

PROSPECTS FOR A U.S.-RUSSIAN PARTNERSHIP IN SYRIA

**FOR SUBMISSION TO
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Despite being the world's lone superpower and wealthiest, most militarily capable nation, the U.S. has nonetheless found itself relatively powerless in its attempt to stem the rising tide of what stands as the most serious threat to Middle East stability: the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.¹ A transnational group emerging from the Syrian civil war, ISIL has not only publicly flaunted some of the most heinous violations of human rights in recent memory, it also has succeeded in overrunning large swaths of Syria and Northern Iraq. The chaos and brutality that the Islamic State has left in its wake has helped fuel a massive refugee exodus, one that is now becoming a problem for countries as far away as central and northern Europe.

Complicating U.S. efforts to combat ISIL is the Syrian government, a stubbornly resilient authoritarian regime long touted as a state-sponsor of terrorism. As a matter of policy, the U.S. has since 2011 made no secret of its desire to see Syrian President Bashar al Assad removed from power. The result has been a two-faceted American effort that in retrospect appears to have become increasingly divergent: (1) attack ISIL in its Syrian safe haven and (2) facilitate the ouster of Assad while promoting a democratic transformation of the Syrian government. Looming in the background is the fact the U.S. is now \$18 trillion in debt, war-wearied from the experience of Iraq and Afghanistan, and desperate for a solution to ISIL that doesn't hinge upon a sizable, long-term U.S. commitment.

Yet a new opportunity has arisen, ushered in by the recent deployment of Russian military forces into Syria: the potential either to leverage Russia's intervention or to partner directly with Russia. Is such a partnership realistic, and can a cooperative effort between the two countries be used to emasculate ISIL and at the same time help prevent Syria from becoming a failed state? A close examination of the converging interests between the two countries suggests this is not only possible, but also ultimately in the best interests of the United States.

Syria and its Descent into Civil War

In March of 2011, small-scale protests throughout Syria erupted into an open revolt against the regime. In Deraa, thousands of protesters faced a violent crack-down by security forces, setting into motion the uprising that would launch Syria into a full-fledged civil war. At its start, the Syrian uprising looked like another chapter of the ‘Arab spring,’ the beginning of the end for yet another Middle Eastern dictator and an opportunity for democracy to take root. What many western observers did not detect at the outset, however, was that chaos in Syria only served to unleash longstanding religious tensions between the Sunnis and Shias, bringing about a civil war fueled by the Shi’a–Sunni divide.²

Part of the reason why the Syrian civil war has endured for so long is that the major players taking part in the violence had from the beginning little interest in democratic principles. Rather, the various players seemed only to be seeking democracy if they thought it would empower their own particular group. For this reason, Henry Kissinger argues the revolution was about nothing more than who would be in charge of Syria – a fight for control and survival.³ If Kissinger is correct, then it helps to explain why what has occurred in Syria is different from the ‘Arab spring’ in Tunisia or even Egypt. Part of the reason the Syrian conflict has persisted for so long is that Syria’s 15 percent Alawi population is in a “fight to the death.”⁴ Assad, and with him the Alawi privileged elite, realize that a victory by either moderate Sunni rebel groups, Al Qaeda, or ISIL would result in certain disaster for this small minority group, one that for decades has held the reins of power in Syria.

Adding another layer of complexity to the Syrian conflict and adding fuel to the sectarian divide are a number of foreign patrons. In some ways, Syria has become a proxy war between regional backers rather than a war between a dictator and a popular democratic movement.⁵ The

broad range of armed groups currently operating within Syria is indeed diverse. Some are believed to be receiving support from Iran, such as Assad's government forces as well as various Shiite groups like Hezbollah. Among the broad range of Sunni groups involved in the fighting, some are driven by an Islamic extremist ideology while others are more moderate. Many of these groups receive support from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.⁶ In all, there are approximately 1,000 different armed groups currently taking part in the Syrian conflict, a number that reflects not only the wide range of interests and associations involved, but also how a widespread lack of trust has fractured the country, splintering its people in a seemingly hopeless web of competing interests.⁷

Today, Syria is in the midst of a devastating humanitarian crisis with no end in sight. At the end of 2014, 11.5 million of Syria's 22 million people had been either internally displaced or had fled the country.⁸ Death toll estimates vary, but by many accounts it is thought to be well over 200,000.⁹ Highlighting this humanitarian disaster, the Russians have recently intervened, asserting their commitment to help bring an end to the conflict. The main problem with Russia's intervention for the U.S., however, is that Russia has from the outset expressed its support for President Assad, while America has from the beginning insisted upon his removal.

America's Failed Attempt to Bring about Assad's Demise

Shortly after the Syrian government began its crackdown on domestic protests in March of 2011, President Obama expressed his tacit support for the uprising by issuing an executive order freezing the assets of prominent figures in the Assad regime.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the Syrian government struck quickly to crush the rebellion. Because it was concerned with defections, the Syrian military chose to use air power and artillery rather than infantry forces, resulting in indiscriminate bombardments and a horrifying human cost.¹¹ This gave the American president

the moral grounds to begin insisting upon Assad's ouster. In August of 2011 President Obama declared,

The future of Syria must be determined by its people, but President Bashar al-Assad is standing in their way. His calls for dialogue and reform have rung hollow while he is imprisoning, torturing, and slaughtering his own people. We have consistently said that President Assad must lead a democratic transition or get out of the way. He has not led. For the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Assad to step aside.¹²

The message was that if Assad was willing to use brutality to punish his own people rather than seek compromise and transition toward democracy, then America would oppose him as well.

America's condemnation reached a new level of urgency following allegations Syrian government forces used chemical weapons against its own civilians on 21 August, 2013. As public outrage began to rise, President Obama began considering the possibility of U.S.-led punitive air strikes against the Syrian government and its armed forces, assuming that Assad was at least aware of, if not responsible for the use of prohibited weapons that resulted in the death of over 1,400 civilians.¹³ The situation was defused, however, when Russia one month later brokered a deal in which Assad agreed to give up all of his chemical weapons to international monitors. Months later, a UN report cast doubt on the degree to which government forces were culpable for the 21 August attack, which may have given some the impression the U.S. was looking for an excuse to attack Assad directly.¹⁴

The U.S. strategy in Syria, at its conception, seemed to be built upon enthusiasm for yet another popular uprising in the Middle East combined with the hope that Assad would be overthrown and that democracy would follow. According to the *New York Times*, a covert U.S. program was initiated early on that was designed to arm a loosely affiliated collection of rebel groups collectively battling government forces – the Free Syrian Army. The effort has suffered

various setbacks, however. For example, the Nursa Front, al Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, attacked many of these groups and seized their American-made weapons, including anti-tank missiles.¹⁵

As the civil war progressed, the U.S. amended its strategy when a group called the Islamic State of the Levant, after establishing a foothold in eastern Syria, surprised the world in early 2014 by launching an offensive into Iraq, seizing a handful of key cities. Needing a way to counter this new threat to Iraq and realizing that group's center of gravity was in Syria, the Obama administration initiated two additional programs, both aimed at combatting ISIL: training and equipping rebel groups to fight the Islamic State on the ground, and launching U.S. airstrikes against ISIL targets within Syrian territory. The train and equip mission proved ill-fated, however, when after a year the training program, based in Turkey and Jordan and designed to send Syrian fighters to fight against the Islamic State, generated only a handful of graduates.¹⁶

In the fall of 2014, the U.S. also began air and cruise missile strikes against ISIL targets in Syria, launching over 7,300 missions in 12 months. Yet over time, ISIL adjusted tactics to become less vulnerable to air attack, and while it may have experienced some losses in the short-term, the long-term effects have left much to be desired. Since those strikes began, the Islamic State's control of Syrian territory has actually increased. Some have attributed this success to a spike in recruitment inspired by a widespread Sunni call to arms in the face of western military intervention.¹⁷

Russia's Intervention

In September of 2015, the situation in Syria became further complicated when a Russian military task force, at the invitation of Assad's government, landed at an airfield near the government-controlled city of Latakia.¹⁸ Days later, Russia began conducting air strikes against various opposition groups, including what appeared to be limited attacks against the Islamic

State. Besides the helicopters and artillery it had on hand for base defense, Russian capability was essentially comparable to what the U.S. had on hand to attack ISIL within Syria: a relatively small number of fighter aircraft capable of conducting air to ground attacks. The Russians also moved ten warships into the Caspian Sea and from there launched medium-range cruise missiles against targets in Syria.¹⁹ To help establish the requisite intelligence needed to conduct these strikes, Russia succeeded in establishing a cooperative intelligence sharing agreement with Iran, Iraq and Syria prior to the commencement of its operations.²⁰

Speculation as to why Russia chose to intervene militarily varies. Some suggest it is part of a bold geo-strategic move to insert itself into the crisis at what might prove to be a critical juncture. Others claim Russia realizes stopping the Islamic State is now in its vital national interests in order to prevent the further spread of violent extremism.²¹ Russia's true motives likely involve a number of reasons that include, among others, a combination of the two. At the same time, it may be that the Syrian government, far from defeated yet exhausted after over four years of fighting, may be ready to enter into meaningful negotiations, talks that the Russians are anxious to facilitate. If Russia was able to succeed in bringing about a peace in Syria, it would not only gain a significant amount of international prestige by doing so, but it would also earn the gratitude of much of Europe, the Middle East, and the rest of the world.²²

After observing what it sees as a failed American-led interventionist policy in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, Russia is perhaps seeking an internationally-mediated settlement that brings to the table the all primary stakeholders within Syria, the current sitting president included. If it can succeed, Russia will be postured to ensure it has a prominent place in negotiations and that its interests in Syria will remain protected, to include the future of its leased naval facility in the port city of Tartus.²³

Should the U.S. Continue to Oppose Assad?

Now that Russia has a military presence in Syria and is seeking to score a diplomatic success by brokering a political settlement, the U.S. is faced with at least two options, both of which, it might be said, are mutually exclusive. First, it could continue to support ‘moderate’ anti-Assad opposition groups and deliberately seek to undermine Russian efforts to bring about an end to the civil war; or second, it could cooperate with Russia and accept a temporary arrangement in which President Assad remains in power.

There are a number of reasons to continue insisting upon the removal of Assad, the foremost of which is perhaps the desire to maintain a consistent U.S. policy vis-à-vis Syria, which since 2011 has promoted his ouster. America is also under pressure from its closest allies in the region – Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar included – to see Assad overthrown. According to Kissinger, the reason the Gulf States want Assad overthrown is to see Iranian interests thwarted, which they fear more than the Islamic State.²⁴ Saudi Arabia and others consider Syria as one of Iran’s few reliable allies, in part because of the Shi’a connection between Iran’s state religion and Assad’s Alawite sect.

It is nonetheless important to note that the tie between the Syrian ruling elite and Iran is perhaps less deeply rooted than it at first might appear. For example, the Iranians are ethnic Persian, while Syrians are Arab. Furthermore, the minority Alawite sect had no historical tie to Shi’a Islam prior to 1973, when the Alawites finally succeeded in securing a fatwa from Lebanese cleric Imam Sayyed Moussa as-Sadr that declared Alawi a part of Shi’a Islam.²⁵ Since then, many have looked upon the decision of the Alawites, whose beliefs originated from a blend of Phoenician paganism, Greek astrology, eastern reincarnationism, and Christianity, to join

Islam as a politically motivated marriage of convenience.²⁶ For this reason, the Alawi sect to this day continues to receive the renunciations of Shi'a fundamentalists.²⁷

Given the recent improvement in U.S.–Iranian relations, it seems American interests would be better served if the U.S. refused to take sides in any Shi'a–Sunni intrastate internal conflict. As long as many believe the U.S. is favoring Sunnis in Syria over Shi'ites, the U.S. jeopardizes its ability to bring peace to the region and risks fomenting additional anti-American sentiment in a part of the world where such feelings are already abundant. A continuation of current U.S. policy in Syria may also feed the perception that the U.S., since the groups it supports are among the weakest of those engaged in the fighting, is not really interested in achieving a peace in Syria but instead only seeks to prolong the fighting to ensure no side wins.²⁸

Is a U.S. Partnership with Russia Feasible?

If the U.S. was to abandon its support for opposition groups and reverse its position toward Assad, the opportunity to partner with the Russians would likely become a possibility, since the Russians have made clear their belief that the only way to restore stability to Syria is through the existing government. In order to reverse its previous policy and side with the Russians, America may have to deem one of two bad outcomes the least desirable: namely, that the continued expansion of the Islamic State from its territorial safe haven in Syria is worse than the continued rule of President Assad.

Some might question whether a partnership is even feasible given the current state of U.S.–Russian relations. The question of whether or not relations between the two countries have been degraded to the point of being truly irreconcilable is beyond the scope of this essay. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to recall that partnership with Russia is nothing new. Russia has been a partner, albeit sometimes a reluctant one, in most U.S. foreign policy goals since 9/11:

countering terrorism, removing the Taliban from power in Afghanistan, containing Iran's nuclear program, denying the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and supporting a stable transition from autocracy in the Middle East.²⁹ Russia also supported UNSCR 1973, which authorized the establishment of a no-fly zone over Libya in 2011 and provided the basis for NATO's military intervention and the eventual fall of Qaddafi. Additionally, Russia has, since 2011, permitted transit of U.S. and NATO forces through Russia, signed a new START treaty, engaged in numerous military exchanges with the U.S., and cooperated on counterpiracy, counternarcotics, and counterterrorism.³⁰ So to say a partnership with Russia is unrealistic is to ignore the many ways in which the U.S. historically has cooperated with Russia, some of which have been relatively recent.

Already, the U.S. and Russia have engaged in limited amounts of coordination since the arrival of Russian forces in late September of 2015. The U.S. Department of Defense and the Russian military have established a direct line of communication, chiefly intended to avoid direct confrontations between Russian and U.S. combat aircraft operating in Syrian airspace.³¹ Yet the implementation of such measures only shows the two sides do not consider each other adversaries. Further steps must be taken in order to sow the seeds of real and meaningful cooperation.

If the U.S. and Russia could agree to cooperate, the purpose of this partnership would likely be twofold: to bring about a peaceful, diplomatic resolution to the Syrian civil war, and to assist the governments of Syria and Iraq in their efforts to regain control of their own sovereign territory from the Islamic State. While one benefit of cooperation could include intelligence sharing, perhaps the most significant gain from the American perspective would be a division of labor in the battle against ISIL. Additionally, if responsibility for ISIL was split along the Syrian-

Iraqi border, critics could no longer complain that the U.S. is violating Syrian sovereignty, since U.S. combat operations in Syria currently have no UN Security Council mandate.

Why Partnering with Russia in Syria is in America's National Interests

At first glance, the reasons not to cooperate with Russia might seem many while the reasons to partner with them few. For example, some might argue the real threat to U.S. national security is neither the Islamic State nor the Syrian civil war, but rather Russia itself. A rising, nuclear-armed Russia presents the only real existential threat to the U.S., some might say, and therefore it would be foolish for the U.S. to do anything that would increase Russian influence in the region and improve Russia's image internationally. Second, others might argue that U.S. cooperation would only serve to lend credibility to Russian President Vladimir Putin. If the U.S. agrees to partner with Russia, then Putin's status in the international community would likely improve and his actions in Syria and Ukraine might in turn seem more legitimate.

There are a number of ways to respond to these concerns. First, while Russia may in fact be a threat to the U.S., it would not in any way be in its interests to reignite a cold war with America and its western allies. It was, after all, Russia's economic isolation and its inability to sustain an arms race that contributed directly to the fall of the Soviet Union. Russia has already learned that lesson. Any Russian attack on the U.S. or NATO would only serve to trigger a proportional response while provoking a long-term standoff with the West that would cripple Russia economically.

Second, it would be wrong to gauge U.S. foreign policy decisions on the basis of Putin's reputation, no matter how much America would like to see him cast as a 'bad guy.' Already, Putin is immensely popular within Russia, and his legitimacy in Syria seems to rest firmly on the fact that Russian forces are operating there at the invitation of the Syrian government.

Furthermore, Russia's intervention has begun to take on a positive light being that Putin has already taken steps to begin brokering a peace deal, capitalizing on his position of influence over Assad that the U.S. is not able to match. At the same time, Russia has argued its intervention is designed to bring about a resolution to the conflict and that Assad must stay in power in order to ensure that Syria remains intact as a nation. Perhaps Putin is right – in order to drive the Islamic State from Syria, it might be necessary first to preserve Syria as a state by first restoring order under Assad's leadership.

A partnership with Russia might also provide an opportunity to act within the context of the UN Security Council. Passing a UN Security Council resolution on Syria, one that condemns the Islamic State while calling for a cease-fire and follow-on peace talks, could help rehabilitate the international order established by the UN Charter, a system that has arguably been weakened by recent U.S. interventions, most notably the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Russia wants this because the UN Charter, the foundation of the current post-WWII Westphalian order, enshrined Russia as a major player, so any positive contribution to international stability realized through the Security Council improves the prestige of Russia in the eyes of the international community.³² The U.S. needs to work through the Security Council to improve its own international legitimacy and to convince a skeptical world that the U.S. does in fact respect the rules of international sovereignty to which all UN member states are bound.

One additional benefit of partnering with Russia, while at the same time acting through the Security Council, is that it could open the door to further cooperation in other areas of the world and in future conflicts. While some might suggest that relying on the Security Council only grants Russia, with its veto power, license to disrupt the international order by acting as an obstacle to Western proposals, there is actually good reason to believe that this need not be the

case. Russia, it seems, is in fact committed to working through the Security Council to bring about global stability, in part because it is concerned about its status as a leader on the international stage. For example, Russia in 2006 supported the UNSCR condemning North Korea's nuclear test, and in 2010 it supported UNSCR 1929, which censured Iran for its nuclear program and mandated a new series of international sanctions. So while Russia may have mystified the West when it acted unilaterally in Ukraine in 2014 and in Georgia in 2008, the only thing these examples have shown definitively is that Russia will act unilaterally (and outside the UN Charter) if its interests are threatened within its immediate neighbors. Otherwise, Russia seems committed to promoting the rules of the international system, evidenced most recently by public statements emphasizing the need to work within the framework of the UN Charter.³³

Settling with Assad in the Short Term

One final worry is that if the U.S. partners with Russia, it will signal a reversal of the American position toward Assad and will solidify his long-term grip on power, a state of affairs that the U.S. considers unacceptable. Reasons for uneasiness toward Assad range from his record of human rights abuses to Syria's support for Hezbollah and its connections with Iran. Indeed, these are valid concerns. Yet it may be in the best interests of the U.S. to set aside such concerns in order to address problems that are more pressing: namely, the metastasization of the Islamic State and the humanitarian exodus that is creating a crisis for America's European allies.

Assad and his Alawite minority are in a fight for survival, a fight that has been prolonged by foreign patrons who continue to arm a disparate array of armed factions involved in the conflict. It may be the case that many of these groups are approaching exhaustion and thus may be eager to negotiate an end to the conflict. Some of these groups are Islamic extremism-inspired, others such as the Kurds are ethnic minorities, while still others are secular or even

religious moderates. If it is possible to bring the major players into negotiations, there are reasons to believe Assad, given his background, could perhaps be enticed into siding with those that are western-leaning and anti-fundamentalist.³⁴ If this occurred, then it's likely a partial order could be restored in Syria that is Assad-led, one that would work aggressively to uproot ISIL from within its borders.

By reversing its position on Assad, the U.S. would open the door for a partnership with Russia. Setting suspicions of nefarious Russian motives aside, there are good reasons to believe Russian intervention in Syria is strictly geopolitical rather than ideological, and thus the final goal of Russia is not simply to ensure Assad remains in power, but rather to save Syria from becoming a lawless state and a safe haven for Islamic extremism. Putin seemed to hint at this when he expressed his unease with Assad as early as 2012. He said, "We are not anxious about the fate of Assad's regime. We understand what is happening there and that [his] family has been in power for 40 years. Undoubtedly, change is needed. We are worried about something else: what happens next."³⁵ At that time, he added that Russia wanted to see Assad enter into dialogue with the Syrian opposition to "save the country from collapse and endless civil war."³⁶ This view has been echoed recently by Dmitri Trenin, Director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, who argues that Russia's highest priority is to save the authority of the Syrian government to stop the spread of chaos "and, with it, the fertile ground from which the Islamic State can take root."³⁷ If Trenin's diagnosis is correct, then it seems Russia and the U.S do in fact have a common interest in Syria – a commonality that warrants cooperation, if not partnership.

Conclusion

For the first time since the Second World War, the U.S. and Russia have a common tangible enemy, the Islamic State. Neither country can risk allowing this group to entrench itself

in Syria and Iraq and create a terrorist quasi-state.³⁸ If this was to occur, it would likely be only a matter of time before ISIL is responsible for attacks on U.S. or Russian soil.

After more than four years of civil war, the U.S. strategy toward Syria is in need of reassessment. Recent Russian intervention in the conflict has fortuitously provided the context for such a reformulation while at the same time opening up several windows of opportunity. These opportunities all share a common source: the necessity of a U.S.–Russian partnership to help bring the crisis in Syria to a close. By working with Russia, the U.S. has a chance to achieve a political solution that would prevent Syria from becoming a failed state. Furthermore, cooperation and the image of a U.S.–Russian united front is essential to ensure any Syrian government that emerges in the aftermath is committed to combatting the threat to America and its interests that has found refuge within Syria’s borders.

¹ For the purposes of this article, the group referred to as ISIL, ISIS, and Daesh will be referred to as ISIL, at times shortened to the Islamic State.

² David Sorenson, “US Options in Syria,” *Parameters* (Autumn 2013): 6.

³ Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 127-8.

⁴ Sorenson, 6.

⁵ See for example Kissinger, 127.

⁶ For example, Sudan reportedly shipped arms, paid for by Qatar, to Sunni rebel groups within Syria. See “Arms Shipments Seen from Sudan to Syria Rebels,” *The New York Times*, August 12, 2013, accessed October 19, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/13/world/africa/arms-shipments-seen-from-sudan-to-syria-rebels.html?_r=0.

⁷ “Syria Countrywide Conflict Report #4,” *The Carter Center*, September 11, 2014, 11.

⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, The UN Refugee Agency, Syrian Arab Republic, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486a76.html>.

⁹ See for example “Syria Death Toll Now Exceeds 210,000: Right Group,” *Reuters*, February 7, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/07/us-mideast-crisis-toll-idUSKBN0LB0DY20150207>.

¹⁰ Fred Lawson, “Global Security Watch—Syria,” Praeger Security International, Terrorism, Homeland Security, Strategy, accessed October 19, 2015, <http://psi.praeger.com/doc.aspx?d=/books/gpg/C8257C/C8257C-1954.xml>

¹¹ Emile Hokayem, *Syria’s Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2013), 58.

¹² Barack Obama, “The Future of Syria must be determined by its people, but President Bahsar al-Assad is standing in their way,” The White House, August 18, 2011, accessed October 19, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/08/18/president-obama-future-syria-must-be-determined-its-people-president-bashar-al-assad>.

¹³ Michael Gordon and Mark Landler, “Kerry Cites Clear Evidence of Chemical Weapon Use in Syria,” *The New York Times*, August 26, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/27/world/middleeast/syria-assad.html?_r=0.

¹⁴ The UN released its report in December, determining that chemical weapons had been used five times in Syria between March 19 and August 24, 2013. While the final report was unable to ascertain who was responsible for the

1,400 civilian deaths, it did find that rebel forces had used chemical weapons against the Syrian army on three of the five occasions, calling into question earlier claims that government forces had been behind the August 21st attack. “United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic Final report,” accessed November 3, 2015, <https://unoda-web.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/report.pdf>.

¹⁵ Rick Gladstone, “4 U.S. Military Efforts on ISIS and Syria Yield Mixed Results,” *The New York Times*, October 9, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/10/world/middleeast/4-us-military-efforts-on-isis-and-syria-yield-mixed-results.html?_r=0

¹⁶ See Gladstone, “4 U.S. Military Efforts on ISIS and Syria Yield Mixed Results.” The program has recently been terminated. Michael Shear et al. “Obama Administration Ends Effort to Train Syrians to Combat ISIS,” *The New York Times*, October 9, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/10/world/middleeast/pentagon-program-islamic-state-syria.html>

¹⁷ “Syria Countrywide Conflict Report No. 5,” *The Carter Center*, February 2015, 5.

¹⁸ Russia’s Intervention in Syria: Implications for Western Engagement, Paul Rogers & Richard Reeve, October 14, 2015, Oxford Research Group, accessed October 27, 2015, http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/paul_rogers_monthly_briefing/russia’s_intervention_syria_implications_western_engagemen

¹⁹ Julian E. Barnes et al, “Russia Builds Force in Syria As U.S. Rejects Cooperation.” *Wall Street Journal*, October 8, 2015.

²⁰ Matt Bradley and Nathan Hodge, “Iraq Signs Collaboration Deal with Russia, Iran, Syria on ISIS,” *Wall Street Journal Online*, September 27, 2015.

²¹ Dmitri Trenin points out that the possibility of foreign fighters coming back from Syria and Iraq to destabilize the Muslim regions of Russia is also a real fear. Dmitri Trenin, “Putin’s Syria Gambit Aims at Something Bigger Than Syria.” Carnegie Moscow Center, 2015.

²² Tim Lister, “Russia’s Syria expedition: Why now and what’s next?” *CNN*, October 1, 2015, accessed October 27, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/27/world/russia-syria-involvement/>.

²³ Paul Rogers & Richard Reeve, “Russia’s Intervention in Syria: Implications for Western Engagement,” Oxford Research Group, October 14, 2015, accessed October 27, 2015, http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/paul_rogers_monthly_briefing/russia’s_intervention_syria_implications_western_engagemen.

²⁴ Henry Kissinger, “A Path Out of the Middle East Collapse,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 17, 2015.

²⁵ Pat Proctor, “The Mythical Shia Crescent,” *Parameters* (Spring 2008): 35.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁸ Sorenson, 10.

²⁹ Angela Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U. S. – Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 264.

³⁰ James Stavridis, *The Accidental Admiral: A Sailor Takes Command of NATO* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2014), 103-104.

³¹ Jamie Crawford, “Officials: U.S. and Russia Close to Agreement on Syria Flights,” *CNN*, October 14, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/14/politics/us-russia-syria-aircraft-agreement/index.html> and “Russia, US Sign Cooperation Deal on Syria Airstrikes,” *Russia Today*, October 20, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/319198-russia-us-syria-agreement/>.

³² In Putin’s September 2013 New York Times OPED “A Plea for Caution from Russia,” Putin argued that a U. S. strike against Syria without the consent of the UN Security Council could not only further destabilize the Middle East, but could undermine the entire system of international law and order. See http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/opinion/putin-plea-for-caution-from-russia-on-syria.html?_r=0, accessed October 16, 2015. Sampson, arguing from a realist point of view, holds that the “core overall interest” of all great powers, to include the U. S., should be to preserve the international system, which in turn will provide the framework necessary to avoid another world war.

³³ See Vladimir Putin, “A Plea for Caution from Russia,” OP-ED: *New York Times*, September 11, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/opinion/putin-plea-for-caution-from-russia-on-syria.html?_r=0 and “Speech to UN General Assembly,” 28 September, 2015, accessed November 3, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/09/28/read-putins-u-n-general-assembly-speech/>.

³⁴ Pat Proctor makes a similar point, pointing out that Bashar al-Assad speaks fluent English and that his wife was born and educated in the West. See Proctor, 38.

³⁵ Tom Parfitt, "Vladimir Putin goes on offensive against US," *The Telegraph*, December 20, 2012, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/vladimir-putin/9759260/Vladimir-Putin-goes-on-offensive-against-US.html>.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Steven Lee Myers and Anne Barnard, "Assad Finds Chilly Embrace in Meeting with Putin," *The New York Times*, October 22, 2015.

³⁸ Simon Saradzhyan, "US and Russia Share a Vital Interest in Fighting Terrorism," *Hampton Roads International Security Quarterly*, October 1, 2015, 111.