

**OBAMA CONCEDES THE MIDEAST TO PUTIN**  
**The Russian-Iranian alliance is far more dangerous for the future  
of the Middle East than ISIS\***

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Quote: From an Israeli point of view, one can only hope that Obama's successor will reassert US leadership in the region

The turning point was the Syrian 2013 chemical weapons crisis in August 2013. US President Barack Obama wanted to deter Syria's Bashar Assad from further uses of chemical weapons against his opponents and set had drawn a red line a year earlier: any Syrian chemical attacks, he warned, would draw a powerful US military response.

Therefore, a major crisis erupted however, when, in late August 2013, Assad crossed that line. Obama faced a dilemma: If he didn't respond, American credibility would have been seriously damaged undermined and Assad could have would be able to freely continue his chemical weapons attacks unhindered; but if he Obama used force to punish Assad, this would have meant a mean direct US military intervention in the Syrian civil war. Obama was in the process of terminating the long and unsuccessful US military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, and had no desire to begin a new one in Syria. He threatened retaliation, but was clearly wavering and as he transferred the issue decision to strike to Congressional decision for its approval.

Sensing Obama's indecision, Russian President Vladimir Putin sensed Obama's indecision and proposed an agreement deal: the US will would not attack Assad in return for a complete dismantling of all the Syrian chemical weapons in Syria stockpiles and production facilities. Obama accepted the deal acquiesced.

The lessons were clear: Obama was reluctant to make good on his commitments, whereas Putin took the initiative, resolving and resolved the crisis while and ensuring Assad's political survival.

From the beginning of the civil war in Syria, the US had insisted on Assad's departure as a precondition for resolution. Now this policy was shattered. Putin emerged from the crisis as an assertive leader strong and assertive, while Obama was seen as a wavering leader waverer, who trapped trapping himself with red lines and failed then failing to act when he had to they were crossed.

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The next crisis developed from the rapid and overwhelming conquests of significant areas in Syria and Iraq by the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS) forces. Initially, Obama didn't think ISIS represented constituted any strategic threat to American interests. Only after ISIS the radical Islamist organization cruelly beheaded American journalists and threatened Baghdad did he changed his mind, but admitted to have having no strategy to deal with the crisis.

After weeks of deliberations and vague statements, he ruled out any "boots on the grounds," but authorized a few lesser steps: an air campaign with allies from Europe and the region, military assistance to groups fighting ISIS, such as the Kurds, and sending advisers to train the crumbling Iraqi military forces. This response was too late, too slow, and too little too late and failed to significantly stop make a significant impression on ISIS.

At the same time, Iran was fighting ISIS both in Syria and Iraq, and Obama thought that once the nuclear deal with Iran is Tehran was finalized and approved, a coordinated effort with such a significant regional player like Iran could advance the battle against ISIS.

The nuclear deal concluded in July 2015 legitimized the Iranian Iran's global standing. in the world, and Obama hoped to go on to collaborate with Tehran in several areas other than the fight against ISIS: ending the war in Syria, stabilizing Iraq and restraining allies Iranian proxies like such as Hezbollah. The removal of the lifting of UN sanctions which followed the deal, however, led to other less expected unanticipated and less favorable consequences. Most significantly, it paved the way for a major arms deal between Iran and Russia, for much closer strategic, political and diplomatic relations ties between the two countries, and eventually for the Russian direct Russian military intervention in Syria.

Russia decided to The Russians intervened in Syria primarily to save Assad. Like Obama, Putin authorized the use of air power only to help the Syrian army, Hezbollah and Iran to move on the ground. Russia built air force bases on the northern-eastern Syrian shore of the Mediterranean and a logistic and intelligence infrastructure to support the daily air strikes. The Kremlin said

The Kremlin insisted that the military intervention was designed to liquidate the "terrorist organizations" which have been fighting Assad. To garner support and legitimacy from the international community, Russian leaders said claimed the strikes targeted ISIS. But many were conducted against Sunni rebel groups, including several, ostensibly moderate, that the US had supported and equipped.

The Russian intensive and brutal Russian attacks on civilians helped the Assad military and its allies to change the balance of power, to score victories and regain territories. The siege of Aleppo, the largest city in Syria, led to spawn a new wave of refugees and evoked threats of intervention from Turkey and Saudi Arabia to intervene.

The US response was hesitant and timid. Obama again failed again to develop a coherent strategy to deal with the radically changing circumstances in Syria. He called for resolution of the conflict by peaceful means and Russia agreed. After killing about 500,000 of his own people, destroying many cities and making millions refugees, Assad was seen by Washington considered Assad as a central part of the problem, and the Americans again demanded his removal. Russia, however, insisted that he is part of the solution and was determined resolved to keep him in power.

In mid-February in Munich, on February 11, US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov negotiated and reached a partial cease-fire agreement. As in the 2013 negotiations to resolve the Syrian chemical weapons crisis, Russia dominated the talks. It refused to stop the strikes on the rebel organizations and wanted called for the cease-fire to begin in one go into effect only a week later. The hidden covert reason was to have enough time to complete the takeover of Aleppo.

The rebels, both moderate and extreme, felt betrayed by the US. and Consequently the Obama administration called on urged Russia to immediately halt the its attacks on Aleppo immediately. Calling the American bluff, Russia's Prime Minister Dimitri Medvedev rejected the US call demand, insisting that said the situation is was close to a new Cold War and warned warning that any entry of "foreign troops" to Syria would lead to a "world war."

Putin demonstrated aggressive leadership, formulated clear strategic goals, developed a strategy to achieve them and was determined took steps to protect his allies. By In contrast, Obama demonstrated weak leadership, didn't articulate clear goals, didn't develop an effective strategy and US allies felt betrayed by his policies. The US was following and responding rather than leading and initiating. It wasn't clear what the US it wanted.

Obama called for the Assad's removal of Assad, but at the beginning of throughout the uprising had failed to sufficiently support tender the moderate rebels sufficient support. With ISIS's advances, Once ISIS started advancing; it wasn't clear whether the US preferred Assad to stay over a possible jihadist takeover of Syria. Certainly, the CIA and the US military preferred Assad over the alternatives.

Obama's policies of disengagement policy of disengaging from the Middle East left a vacuum quickly filled by Putin. Russia fully exploited the opportunity not only to protect shore up its only base in the region in Syria, but also to create a strategic alliance with Iran and new openings towards states such as other key players like Egypt, Cairo is interested in buying a nuclear reactor from Moscow, to which it is supplying arms and a nuclear powered electricity plant.

The US believed that US officials believe the Russian intervention will fail and Syria will become what Afghanistan was to the USSR in the 1980s. They Officials also thought maintain that beyond the common interest in Syria, Russia and Iran have significant differences on over the future of the Middle East and that, therefore, their alliance will be short-lived.

Both these assumptions are questionable. Russia is pursuing major arms deals with Iran, and wants to convert the military presence in Syria into a permanent base for political and diplomatic influence across the region. Obama considered defeat of ISIS a top priority and collaboration with Russia and Iran as necessary to achieve this goal.

The Russian-Iranian alliance, however, is far more dangerous to for the future of the Middle East than ISIS. The Iranian contiguous Iranian strategic axis that includes itself, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, coupled with regional hegemonic aspirations, billions of dollars released from frozen accounts, modern Russian conventional weapons and nuclear weapons' options, is poses the greatest threat to regional stability and world peace. in the region and the world.

The blunt truth is that the US has conceded the Middle East to Russia and Iran, and outsourced its regional responsibilities and commitments to Putin and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani. Obama's failed leadership has weakened the US standing and presence in the region.

One of the chief victims of this policy is Israel. Israel's power depends to a large extent on the projection of US power. When the US is weak, Israel is also becomes weakened. If Russia and Iran dictated the fate of Syria's fate, Assad would become even more of a puppet leader than he already is. Hezbollah might obtain new, sophisticated Russian weapons, and Iran and Hezbollah would revive renew the plans to build along the Israeli-Syrian border a base for attacks on Israel along the Israeli-Syrian border.

Following the Russian airstrikes, Israel had to build a coordination mechanism with the Russian military to protect Israeli vital Israeli interests and to avoid unwanted confrontations in the air. Preventing the transfers of sophisticated weaponry from Assad to Hezbollah became more difficult.

Given Obama's disengagement from the Middle East, closer collaboration with Russia could possibly have improved the Israel's strategic position. This option, however, doesn't exist. Israel almost totally depends almost entirely on American military, political, diplomatic and economic support. In other words, there is no alternative to the US-Israeli relationship.

From an Israeli point of view, one can only hope that perhaps, Obama's successor will reassert American leadership in the region and will better handle its complex threats and crises.