violent Extremism
- Piracy
- Political Islam (Jihadist trend) – some African countries from Sub-Sahara, including Sudan, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, Chad and Eritrea share a controversial issues: the relative religious, social and political positions of Muslim and non-Muslims. These Sub-Saharan countries are located on the "periphery" of Arab centers of political and commercial power, places that historically experienced long periods of Arab political and commercial dominance. They straddle an African geographical and cultural Arab/non-Arab division, located approximately 15-20 degrees north of the Equator<sup>7</sup>. There are some dangerous and ideologically and politically motivated Jihadist networks, including such international terrorist organizations as are: ISIS affiliated al-Shabaab (Islamist militant group al-Shabab is battling

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<sup>5</sup> Y. Satanovskiy, *Kotol s nepriyatnostyami. Blizhniy Vostok dlya "chaynikov"*, Moscow 2016, p. 188.

<sup>6</sup> J. M. Calha, *Tackling The Challenges From the South*, nato.int, <<https://www.nato-pa.int/document/2017-challenges-south-miranda-calha-report-171-pcnp-17-e-bis>> (30.01.2018).

<sup>7</sup> J. Haynes, *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion*, Edinburgh, 2013, pp. 307-308.

the UN-backed government in Somalia, and has carried out a string of attacks across the region. The group, which is allied to Daesh and created a special Jihadist alliance network under the Daesh leadership, has been pushed out of most of the main towns it once controlled, but it remains a potent threat<sup>8</sup>), Boko Haram, separately active “National Islamic Front”, “the Tablighi Jamaat”, etc.

These threats and challenges emanated from the Sub-Sahara region are considered by the Global Powers as the key indications to deter and to provide so-called non-military approaches in way of “soft power” strategy as one of the most efficient and increase influence on the place of engagement.

### **“Soft power” and capability to influence on geostrategic missions of global powers**

In order to perceive the correct meaning of “soft power” capabilities it is necessary to identify: “what is power, and why does it matter?”. In that respect, there are some interesting definitions of power and one of them implies that it is ability to affect others to get the things you want. It is possible to do that in three ways: one can use coercion, sticks; one can use payments, carrots; or one can use attraction and persuasion, soft power. In the XXI century, the ability to combine these as smart power will be one of the main challenges not just for the United States but for any other actors in international politics. Today international society faces two big shifts in how power is used in global relations. “These shifts, which are the result of the information revolution and globalization, are power transition among states and power diffusion from states to non-state actors”<sup>9</sup>. Generally saying, the concept of power has been associated with special jargon of international relations and the term affiliated with nation’s ability with national, social-psychological and economic capabilities. In studies under international security there are three concepts of power:

- Hard Power
- Soft Power
- Smart Power<sup>10</sup>

“Hard power” has been the traditional form of foreign policy tool, but in the 21st Century, a new and more flexible foreign policy tool – “soft power”

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<sup>8</sup> *Who are Somalia’s al-Shabaab*, bbc.com, 22.12.2017 <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-15336689>> (30.01.2018).

<sup>9</sup> J. S. Nye, *The future of power*, <<https://www.amacad.org/publications/bulletin/spring2011/power.pdf>> (30.01.2018).

<sup>10</sup> G. Magradze, V. Maisaia, *op. cit.*, 31.

has been emerged. Many scholars have studied “soft power” as a behavior influence outcome in the post 9/11 period<sup>11</sup>.

Despite Nye<sup>12</sup>'s concept's popularity, current power scholarship is still divided about the nature of power. Some scholars see capabilities as the most important factor and others see it as a behavior outcome deriving from Nye's concept. As a neo-liberal school scholar, he built his concept as a behavior outcome, or as he calls it “relational power concept” on multiple faces of power.

As power literature has developed, so did Nye's initial definition of soft power. Earlier versions of Nye's soft power definition were: “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment, which included culture, values and foreign policies<sup>13</sup>”. Later, Nye extended his definition into “the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes<sup>14</sup>” While further developing his concept of soft power, Dr. Nye has been focusing on the outcome of “soft power”. Nevertheless, the “hard power” remains still coercive instrument and efficient tools to promote national interests (on case of the Russian Federation).

Soft and hard power literature has also been divided according to effectiveness and usefulness of such capabilities. Some scholars claim that soft power is effective and it sometimes reinforces and occasionally interferes with hard power, while others strongly believe that, soft power is emerging and getting more influential in today's global information space and it has less hard power support. However, in real political life and mainly in real geopolitical realm the “soft and hard Power” strategies could be characterized with unique specifics and the global actors could enact in proper manner. Regarding Sub-Saharan region, those actors whose influences flexes beyond the regional scope tailor three concrete leverages of the strategies:

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<sup>11</sup> R. T. Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, Washington 2005, pp. 105-110.

<sup>12</sup> The definition of soft power has been closely linked with Joseph Nye, Jr. who first coined this term. Dr. Joseph Nye, Jr., a noted foreign policy scholar and practitioner, coined the phrase "soft power" in 1990. Nye has served as the Dean of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard; Chairman of the National Intelligence Council; and Assistant Secretary of Defense in Bill Clinton's administration. He has written and lectured extensively on the idea and usage of soft power. Nye describes soft power as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than through coercion." He sees strong relations with allies, economic assistance programs, and vital cultural exchanges as examples of soft power.

<sup>13</sup> E. Beraia, *Foreign policy-making processes in 20-21<sup>st</sup> centuries: Theoretical and Practical Background on the example of the USA*, “Journal of Humanities” 2017, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 20.

- Energy security – provide protection and secure energy infrastructure and capability provisions and get accessed to energy reserves of the region
- Humanitarian intervention<sup>15</sup> – with involvement light mechanisms in way of private military companies
- International Aid – as a key tool for achieving foreign policy missions and goals

Three main Global Powers (super-powers) that are eligible to foster their geostrategic missions and promote stability and peace in stalemate areas are indicating the approaches to these three leverages. These three powers are USA, Russia and recently expressing grave interests toward African affairs China. Mainly China is promoting not only her own national but also multilateral ties for keeping peace with two other competitors. The same imperatives influenced China's participation in multilateral international organizations including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the China-Arab Countries Cooperation and the China-Africa Cooperation Forums<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, fierce geopolitical competition over getting control for the Sub-Saharan African territories are being mitigated with promoting "soft power" above-mentioned instruments and leverages and their competition in that stance reached quite solid and impressive scopes. Once a largely neglected region of the world, sub-Saharan Africa has quietly become the center of a struggle for influence between what are arguably the world's chief powers: China and the United States. In 2013, for example, trade between China and Africa totaled roughly \$200 billion, with Chinese electronics goods and textiles flowing into African nations, while African natural resources were shipped off to China. Remarkably, Chinese-African trade was more than double the trade level between the United States and Africa<sup>17</sup>. The fact clearly highlighted the reality of battle for Africa. Moreover, on case of Sudan one of the richest, poorest and unstable countries in Sub-Saharan Africa which get under the status of "rogue state" is also good case-study for illuminating how these Global Powers are implementing their vision of "soft power" and "hard power" strategies in respect manner. With the future involvement of China in the regional affairs, a classical balance of power game could be foreseen among the Global Powers (lately China has also underpinned its global geopolitical missions which are

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<sup>15</sup> Humanitarian intervention is defined as a threat or use of force by a state or group of states aimed at preventing or ending widespread and grave violations of the international human rights of individuals. Regarding Sub-Saharan case is added rights of corporate and economic rights of the actor.

<sup>16</sup> J. Cheng, *A Chinese View of China's Energy Security*, "Journal of Contemporary China", 2008, Vol. 17, No. 55, pp. 297-317.

<sup>17</sup> J. Burnett, *China is Besting the U.S. in Africa*, 24.03.2015, <<https://www.usnews.com/opinion/economic-intelligence/2015/03/24/china-beating-us-in-race-to-invest-in-africa>> (30.01.2018).

declared and light shed in its national mega-project “One Belt, One Road”<sup>18)</sup> and where new trend “smart power” is to be added to the geopolitical games over the Sub-Saharan region. But, at time being, based on scrutinizing only two Global Power policies and strategies on case of involvement into Sudan politics it is possible to reflect what are the real implications and approaches of this involvement.

### **USA’s “soft power” strategy and its implications to the region**

The U.S. geopolitical interests toward African continent have been vividly indicated in new National Security Strategy that has been recently adopted by the President Trump’s Administration. The American policy-makers have underlined three priority actions: political, economic and military-security. The preamble of the document linked with Africa announces: “Africa remains a continent of promise and enduring challenges. Africa contains many of world’s fastest growing economies, which represent potential new markets for U.S. goods and services. Aspiring partners across the continent are eager to build market based economies and enhance stability. The United States seeks sovereign African state that are integrated into the world economy, able to provide for their citizens’ needs and capable of managing threats to peace and security”<sup>19)</sup>. At the same time, in new National Defense Strategy in special reference “Support relationships to address threats in Africa”, the Trump Administration underscores those concrete asymmetric threats emanated from the Africa, including Sub-Saharan Africa, and addressing with necessary to use “soft power” leverages. Among these threats, the document implies – degrade terrorism, build the capability required to counter violent extremism, human trafficking, trans-national criminal activity and illegal arms trade with outside assistance and limit the malign influence of non-African powers (presumable Russia and China)<sup>20)</sup>.

One of the classic examples of American soft power is considered to be the Marshal plan. In order to protect Western European nations from the aggressiveness, the USA had to provide new leverages as foreign policy instruments. One of the efficient ones became the Marshall Plan, included humanitarian aid, such as food and medical care and attempt to rebuild destroyed infrastructures, such as transportation and communication networks and public utilities. Besides of that the USA then Administrations led by

<sup>18)</sup> P. Stephens, *A Train That Proclaims China’s Global Ambition*, 20.07.2017, <<https://www.ft.com/content/ed033dae-6c69-11e7-b9c7-15af748b60d0>> (30.01.2018).

<sup>19)</sup> *National Security Strategy of the United States*, 2017, p.52, <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>> (30.01.2018).

<sup>20)</sup> *Summary of the National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, 2018, p. 10, <<https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>> (30.01.2018).

Truman, Eisenhower and later Kennedy considered also “cultural values and practice” sharing and indoctrination to the European sole that was a predisposition of the contemporary foreign policy leverage, labeled as “soft power”. The consistent elements of Cold War period “soft power” included – movies, soft drinks (like, American Coca-Cola), fast-food chains, etc. Namely cultural communication knot between the American and Western European communities transformed into new geopolitical dimension named as “Euro-Atlantic Community” based on such core values as freedom, independence and openness that had promoted business and communication dynamics in aegis of the Community. Later the mission has been transposed by the internet as American version of freedom of expression as one of the consistent instruments of “soft power” in Post-Modernist epoch, covering certainly Sub-Saharan Africa. As for how the USA implements “soft power” in case of Sudan is seen in realization of its national energy security goals and missions. In 20<sup>th</sup> century in 1970s new oil fields were discovered in Sudan that had sparked the USA’s interests toward the Sub-Saharan Africa. In 1983 when President D. Nimeiri executed coup d’etat and endorsed Sharia law, Reagan’s Administration engaged in confrontation with authoritarian and Islamist regime of President Nimeiri. At the same time, South Sudan Christian population launched its own resistance against the regime and after creation of “Sudanese National Liberation Army” led by American graduate from Fort Benning John Garang (died in 2005) liberation war for gaining independence protracted till proclamation of independence on 9 July 2011. During the civil war in Sudan, American government provided full-pledged support to South Sudan rebels with involvement of the American oil merger “Occidental Petroleum” and military-private corporation “Halliburton” as well as with involvement of other military-private companies “Executive Outcome”, “Defense System”, “Air Scan International”, etc. sided with rebel forces<sup>21</sup>. Actually the USA has achieved its national interests in the region and get access to South Sudan energy reserves. Here is a chart shortly describing how the USA used its “soft power” leverages in Sudan in classification: Supported Party-Concrete Leverages-Tackling Concrete Asymmetric Challenges:

*Diag. 1. USA “soft power” in Sudan*



Source: own work.

<sup>21</sup> *The Voice News Winstead*, 04.01.2001.



## Russia's "hard power" strategy and its implications to the region

Unlike the USA, Russia is more tailoring classical way to achieve its national interest at any parts of the world. Hence, for the official Moscow flexes its "hard power" strategy is casual case. This narrative has been stipulated from its modernized "Military Doctrine" paper where even though the Kremlin mentioned that in order to protect its national economic interests it can use its military power<sup>22</sup>. However, Russia also expresses its willingness and readiness to exploit its version of "soft power". Based on the documents attached, especially with several new ones – f. e. the latest document introduction of new draft of "Information Security Doctrine of Russian Federation" adopted in 2017 and "Main State Policy of Russian Federation for International Information Security till 2020", key priorities of the Russia's "Soft Power" strategy implies to dominate on information-telecommunication sphere at least in Post-Soviet space and last in Global political level. However, with regard involvement into African affairs, the Russian authorities, inherited from the Soviet legacy, exploits elements of "hard power" strategy. Russia's engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa has had mire historic origins. During the Cold War the Soviet Union engagement into Sub-Saharan African country affairs was significant. The Soviet Union military intervention in Somali and in Ethiopia in 1977 and in 1978 as well as in Egypt 1965-1973 and in Algeria in 1962-1966 were pure indications of reflected the region as one of the key geostrategic area for conductive military operations against USA/NATO and later in 1975 in so-called "Ogarkov Military Doctrine" where the Sub-Sahara African was sought to be labeled as the first zone combat strategic operative theater in war-game scenario against USA and its Allies. The Soviet legacy has also remained unchanged in contemporary Russia's Military Doctrinal rhetoric. Current version of the military intervention opportunities is linked with achieving not only pure military-political strategic goals but also performing energy security and economic missions. As it is known, decisive point of Russia's military modernization and star-up provision affiliated with 2010. Russia's Military Doctrine (renewed version), the third pillar of the National Security System after National Security and Foreign Policy Concepts was published in delay on 5 February 2010 soon after the Russo-Georgian August war in 2008. New document has endorsed the principle of protection national energy security missions with by military capabilities. This is to be novelty in Russia's military strategic thinking and planning. The Military Doctrine 2010 directly indicated two important decisive implications:

- Possibility to use of Armed Forces outside Russia to protect national interests and Russian citizens;

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<sup>22</sup> *Voyennaya doktrina Rossiskoy Federatsii*, 05.02.2010, p. 15, <<http://kremlin.ru/supplement/461>> (30.01.2018).

- Creation and training of special units from the Armed Forces and other troops (presumably doomed private military corporations, like “Vagner” Group – note by authors) for use in the interests of Russia economy”<sup>23</sup>

The latter provision is probably related to protecting energy infrastructure and energy assets outside Russia and possibly also with an eye toward securing future resources, such as those in the Arctic region<sup>24</sup> and presumable in Sub-Saharan region. Currently Russia has expanded its presence in the region with assistance of “soft power” instruments. On 17 December 2017 Rusatom Overseas (a company of ROSATOM) and the Ministry of Water Resources, Irrigation and Electricity of the Republic of the Sudan signed an agreement on the development of NPP construction project in Sudan. The document was signed by Musa Omer Abu Elgasim, Deputy Minister of Water Resources, Irrigation and Electricity of the Republic of the Sudan, and Dmitry Bazhenov, Head of Business Development at Rusatom Overseas<sup>25</sup>. The feasibility study for the NPP construction project envisages site screening and establishment of key project parameters including technology, capacity, configuration, deadlines and project’ stages, as well as the financing scheme. Nuclear technology development will allow Sudan to cope with a problem of energy security in the Republic. This is a large-scale project that has a strategic meaning and determines the character of relations between our countries for a long period”, pointed out Dmitry Bazhenov<sup>26</sup>. A month before the President of Sudan Omar al Bashir paid official visit in Moscow<sup>27</sup>. The Russian energy merger “Lukoil” also emerged in Sudan and is seeking to boost up its engagement in energy sector<sup>28</sup>. In the Sub-Sahara region in Libya from Egypt appeared the Russian private military company representatives, namely RSB-Group company militaries led by former Spetnaz officer Oleg Krynitsin have been discovered to aid to General Khaftar regime and provide all necessary military support. Near Libya-Egypt border in 100 km distance in Egyptian city Sidi-Baranni at

<sup>23</sup> *Russian Military Doctrine*, 2010, <[http://carnegieendowment.org/files/2010russia\\_military\\_doctrine.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/2010russia_military_doctrine.pdf)> (30.01.2018).

<sup>24</sup> M. De Haas, *Russia’s New Military Doctrine: A Compromise Document. Russian analytical digest*, 4.05.2010, <<http://www.css.ethz.ch/publications/pdfs/RAD-78.pdf>> (30.01.2018).

<sup>25</sup> *Op. cit.*

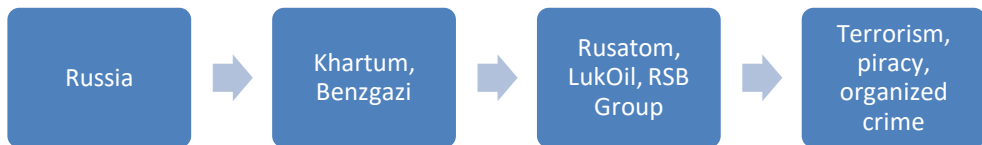
<sup>26</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> *Sudan and Russia signed Agreement on Development of NPP Construction Project in Sudan*, <<http://www.rosatom.ru/en/press-centre/news/sudan-and-russia-signed-agreement-on-development-of-npp-construction-project-in-sudan/>> (30.01.2018).

<sup>28</sup> T. Paraskova, *Sudan in Talks with Foreign Oil Firms To Boost Crude Production*, 14.11.2017, <<https://oilprice.com/Latest-Energy-News/World-News/Sudan-In-Talks-With-Foreign-Oil-Firms-To-Boost-Crude-Production.html>> (30.01.2018).

military airport emerged Russian regular militaries with unknown mission<sup>29</sup>. It is clear as like USA, the Russia has its own agenda in the region and with structure like below.

*Diag. 2. Russian policy in Africa*



Source: own work.

## Conclusion

In summary it is essential to underline that Sub-Saharan Africa has reached New Cold War wave where the Russian and American interests are competed. Here is emerging new actor in the scene like China who has its own agenda to pursue its national energy security and geostrategic missions. That is why “soft power” strategies are becoming more dominant factor for these Powers to successfully achieve their proper national interests in the area focusing on deterring asymmetric challenges emanating from the region itself. How the missions are to be pursued in cooperation or collusion manner is another question but time will tell. Having considered above-mentioned issues is possible to conclude that both USA and Russia have their own geostrategic interests toward the region but with different means to achieve. If the USA is more prone toward exploitation of “soft power” instruments (for instance, corporate business engagement, financial and humanitarian assistance, cultural intervention, etc.), the Russian side operates on “hard power” instruments (for instance, corporate warriors, state mergers, direct military assistance, etc.). However, both power strategies have particular mission to tackle those asymmetric challenges, pose concrete problems to them as well as to local national authorities.

<sup>29</sup> O. Matthews, *Taynyye armii Putina uchastvovali v voyne v Sirii — a gde oni budut voyevat' v sleduyushchiy raz?*, <<http://inosmi.ru/military/20180122/241239434.html>> (30.01.2018).

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