

October 6, 2015

Today's post could be titled "Becoming Putin's Poodle." because that is the title of the first item, a post from National Review.

*The sound you'd be hearing this morning if you live in the devastated city of Homs in Syria, would be Russian jets doing bombing runs against your neighbors rebelling against dictator Bashar al-Assad.*

*And not just in Homs. The roar of those Russian jets is being heard around the world; it's the sound of Vladimir Putin becoming the new alpha male and power broker of the Middle East.*

*What I dubbed in a recent NR article the Pax Putinica is rapidly taking shape. Just as the earlier Pax Americana was aimed at containing the Soviet Union, so Putin's new world order is aimed at smashing the U.S.'s influence as a superpower, first in Europe and now in the eastern Mediterranean.*

*Our president, meanwhile, is letting it all happen. If Vladimir Putin is the dominant alpha male in the new international pecking order, Barack Obama has emerged as his highly submissive partner.*

*There are various reasons why we are being subjected to the humiliating spectacle of an American president, so-called leader of the free world, rolling over on the mat at Putin's feet. ...*

And Charles Krauthammer has the keynote address as he reacts to the administration's "anger" at Putin's Syria policy.

*If it had the wit, the Obama administration would be not angered, but appropriately humiliated. President Obama has, once again, been totally outmaneuvered by Vladimir Putin. Two days earlier at the United Nations, Obama had welcomed the return, in force, of the Russian military to the Middle East — for the first time in decades — in order to help fight the Islamic State.*

*The ruse was transparent from the beginning. Russia is not in Syria to fight the Islamic State. The Kremlin was sending fighter planes, air-to-air missiles and SA-22 anti-aircraft batteries. Against an Islamic State that has no air force, no planes, no helicopters?*

*Russia then sent reconnaissance drones over Western Idlib and Hama, where there are no Islamic State fighters. Followed by bombing attacks on Homs and other opposition strongholds that had nothing to do with the Islamic State. ...*

*... Why is Putin moving so quickly and so brazenly? Because he's got only 16 more months to push on the open door that is Obama. He knows he'll never again see an American president such as this — one who once told the General Assembly that "no one nation can or should try to dominate another nation" and told it again Monday of "believing in my core that we, the nations of the world, cannot return to the old ways of conflict and coercion."*

*They cannot? Has he looked at the world around him — from Homs to Kunduz, from Sanaa to Donetsk — ablaze with conflict and coercion?*

*Wouldn't you take advantage of these last 16 months if you were Putin, facing a man living in a faculty-lounge fantasy world? Where was Obama when Putin began bombing Syria? Leading a U.N. meeting on countering violent extremism. ...*

**WSJ Editors** have an opinion.

*... Mr. Putin is also showing that Russia is an ally to be trusted, in contrast to an America that abandoned Iraq in 2011 and won't fight ISIS with conviction. His alliance with Iran gives him leverage throughout the Middle East, and his Syria play may even give him leverage with Europe over Ukraine sanctions. Perhaps he'll offer to limit the barrel bombs that have sent refugees fleeing in return for Europe easing sanctions. Some quagmire.*

*Mr. Obama could make Mr. Putin pay a price if he reversed his Middle East policy and revived American leadership. In Syria the U.S. could set up a no-fly zone to create a haven for refugees against Islamic State and Mr. Assad's barrel bombs. He could say U.S. planes will fly wherever they want, and if one is attacked the U.S. will respond in kind.*

*In Iraq the U.S. could directly arm the Kurds. And the U.S. could rev up the campaign against Islamic State from more than 11 or so strike sorties a day. This would show a new commitment that might convince the Sunni Arabs that the U.S. is finally serious about defeating the caliphate.*

*By now we know Mr. Obama will do none of this. He wants America out of the Middle East, so he will gradually find a way to accommodate Russia's presence in the Middle East and Mr. Putin's demands. U.S. allies in the region will get the message and make their accommodations with Russia and Iran. The next President will inherit a bigger terror threat and diminished U.S. influence, if not worse. ...*

**Ralph Peters** says Putin wants to humiliate the US.

*The first thing to understand about Vladimir Putin is that he's not content just to win. He has to destroy his opponents, foreign or domestic.*

*His deeds may be despicable and his manners far too crude for the Upper West Side, but the guy is a force of nature, a man who — by sheer strength of will — has used a broken country and its rusting military to change the world. Meanwhile, our astonished president sulks like a high school girl stood up by her boyfriend (“But Vladimir ... you promised!”).*

*Now we have reached the point where a Russian general can barge into a US military office in the Middle East and order us to stop flying our aircraft over Syria. Oh, we're still flying, for now — but you can bet that our flights are restricted and careful to the point of paralysis.*

*You bet President Obama's afraid of Putin. Physically, tangibly, change-the-diaper afraid.*

*And as I wrote in these pages on Monday, the odds are good that Putin will order the shootdown of a US drone or even a manned aircraft, anyway. Why? Because he can.*

*And he enjoys it. ...*

**Claudia Rosett** says Putin's blitz is a Middle East coup in three acts.

*As the world audience contemplates this latest drama in the reshaping of the 21st Century World Order.*

*In New York, the United Nations is still lumbering through its Sept. 28th – Oct. 3 general debate. But even with today's declaration by aging potentate Mahmoud Abbas that the Palestinian Authority will no longer respect the Oslo Accords (did they ever?) the headlines are elsewhere. Russia's President Vladimir Putin not only stole the UN show, but in Syria — and beyond — is stealing a march on President Obama that makes the current world scene look ever more like the disastrous penultimate year of Jimmy Carter's presidency. That 1979 run of debacles opened with Iran's Islamic Revolution, and rolled on to the Soviet Union's December invasion of Afghanistan — lighting the fuel under the cauldron whence sprang, in due course, a great many horrors, including the Sept. 11, 2001 al Qaeda attacks on the United States.*

*Obama's presidency still has more than a year to run (477 days, to be precise), and after more than six years of U.S. global retreat, as we toil through this fourth quarter of "interesting stuff," trouble is spreading even faster than it did in the Carter era. The threats now rising like a tsunami on the horizon are, arguably, worse.*

*But let's focus here on Russia. This week, President Putin has delivered not only a blitz in Syria, but a grand slam on the world stage. Call it a play in three acts. ...*

**Max Boot** writes on the disaster that is left to the next president.

*Now even if President Obama wanted to take more serious steps to stop Assad — and there is no sign that he does — he would find it increasingly difficult to do so. As General Philip Breedlove, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander, recently noted, Russia is building an "A2/AD bubble" over Syria. That stands for anti-access/area denial — military nomenclature for defensive systems such as anti-aircraft missiles that will make it hard for U.S. or Israeli forces to operate in the area.*

*So, in addition to the creation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, the ongoing killing of the Syrian civil war, the general chaos of Libya, the loss of territory to the Taliban, and the general expansion of Iranian influence, the Obama administration is leaving another legacy to its successor: Growing Russian power in the heart of the Middle East. It makes you wonder why anyone would want to be president, given the size of the mess that Obama's successor will inherit. ...*

The cartoonists have a ball.

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## National Review

### Becoming Putin's Poodle

by Arthur L. Herman



The sound you'd be hearing this morning if you live in the devastated city of Homs in Syria, would be Russian jets doing bombing runs against your neighbors rebelling against dictator Bashar al-Assad.

And not just in Homs. The roar of those Russian jets is being heard around the world; it's the sound of Vladimir Putin becoming the new alpha male and power broker of the Middle East.

What I dubbed in a recent [NR article](#) the Pax Putinica is rapidly taking shape. Just as the earlier Pax Americana was aimed at containing the Soviet Union, so Putin's new world order is aimed at smashing the U.S.'s influence as a superpower, first in Europe and now in the eastern Mediterranean.

Our president, meanwhile, is letting it all happen. If Vladimir Putin is the dominant alpha male in the new international pecking order, Barack Obama has emerged as his highly submissive partner.

There are various reasons why we are being subjected to the humiliating spectacle of an American president, so-called leader of the free world, rolling over on the mat at Putin's feet.

Of course, there have been signs for years that Obama is prone to submitting to males who act dominantly in his presence. Who can forget his frozen performance with Mitt Romney in the first presidential debate in 2012, where Romney ruled the stage while Obama seemed to shrink away (Romney then threw away his alpha-male advantage in the next debate). We've seen it in his interactions with China's president Xi Jinping; his strange bowing and scraping with the Saudi king; and his various meetings with Putin, including the last at the United Nations on Monday where a tight-lipped Obama could barely bring himself to look at the Russian president while Putin looked cool and confident—as well as he should.

For every aggressive move Putin has made on the international stage, first in Crimea and Ukraine in Europe, and now in Syria, our president's response has been largely verbal protestations followed by resolute inaction. Why should Putin not assume that when he orders the U.S. to stop its own air strikes against ISIS in Syria, and to leave the skies to the Russians, he won't be obeyed?

But there's more to Obama's passivity than just pack behavior, and the real explanation is Iran.

Since gaining the presidency, Obama's entire policy of constructive engagement with Iran, including the current nuclear deal, has been built on the premise that Russia will help, both with shutting down Iran's nuclear program when a deal is finally struck, and re-imposing sanctions if Iran doesn't.

That's why he was so eager to accept Putin's offer to get Assad to give over his chemical weapons in 2013 — as a test run for cooperation in stopping Iran's nuclear program — and why he's been so hesitant about supporting the anti-Assad rebels, even after publicly calling for the dictator's removal for more than four years — not to mention so weak in confronting Russian aggression in Ukraine.

It even explains why he's been slow to respond to ISIS's seizing of territory in both Syria and Iraq, out of fear that aggressive American military action might offend Tehran, and with it Iran's chief patron, Vladimir Putin.

Of course this is all an Obama fantasy, reinforced by Obama's deep disdain for our allies in the region, Israel and the Saudis, who are also the ones most worried by Russia's escalating influence. They know Putin's ambitions run counter to real peace and stability in the Middle East; that he has no intention of defeating ISIS if it helps keep the region in turmoil and no reason to rein in Iran's nuclear program as long as fear or Iran serves Russian interests. They also understand that Putin will be able to play the Shia Iranians against the Sunni Arabs in order to increase his own status as power broker, as well as his status as gatekeeper for other powers who will want a bigger piece of the action in the Pax Putinica Middle East, including China.

In the meantime, Obama's fantasy has turned U.S. policy in the region inside out — and propelled Russia back into the ranks of the world's superpowers. The next president will have to deal with the consequences of that passivity. For now, the rest of us will be listening for the roar of Russian jets — and hoping they stay in the Middle East.

**Washington Post**  
**[Obama's Syria debacle](#)**  
by Charles Krauthammer

*"Russia hits Assad's foes, angering U.S."*

— Headline, Wall Street Journal, Oct. 1

If it had the wit, the Obama administration would be not angered, but appropriately humiliated. President Obama has, once again, been totally outmaneuvered by Vladimir Putin. Two days earlier at the United Nations, [Obama had welcomed](#) the return, in force, of the Russian military to the Middle East — for the first time in decades — in order to help fight the Islamic State.

The ruse was transparent from the beginning. Russia is not in Syria to fight the Islamic State. The Kremlin was sending fighter planes, air-to-air missiles and SA-22 anti-aircraft batteries. Against an Islamic State that has no air force, no planes, no helicopters?

Russia then sent reconnaissance drones over Western Idlib and Hama, where there are [no Islamic State fighters](#). Followed by bombing attacks on Homs and other opposition strongholds that had nothing to do with the Islamic State.

Indeed, some of these bombed fighters were [U.S. trained and equipped](#). Asked if we didn't have an obligation to support our own allies on the ground, Defense Secretary Ashton Carter bumbled that Russia's actions exposed its policy as self-contradictory.

Carter made it sound as if the Russian offense was to have perpetrated an oxymoron, rather than a provocation — and a direct challenge to what's left of the U.S. policy of supporting a moderate opposition.

The whole point of Russian intervention is to maintain Assad in power. Putin has no interest in fighting the Islamic State. Indeed, the second round of Russian air attacks [was on rival insurgents](#) opposed to the Islamic State. The Islamic State is nothing but a pretense for Russian intervention. And Obama fell for it.

Just three weeks ago, [Obama chided Russia](#) for its military buildup, wagging his finger that it was "doomed to failure." Yet by Monday he was publicly welcoming Russia to join the fight against the Islamic State. He not only acquiesced to the Russian buildup, he held an ostentatious meeting with Putin on the subject, thereby marking the ignominious collapse of Obama's vaunted campaign to isolate Putin diplomatically over Crimea.

Putin then showed his utter contempt for Obama by launching his air campaign against our erstwhile anti-Assad allies not 48 hours after meeting Obama. Which the U.S. found out about when a Russian general knocked on the door of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and delivered a brusque demarche announcing that the attack would begin within an hour and warning the U.S. to get out of the way.

In his [subsequent news conference](#), Carter averred that he found such Russian behavior "unprofessional."

Good grief. Russia, with its inferior military and hemorrhaging economy, had just eaten Carter's lunch, seizing the initiative and exposing American powerlessness — and the secretary of defense deploras what? Russia's lack of professional etiquette.

Makes you want to weep.

Consider: When Obama became president, the surge in Iraq had succeeded and the United States had emerged as the dominant regional actor, able to project power throughout the region. Last Sunday, [Iraq announced](#) the establishment of a joint intelligence-gathering center with Iran, Syria and Russia, symbolizing the new "Shiite-crescent" alliance stretching from Iran across the northern Middle East to the Mediterranean, under the umbrella of Russia, the rising regional hegemon.

Russian planes roam free over Syria attacking Assad's opposition as we stand by helpless. Meanwhile, the U.S. secretary of state [beseches the Russians](#) to negotiate "de-conflict" arrangements — so that we and they can each bomb our own targets safely. It has come to this.

Why is Putin moving so quickly and so brazenly? Because he's got only 16 more months to push on the open door that is Obama. He knows he'll never again see an American president such as this — one who once [told the General Assembly](#) that “no one nation can or should try to dominate another nation” and [told it again](#) Monday of “believing in my core that we, the nations of the world, cannot return to the old ways of conflict and coercion.”

They cannot? Has he looked at the world around him — from Homs to Kunduz, from Sanaa to Donetsk — ablaze with conflict and coercion?

Wouldn't you take advantage of these last 16 months if you were Putin, facing a man living in a faculty-lounge fantasy world? Where was Obama when Putin began bombing Syria? Leading a U.N. meeting on countering violent extremism.

Seminar to follow.

## **WSJ - Editorial**

### **[What U.S. Retreat Looks Like](#)**

***Syria reveals the chaos of a world without American leadership.***

A friend of ours quipped amid the Iraq debate of 2003 that the only thing Europeans dislike more than U.S. leadership is a world without it. Well, we are now living in such a world, and the result is the disorder and rising tide of war in the Middle East that even the Obama Administration can no longer dismiss. How do you like it?

The epicenter of the chaos is the Syrian civil war now into its fifth year. President Obama justified his decision to steer clear of the conflict by pointing to a parade of horrors if the U.S. assisted the opposition to Bashar Assad. Every one of those horrors—and more—has come to pass in the wake of his retreat.

Syria has become a “geopolitical Chernobyl,” as former General David Petraeus recently put it. It was the breeding ground for Islamic State and is a new sanctuary for terrorism. It has nurtured a growing regional conflict between Shiite and Sunni Muslims, while unleashing the worst refugee crisis on Europe since World War II. And now it has become an arena for potential major power conflict as Vladimir Putin forms an alliance with Iran to make Russia the new Middle East power broker.

Mr. Putin unveiled his strategy this week with a disdain for a U.S. President unseen in a Russian leader since Nikita Khrushchev “beat the hell out of” John Kennedy, as JFK put it, at the Vienna summit in 1961. Mr. Putin coaxed Mr. Obama to grant him a private meeting, then told the world to rally behind his alternative coalition to fight Islamic State and prop up the Assad regime. It's as if he set up Mr. Obama for humiliation.

Now Russian planes are bombing in Syria—but not Islamic State targets. They are bombing the anti-Assad forces that the U.S. has haltingly supported. The U.S. has been caught unaware and nonplussed. The White House has been left to stammer in protest and send Secretary of State [John Kerry](#) to negotiate the terms of U.S. irrelevance.

The world is watching, aghast, yet we are now told by the same people who told us to stay out of Syria that Mr. Putin has fallen into his own quagmire. We doubt that's how they see it in Moscow, Tehran or Damascus.

For a limited deployment of 2,000 soldiers and some weapons, Mr. Putin is showing Russians their country has global influence again. He needn't waste Russian blood because Hezbollah provides the cannon fodder. And he needn't defeat Islamic State as long as he carves out an Alawite protectorate around Damascus and Syria's coast. Mr. Assad needs Islamic State as an enemy for now because he can pose as the lesser evil. His goal—and the Kremlin's—is to slowly win Western agreement that Mr. Assad is necessary for Syrian stability.

Mr. Putin is also showing that Russia is an ally to be trusted, in contrast to an America that abandoned Iraq in 2011 and won't fight ISIS with conviction. His alliance with Iran gives him leverage throughout the Middle East, and his Syria play may even give him leverage with Europe over Ukraine sanctions. Perhaps he'll offer to limit the barrel bombs that have sent refugees fleeing in return for Europe easing sanctions. Some quagmire.

Mr. Obama could make Mr. Putin pay a price if he reversed his Middle East policy and revived American leadership. In Syria the U.S. could set up a no-fly zone to create a haven for refugees against Islamic State and Mr. Assad's barrel bombs. He could say U.S. planes will fly wherever they want, and if one is attacked the U.S. will respond in kind.

In Iraq the U.S. could directly arm the Kurds. And the U.S. could rev up the campaign against Islamic State from more than 11 or so strike sorties a day. This would show a new commitment that might convince the Sunni Arabs that the U.S. is finally serious about defeating the caliphate.

By now we know Mr. Obama will do none of this. He wants America out of the Middle East, so he will gradually find a way to accommodate Russia's presence in the Middle East and Mr. Putin's demands. U.S. allies in the region will get the message and make their accommodations with Russia and Iran. The next President will inherit a bigger terror threat and diminished U.S. influence, if not worse.

All of this ought to be an opportunity for the Republican presidential candidates to make the case against Mr. Obama's policy of retreat. Instead [Donald Trump](#) says his policy would be to get along with Mr. Putin, somehow, and our Syria policy should be to let both sides kill each other. Never mind that this has been Mr. Obama's policy for five years.

After the 1961 Vienna Summit, Khrushchev famously concluded that Kennedy was weak and could be exploited. The Soviet leader followed by creating a crisis over Berlin and trying to send nuclear missiles to Cuba. The Obama Presidency has 16 months left. We haven't seen the last American humiliation.



*Barack Obama extends his hand to Vladimir Putin during their meeting at the United Nations General Assembly*

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His deeds may be despicable and his manners far too crude for the Upper West Side, but the guy is a force of nature, a man who — by sheer strength of will — has used a broken country and its rusting military to change the world. Meanwhile, our astonished president sulks like a high school girl stood up by her boyfriend (“But Vladimir ... you promised!”).

Now we have reached the point where a Russian general can barge into a US military office in the Middle East and order us to stop flying our aircraft over Syria. Oh, we're still flying, for now — but you can bet that our flights are restricted and careful to the point of paralysis.

You bet President Obama's afraid of Putin. Physically, tangibly, change-the-diaper afraid.

And as I wrote in these pages on Monday, [the odds are good that Putin will order the shutdown of a US drone or even a manned aircraft](#), anyway. Why? Because he can.

And he enjoys it.

But Putin sees a necessity in humiliating the United States. That's business. And yet, despite Putin's obviousness, the White House team and its acolytes publicly scratch their heads and other body parts, saying, “We're not certain what the Russians intend.”

So let's help them. Here are Putin's clear strategic goals:

In the short term, rescue the failing regime of Russia's ally, Syria's blood-drenched President Bashar al-Assad. And in doing so, eliminate all opposition groups except ISIS, leaving the United States, Europe and the world with the stark choice of “Assad or Islamic State?”

In the mid-term, create a fait accompli, irreversible circumstances, on the ground in the Middle East (and in Ukraine) that will defeat the next US president even before he takes office.

Expect a lot more [aggression and violence from Putin](#) between now and Inauguration Day 2017. Obama's delusional worldview — that of a narrow-shouldered, bleeding-heart undergraduate at a second-rate university — is a gift to Putin that keeps on giving. (In almost seven years in office, Obama still hasn't grasped that words don't stop bullets.)

In the longer term, Putin intends to re-establish Russia's grandeur and glory from the apogee of the czars — and to go still further by dominating the Middle East and its energy resources.

Putin has bet on the Shia world against the Sunni Muslims and is well along in the process of building a wall of allies from Tehran to Tripoli. Already, Russia has a renewed presence and influence in the Middle East after a four-decade absence.

Our response? We're still funding the Iranian-owned Baghdad government; still shortchanging the Kurds; still afraid to use real military power against ISIS; and terrified that Putin will push the Syrian situation into a confrontation.

He will. And the Obama administration is utterly, profoundly unprepared.

Our confused policies in the Middle East have left us trusted by no one (not even Israel), respected by no one and feared by no one. We've scattered our military advisers around Iraq, providing Iran-backed militias with instant hostages. We continue to fund those who hate us in Iraq (where our diplomats can't think past the walls of our white-elephant embassy). We continue to pretend that we can convince Iraqis and Syrians to fight for what we believe in, rather than for their own interests.

And should Putin shoot down a US aircraft and should Obama finally screw his courage to the sticking point and attempt an appropriate military response, Turkey — disloyal to us and terrified of Russia — would deny us the use of Incirlik airbase.

The White House response now? Spokesman Josh "Baghdad Bob" Earnest tells us everything's under control and we're working things out. The new line is that Russia will only get bogged down in a quagmire, as the Soviets did in Afghanistan. Sorry, folks: Just because Obama's incapable of learning doesn't mean Putin is, too. And Putin's forces won't go into battle with lawyers looking over their shoulders, either.

Want to know how low we've sunk? The president of France just repeated his demand that Assad has to go. Secretary of State John Kerry, following the pattern of his surrender to the Iranians, has already said that, well, maybe Assad can stay for a while until there's a "managed transition."

Never before has a US presidential administration combined such naked cowardice, intellectual arrogance and willful blindness. We don't have a president — we have a scared child covering his eyes at a horror movie.

And Putin knows it.

## Pajamas Media - Rosett Report

### Obama's Talk and Putin's Blitz: A Russian Middle East Coup in Three Acts

by Claudia Rosett.

As the world audience contemplates this latest drama in the reshaping of the 21st Century World Order.

In New York, the United Nations is still lumbering through its Sept. 28th – Oct. 3 general debate. But even with today's declaration by aging potentate Mahmoud Abbas that the Palestinian Authority will no longer respect the Oslo Accords (did they ever?) the headlines are elsewhere. Russia's President Vladimir Putin not only stole the UN show, but in Syria — and beyond — is stealing a march on President Obama that makes the current world scene look ever more like the disastrous penultimate year of Jimmy Carter's presidency. That 1979 run of debacles opened with Iran's Islamic Revolution, and rolled on to the Soviet Union's December invasion of Afghanistan — lighting the fuel under the cauldron whence sprang, in due course, a great many horrors, including the Sept. 11, 2001 al Qaeda attacks on the United States.

Obama's presidency still has more than a year to run (477 days, to be precise), and after more than six years of U.S. global retreat, as we toil through this fourth quarter of "interesting stuff," trouble is spreading even faster than it did in the Carter era. The threats now rising like a tsunami on the horizon are, arguably, worse.

But let's focus here on Russia. This week, President Putin has delivered not only a blitz in Syria, but a grand slam on the world stage. Call it a play in three acts.

**Act I: Monday, Sept. 28th, at the UN General Assembly in New York.** Obama delivers his annual speech, repeating the message of his first presidential address to the UN in 2009 — in which he effectively served notice that under his command, America was abdicating, to the international collective, its longtime leadership of the Free World. This year, arriving with the feckless UN-approved Iran nuclear deal in his pocket, and lamenting both the ills of dictatorship and the frustrations of democracy, Obama tells the assembled eminences at the UN that he believes in his core "that we, the nations of the world, cannot return to the old ways of conflict and coercion." He adds, "We cannot look backwards." ("Oh, yes we can," editorializes *The Wall Street Journal*, noting that "even as he concedes the growing world disorder, Mr. Obama still won't admit that his policy of American retreat has created a vacuum for rogues to fill.")

On Syria ("nowhere is our commitment to international order more tested," Obama tells the UN), he says the U.S. "is prepared to work with any nation, including Russia and Iran, to resolve the conflict." He stipulates there must be a "managed transition" to an "inclusive government." ISIL must be "ultimately" stamped out, and Syrian dictator Bashar Assad must go.

Note: Obama has been saying since 2011 that Assad must go, and if he has a strategy behind this, it is one that for more than four years now has failed to prevent Assad's use of chemical weapons, the presence of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in Syria, the rise and spread of ISIS, the deaths of more than 200,000 people in Syria's civil war, the flight of millions of Syrian refugees, and growing tumult in the region. (Though the U.S. at massive cost, in the quest to have Syrians find their own resolution to this conflict, has managed to stand up four, or five, or nine U.S.-trained Syrian fighters inside Syria).

Then Putin takes the podium, and delivers Russia's views to the UN Assembly. Usually he leaves this annual chore to his foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov. But this year Putin has seized on

the UN's 70th anniversary festivities to come in person. He gives his own account of history, apparently quite willing to revisit old arguments, and tells the UN that in Syria, Assad must stay.

**Act II. Tuesday, Sept. 29th, at the UN in New York.** Obama continues appealing to the collective. He convenes a “Leaders’ Summit on Countering ISIL and Violent extremism.” In his opening remarks, he welcomes the “representatives from more than 100 nations, more than 20 multilateral institutions, some 120 civil society groups from around the world, and partners from the private sector.” He reminds them that a year ago he gave them some homework: he challenged countries to return to the General Assembly this year “with concrete steps that we can take together.” This year he is convinced that “what we have here today is the emergence of a global movement that is united by the mission of degrading and ultimately destroying ISIL.” Together, he tells them, “we’re pursuing a comprehensive strategy... .” He repeats his desire for a new leader in Syria, “an inclusive government... . This is going to be a complex process.” Part way through the meeting Obama turns over the chair to Vice President Joe Biden.

Putin does not attend this summit at which scores of leaders are talking about the complex process. He has left the UN to return to Moscow.

**Act III. Wednesday, Sept. 30. In the Middle East, Russia makes its move.** In Baghdad a Russian general [delivers a demarche](#) to the U.S. embassy, informing the U.S. that Russian planes are about to begin air strikes in Syria. Russia’s message is not one of cooperation with the U.S., nor is it seeking the permission of Tuesday’s UN-conferencing multitude of envoys, civil society groups and so forth. Russia, which has been moving troops and military equipment into Syria, is asking U.S. war planes to get out of its way.

To put it more accurately, Russia is telling the U.S. — not asking. In Syria, that same day, Russian war planes carry out strikes, not against ISIS, but against areas which *The Wall Street Journal* reports are “primarily held by rebel forces backed by the Central Intelligence Agency and allied spy services.”

**And, in the U.S., officials pursue “de-confliction discussion”:**

In Washington, U.S. Defense Secretary Ashton Carter holds a [press conference](#), in which he says (take a deep breath, this is a lulu of tortured language):

...it’s important to see if we can get the Russians in a position where they are coming to understand the contradiction in the position they now have and the possibility that by seeing a political transition and defeating extremism is something you have to pursue in parallel to succeed in Syria, maybe they could make a constructive contribution. But they’re not on the path to doing that in the way they do — they are acting now.

At the UN, in New York, Secretary of State [John Kerry tells a Russia-chaired meeting](#) of the Security Council that the U.S. is prepared to “welcome” Russia’s “recent actions” if the aim is to defeat ISIL, but if the aim is to protect the Assad regime by striking other rebel areas, “we would have grave concerns.” For the third time this week, Kerry meets with Russia’s Foreign Minister Lavrov. They then appear together — [John and Sergei](#) — at a UN media stakeout, at which Kerry says they would “both concur” that their meeting was “constructive.” Kerry tells the press that they have discussed the need for further discussions, and the imperative of, well, some samples below, and you can find Kerry’s [full remarks here](#):

military-to-military de-confliction discussion, meeting, conference, whichever ... and several options were agreed to be further discussed...we also agreed that it is imperative to find a

solution to this conflict... even as we don't yet have a resolution with respect to some critical choices in that political solution, we think we have some very specific steps that may be able to help lead in the right direction. That needs to be properly explored... And so, we finally agreed we have a lot of work to do.

**Curtain.** As the world audience contemplates this latest drama in the reshaping of the 21st Century World Order, Putin's latest blitz, and America's scramble to, imperatively, constructively, as soon as possible, de-conflict and discuss.

## Contentions

### Obama's Nightmarish Syrian Legacy

by Max Boot

The Russian air force has just begun bombing rebel positions around the city of Homs in Syria. The ostensible justification for the Russian involvement, which now involves more than 30 combat aircraft in the country, is to battle ISIS. But of course ISIS is nowhere near Homs. The rebels that the Russians are actually bombing appear to be American-supplied fighters.

This will come as a surprise only to someone who has just arrived from the moon and has no idea of who Vladimir Putin is or what he is up to. Apparently such people actually inhabit the senior ranks of our government at this moment. How else to explain the anonymous quotes of injured outrage emanating from government officials? "Russian commanders are ignoring their own requests for military-to-military 'de-confliction' with the U.S. as their warplanes attack Syrian resistance fighters Wednesday, a defense official told [Politico](#). "It completely bypasses every bit of legitimate discussion we've had with them so far."

Imagine that: Putin is not keeping his commitments.

It's hard to know whether to laugh or cry at the level of naiveté in Washington, where responsible office-holders honestly seem to imagine that the Russian dictator can be trusted to keep a solemn international commitment. If anyone had bothered to consult with the Georgians or Ukrainians, they would have rapidly disabused our leaders of this farcical notion.

The good news is that "deconfliction" between U.S. and Russian air strikes may not turn to be so important, because the Russians are going to be dropping bombs in a different part of the country from the Americans. Our aircraft are bombing ISIS. Their aircraft are bombing more moderate fighters who are in many ways the more significant threat to Russia's ally, Bashar Assad. Oh and Turkish aircraft are bombing the positions of Kurdish militias that are the only effective anti-ISIS fighters on the ground in Syria.

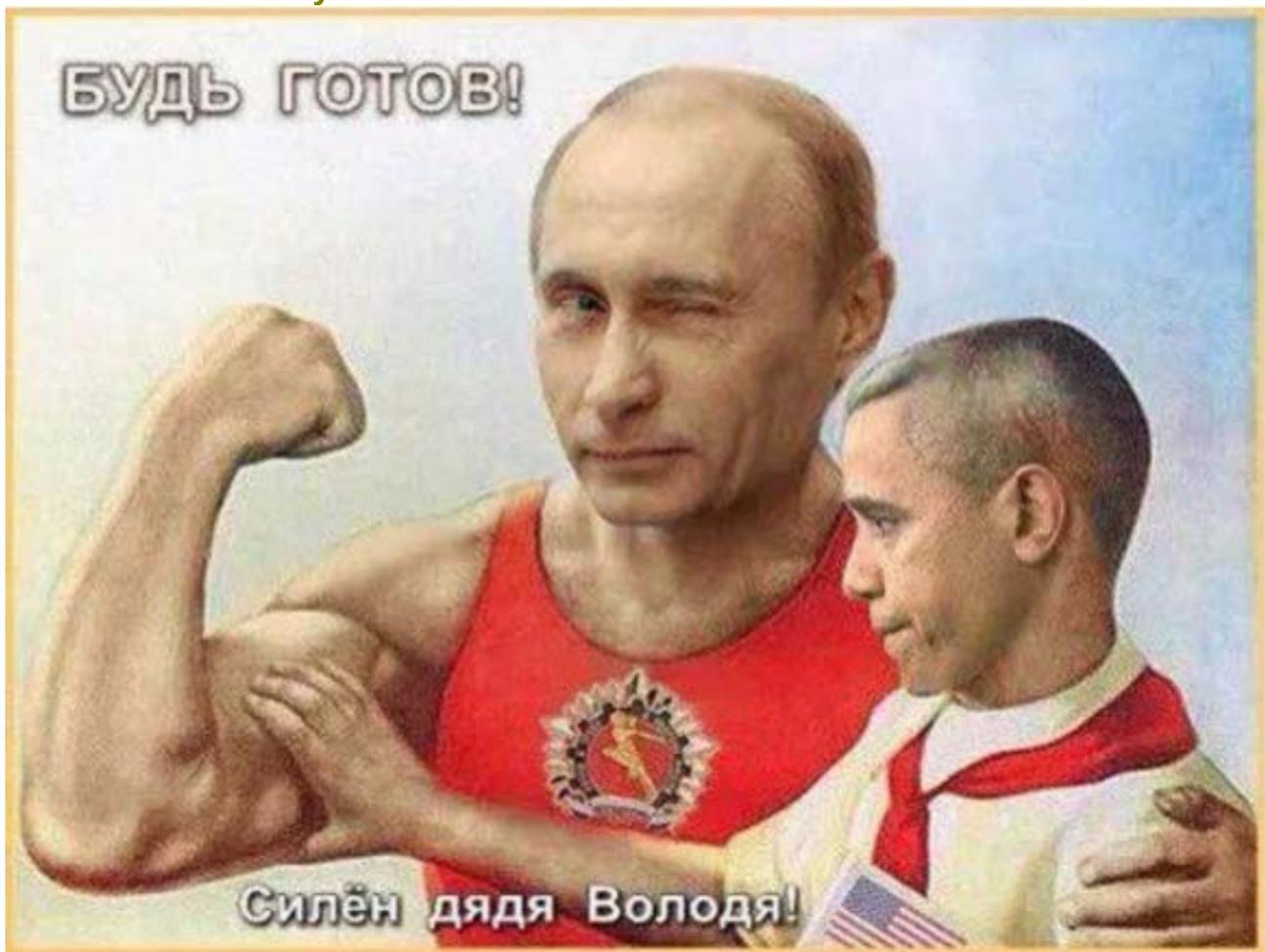
What a perfect division of labor. Its effect will be just what the Russians and Iranians, who are Assad's biggest backers, intend: to keep the dictator in power in at least a small part of Syria. That will leave Assad free to carry out his reign of terror, which is responsible for most of the deaths in Syria and most of the refugees fleeing the country.

Now even if President Obama wanted to take more serious steps to stop Assad — and there is no sign that he does — he would find it increasingly difficult to do so. As General Philip Breedlove, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander, [recently noted](#), Russia is building an "A2/AD

bubble" over Syria. That stands for anti-access/area denial — military nomenclature for defensive systems such as anti-aircraft missiles that will make it hard for U.S. or Israeli forces to operate in the area.

So, in addition to the creation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, the ongoing killing of the Syrian civil war, the general chaos of Libya, the loss of territory to the Taliban, and the general expansion of Iranian influence, the Obama administration is leaving another legacy to its successor: Growing Russian power in the heart of the Middle East. It makes you wonder why anyone would want to be president, given the size of the mess that Obama's successor will inherit.

### Be Ready



**Uncle Vlad is Strong!**



"HE SAYS YOU CAN USE IT TO REPLACE THE CHURCHILL BUST..."



