

## Putin does not give up on Assad

Daniel Rakov / Apr 25, 2020

Israeli and regional experts on Middle Eastern politics are wondering about a series of articles that have appeared in Russian and Arabic media in recent weeks in which Russian experts have been blatantly criticizing the corruption of Assad regime. On April 13, the “Russian Federal News Agency” (RIAFAAN) released three articles on corruption of Assad regime, criticizing his cronies, and theorizing the political implications for Assad’s future. Over the next four days, at least 120 Russian articles (originals and requotes) were published in parallel with publications in Arabic, English and social networks discourse.

RIAFAAN is a private Russian news agency belonging to Yevgeniy Prigozhin’s media network. It reports both in Russian and in Arabic. Prigozhin, known as “the Kremlin’s chef” (because of his catering business), is a Saint-Petersburg businessman who provides the Russian government a basket of international influence tools, and in return wins highly profitable government tenders, and backing up for his global business adventures. His most well-known venture (and for which US sanctions have been bestowed upon Prigozhin) is the Internet Research Agency (IRA, also known as “the Troll Factory”), which is accused of disseminating false information on social networks, including during the 2016 US presidential election campaign. His other famous asset is the “Private Military Company” known as “Wagner” – Russian mercenaries active in Syria and elsewhere in the world.

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### *About the Author:*

**Daniel Rakov**, Lieutenant Colonel (res.) joined the **Institute for National Security Studies** in mid-2019 as a research fellow. Previously, he had a 21-year career in the IDF, mainly in the Israeli Defense Intelligence (Aman). He was employed primarily in research and analysis missions, and dealt with the main strategic and operational challenges in almost every geographical area of interest for the State of Israel. Daniel was born in the former USSR. He holds a Master of Business Administration (MBA) and a BA (magna cum laude) in Middle Eastern History - both from Tel Aviv University.

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