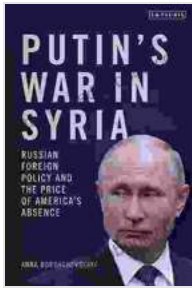


Putin's War in Syria: A Complex Conflict with Far-Reaching Consequences



On September 30, 2015, Russian President Vladimir Putin launched a military intervention in Syria, marking a significant turning point in the country's long-running civil war. While the stated goal of the intervention was to combat the Islamic State (also known as ISIS or Daesh), it has had a profound impact on the wider conflict and the geopolitical landscape of the region. This article explores the complex motivations and consequences of Putin's war in Syria, examining its political, military, and humanitarian dimensions.



Putin's War in Syria: Russian Foreign Policy and the Price of America's Absence by Anna Borshchevskaya

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Russia's Motivations

Russia's intervention in Syria was driven by a combination of factors, including:

- 1. Support for Assad's Regime:** Putin saw the Syrian conflict as a threat to his long-standing ally, President Bashar al-Assad. By intervening militarily, Russia sought to prevent the collapse of the Assad regime and preserve its influence in the region.
- 2. Counterterrorism:** Russia viewed ISIS as a threat to its national security, particularly after the group claimed responsibility for the downing of a Russian passenger plane over Egypt in 2015. The intervention was intended to weaken ISIS and prevent it from establishing a foothold in Syria.
- 3. Geopolitical Interests:** Syria's strategic location on the Mediterranean Sea and its proximity to Russia's naval base at Tartus gave Putin an opportunity to expand Russia's military presence in the Middle East.

Military Impact

Russia's intervention had a significant impact on the military balance of power in Syria:

- **Air Campaign:** Russia launched a large-scale air campaign against ISIS and other rebel groups, providing close air support to Assad's forces.
- **Ground Operations:** Russian forces also played a limited but important role in ground operations, supporting Assad's military with artillery and ground troops.
- **Weakening of ISIS:** Russia's intervention played a major role in weakening ISIS, contributing to the group's loss of territory and the eventual recapture of major cities such as Mosul and Raqqa.
- **Escalation of Conflict:** However, Russia's intervention also escalated the conflict, leading to increased civilian casualties and prolonging the war.

Political Impact

Putin's war in Syria had far-reaching political consequences:

Strengthening of Assad's Regime:

Russia's intervention significantly strengthened Assad's regime, preventing its collapse and giving it a decisive advantage in the civil war.

Weakening of Rebel Groups:

The Russian air campaign and ground operations targeted rebel groups, weakening their ability to resist Assad's forces and complicating efforts to find a political solution.

Exacerbation of Sectarian Tensions:

Russia's intervention, which primarily supported the Alawite-dominated Assad regime, deepened sectarian tensions between Alawites, Sunnis, and other religious groups in Syria.

Erosion of Trust in Western Powers:

Putin's decision to intervene without consulting Western powers eroded trust and cooperation between Russia and the West.

Humanitarian Impact

The humanitarian toll of Putin's war in Syria has been devastating:

4. **Civilian Casualties:** Russian airstrikes and ground operations have caused widespread civilian casualties, with estimates ranging in the tens of thousands.
5. **Displacement and Refugees:** The conflict has forced millions of Syrians to flee their homes, creating a massive refugee crisis in neighboring countries and Europe.
6. **Destruction of Infrastructure:** The war has destroyed much of Syria's infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, and homes, further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis.
7. **Use of Chemical Weapons:** There have been credible allegations of chemical weapons use in Syria, both by government forces and extremist groups. Russia's support for the Assad regime has raised concerns about its complicity in these attacks.

International Response

The international community's response to Putin's war in Syria has been complex and divided:

- **Condemnation from Western Powers:** The United States and European Union condemned Russia's intervention and accused it of war crimes.
- **Support from Iran and Hezbollah:** Iran and Hezbollah, a Lebanese militant group, have provided military support to Assad's regime and welcomed Russia's intervention.
- **Diplomatic Efforts:** There have been numerous diplomatic efforts to broker a ceasefire and end the conflict, but these efforts have largely failed due to lack of consensus among the various parties.
- **UN Security Council Impasse:** The UN Security Council, tasked with maintaining international peace and security, has been unable to take meaningful action on Syria due to the veto power of Russia and China.

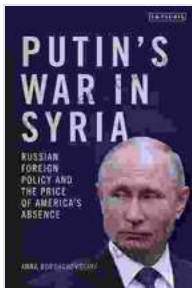
Long-Term Implications

Putin's war in Syria has had profound implications for the long-term stability of the region and the global political order:

- **Increased Russian Influence:** Russia's intervention has given it increased influence in the Middle East, challenging the dominance of the United States and Western powers.
- **Prolonged Conflict:** The war has prolonged the Syrian civil war, making it less likely that a stable and democratic government will emerge.
- **Increased Sectarian Violence:** The conflict has exacerbated sectarian tensions in Syria and the wider region, creating a breeding ground for extremism.

- **Weakening of International Institutions:** The failure of the UN Security Council to resolve the Syrian crisis has weakened its legitimacy and undermined international cooperation.

Vladimir Putin's war in Syria has been a complex and costly endeavor with far-reaching consequences for the region and the world. While it has achieved some of its stated objectives, such as weakening ISIS and supporting Assad's regime, it has also prolonged the conflict, exacerbated humanitarian suffering, and created a breeding ground for instability and extremism. The long-term implications of Putin's war are still unfolding, but it is clear that it has reshaped the Middle East and the global political landscape in profound ways.



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