

Beijing's "Pivot to the Middle East": China Joins Russia in Syria, Shaping New "Anti-Terrorist Alliance" Against Washington?

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In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

The US has failed to fulfil its commitments in accordance with the Russia-US agreement on the cessation of hostilities in Syria. On September 19, Syrian government forces said they were pulling out of the agreement in view of multiple violations by the rebels the United States was responsible for. On September 17, the US-led coalition delivered air strikes against Syrian government forces near the eastern city of Deir ez-Zor in gross violation of the deal.

The failure to keep its side of the bargain has put into question the credibility of the United States and raised the issue of America's future role in the post-conflict peacebuilding. With Turkey, a US NATO ally, padding its own canoe and US-supported rebels [hurling insults](#) at American special operators, the clout of the United States in Syria seems to be far from being overwhelming.

With its credibility greatly damaged, America can hardly be viewed as a reliable partner anymore.



The US is certainly not the only major player in the field. With the government of Bashar Assad firmly in power, the post-war settlement is no longer seen as a pipe dream but Washington will hardly be the one to call all the shots.

In a major policy shift, China has launched the pivot to the Middle East aimed at increasing its involvement in the region by providing military training and humanitarian aid in Syria. In April, China appointed a special envoy to Damascus in order to work toward a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Before the assignment Chinese envoy Xie Xiaoyan had [praised](#) «Russia's military role in the war, and said the international community should work harder together to defeat terrorism in the region».

On August 14, Rear-Admiral Guan Youfei, the head of the Office for International Military Cooperation under the Central Military Commission that oversees China's 2.3 million-member armed forces, [visited](#) Syria to meet Syrian Defence Minister Fahd Jassim Al Freij and Russian Lieutenant-General Sergei Chvarkov, head of the ceasefire monitoring mission in Syria, as well as Russian top commanders at the Hmeimim military base on the Syrian coast.

The visit marks a major milestone in the relationship to make Beijing a party to the conflict.

During the visit, China and Syria announced plans to boost military cooperation, including training and humanitarian aid, signaling stronger Chinese support for Damascus. It is the first public visit by a senior Chinese military officer to the country since the Russian armed forces launched its operation in Syria last September.

According to the *Global Times*, published by the Chinese Communist Party's flagship *People's Daily*, Beijing had already deployed special advisers and military personnel in Syria by the time of the historic visit and provided the Syrian military with sniper rifles and rocket launchers. No doubt, the visit was a diplomatic poke in the eye for the United States amid mounting tensions over territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

The Chinese entry into the war is caused by the increasing number of Chinese Muslim Uighur militants fighting alongside Syrian rebels in the country's north. Rear-Admiral Guan Youfei said over 200 Uighurs was currently fighting in Syria. China wants them to be either put on trial at home or exterminated on the Syrian battlefield. Its concern is justified.

Today there is a Uyghur neighborhood in Ar-Raqqah, and the Islamic State (IS) group publishes a newspaper especially for its members. Besides, geostrategic stability in the Middle East important for the implementation of the Chinese «One Belt, One Road» strategy aimed at facilitating Eurasian economic connectivity through the development of a web of infrastructure and trade routes linking China with South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

The current fracturing of the Middle East as a result of the Syrian crisis hinders the efforts to bring this project into life. Last year, China altered the national legislation to allow [the deployment](#) of its security forces abroad as part of a counterterrorism effort.

China may [play a key role](#) in Syria's post-conflict economic recovery. Despite the war, China National Petroleum Corporation still holds shares in two of Syria's largest oil producers: The Syrian Petroleum Company and Al-Furat Petroleum Company, while Sinochem also holds substantial shares in various Syrian oil fields. In December, China [offered](#) Syria \$6 billion worth of investments in addition to \$10 billion worth of existing contracts, as well as a big deal signed between the Syrian government and Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei to rebuild Syria's telecom infrastructure as part of China's \$900 billion 'Silk Road' infrastructure initiative.

In March Syrian President Bashar Assad [said](#) that Russia, Iran and China will be given priority in the post-war reconstruction plans.

China is not the only world power to boost the contacts with the Syria's government. On August 20, just six days after the Chinese top military official held talks with Syria government officials and Russian military commanders, Indian Foreign Minister Mobasher Jawed Akbar visited Damascus to demonstrate India's support for the Syrian government in the conflict. The two countries [agreed to upgrade](#) their security consultations.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has invited India to play an active role in the reconstruction of the Syrian economy. It should be noted that the recent [trilateral meeting](#) of the presidents of Russia, Iran and Azerbaijan has given a new impetus to the implementation of the North-South transport corridor project.

Syria is located in the proximity of this corridor which, according to the plans, is to become a center for the integration of the vast region, including the Middle East, the Caucasus, Central Asia, Russia and Northern Europe, with India joining the project.

Russia, China and India enjoy good working relations with Iran – a big regional power involved in the Syria's conflict.

On a wider regional scale, the teaming up of the big countries does indicate how, at some point in future, a regional anti-terrorism entity or even a military block independent from the United States might emerge to counter the threat of terrorism.

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