

## How Putin will Win in Syria

By [Mike Whitney](#)

Global Research, October 07, 2015  
[Counterpunch](#) 6 October 2015

Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Military and Militarization](#) and [WMD](#)

*The reason Putin will succeed where the US failed in its war on ISIS, is because the Russian air-strikes are going to be accompanied by a formidable mop-up operation that will overpower the jihadi groups on the ground. This is already happening as we speak.*

*The Russian Air Force has been pounding terrorist targets across the Idlib Governorate for the last few days as well as ISIS strongholds in the East at Raffa. On Sunday, according to a report filed by South Front, roughly 700 militants surrendered to members of the 147th Syrian tank brigade shortly after bombers had attacked nearby cities of Mardeij, Ma'arat Al-Nu'man, Jisr Al-Shughour, Saraqib and Sarmeen. This is the pattern we expect to see in the weeks ahead. Russian bombers will soften targets on the frontlines, ground troops will move into position, and untold numbers of jihadis will either flee, surrender or get cut down where they stand. Bottom line: Syria is not going to be a quagmire as the media has predicted. To the contrary, Putin is going to cut through these guys like crap through a goose.*

According to South Front:

“Lieutenant General Andrey Kartapolov, head of the Main Operation Directorate of the General Staff of Russia’s armed forces, said the strikes have significantly reduced the terrorists’ combat capabilities.” In other words, the Russian offensive is already producing positive results. This is no small matter. By most accounts, the conflict had deteriorated into a stalemate. Now, with Russia in the picture, that’s changed. Now the table is clearly tilted in Syria’s favor.

Also, according to an earlier report: “The positioning of Russian aircraft in Syria gives the Kremlin the ability to shape and control the battle-space in both Syria and Iraq out of all proportion to the size of the Russian force.” (“[International Military Review - Syria, Oct 5, 2015](#)”, South Front)

The Russian air-base at Latakia is perfectly situated for providing air cover or bombing terrorist targets across the country. The Russian airforce will also make every effort to cut off supply lines and escape routes so that as many jihadis as possible are liquidated within Syria’s borders. This is why ISIS positions along the main highway to Iraq were destroyed on Sunday. The jihadi thugs will be given every chance to die in battle as they wish, but getting out alive is not going to be so easy.

There was an article in the Guardian on Sunday that caused quiet a stir among people who are following events in Syria. Here’s a clip:

“Regional powers have quietly, but effectively, channeled funds, weapons and

other support to rebel groups making the biggest inroads against the forces from Damascus.....In a week when Russia made dozens of bombing raids, those countries have made it clear that they remain at least as committed to removing Assad as Moscow is to preserving him. "There is no future for Assad in Syria," Saudi foreign minister Adel Al-Jubeir warned, a few hours before the first Russian bombing sorties began. If that was not blunt enough, he spelled out that if the president did not step down as part of a political transition, his country would embrace a military option, "which also would end with the removal of Bashar al-Assad from power". With at least 39 civilians reported dead in the first bombing raids, the prospect of an escalation between backers of Assad and his opponents is likely to spell more misery for ordinary Syrians. "The Russian intervention is a massive setback for those states backing the opposition, particularly within the region - Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey - and is likely to elicit a strong response in terms of a counter-escalation," said Julien Barnes-Dacey, senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations." (["Gulf states plan military response as Putin raises the stakes in Syria"](#), Guardian)

Saudi Arabia poses no real threat to Putin's operation in Syria. The Saudis may talk tough, but they already have their hands full with a crashing economy (due to plunging oil prices) and a war in Yemen they have no chance of winning. They're certainly not going to get more deeply involved in Syria.

It is possible, however, that the Obama administration is planning to use the Saudis as cover for shoring up their support for opposition groups within Syria. There is a high probability that that will happen. Even so, there's not an endless pool of crackpot mercenaries who want to face a modern airforce with precision-guided munitions for a couple hundred bucks a week. That's not what you'd call "a job with a future". Keep in mind, the various Intel agencies have already called in their chits and attracted as many of these dead-enders as they possibly could from far-flung places like Chechnya, Kosovo, Somalia, Afghanistan etc. And while I'm sure Langley keeps a lengthy file of potential candidates for future assignments, I'm also sure that there are a limited number of people who are willing to meet their Maker just so they can belong to some renegade organization and die with a machine gun in their hands. In fact, we may have already reached "peak terrorist" after which there could be a steady falloff following the downward trajectory of US power in the Middle East and around the world. As we shall undoubtedly see in the months ahead, Syria could very well be the straw that broke the Empire's back. Here's more from the Guardian:

"The best way to respond to the Russian intervention is to engage the rebels more and step up support so they can face down the escalation and create a balance on the ground," he said. "The Russians will [then] realise there are limits to what they can achieve in Syria, and modify their approach." But the wider regional struggle for influence between Saudi Arabia and Iran makes it almost impossible for Riyadh to walk away, whatever the cost." (Guardian)

Is it just me or does the author of this piece sound positively elated at the prospect of a bloodier war?

Also, it would have helpful if he had mentioned that arming, funding and training disparate jihadi organizations to effect regime change in a sovereign nation is a violation of international law and the UN Charter. Of course, maybe the author thought that would have made his article too stuffy or pedantic? In any event, the idea that the enfeebled Saudis are going to derail the Russia-Iran-Syria-Hezbollah alliance in their drive to annihilate ISIS and

al-Qaida-linked groups is a pipe-dream. The only country that could make a difference in the outcome, is the United States. And, the fact is, Washington's neocons don't have the cojones to take on Moscow mano-a-mano, so Putin's clean-up operation is going to continue on schedule.

By the way, the pundits were wrong about the way the Russian people would react to Moscow's involvement in Syria, too. As it happens, they're quite proud of the way their forces have been conducting themselves. Of course, who wouldn't be? They've been kicking ass and taking names since Day 1. Check out this report from CBS News:

"Whatever effect Russia's airstrikes are having on the ground in Syria, their impact at home is clear: They prove to Russians that their country is showing up the United States and reclaiming its rightful place as a global power....Channel One's evening news program on Saturday opened with dramatic cockpit videos of Russian jets making what were described as direct hits on terrorist training camps and weapons stores. The bombs were never off by more than five meters, a military spokesman said, because of the jets' advanced targeting capabilities. This was followed by a report of the disastrous airstrike in the northern Afghan city of Kunduz that destroyed a hospital and killed at least 19 people, including international medical staff. U.S. responsibility for the airstrike had not been proven, but Russian viewers were left with little doubt of who was to blame or of whose military capabilities were superior." ("Russia's airstrikes in Syria are playing well at home", CBS News)

So the Russian people are proud of the way Putin is fighting the war on terror. Is there something wrong with that? Many Americans are old enough to remember a time when they were proud of their own country too, when it actually stood up for the principles it espouses in its founding documents. That was quite a while ago though, sometime back in the "pre-Gitmo" era".

One last thing: There's an extraordinary article by author Aron Lund of the Carnegie Endowment titled "Putin's Plan: What Will Russia Bomb in Syria?" What's so interesting about the piece is that it was published on September 23, a full week before Russia entered the war, and yet, Lund seems to have anticipated Putin's actual battle plan. Military geeks are going to love this piece which is well worth reading in full. Here's a short blurb from the text:

"If at some point Putin decides to target other groups than the Islamic State, he's not likely to stop at the Nusra Front. Whether right off the bat or after a while, he could easily widen the circle of attacks from al-Qaeda and start blasting away at every rebel group in Idlib, Hama, and Latakia under the pretext that they are either "terrorists" or "terrorist allies." ... the Kremlin has every reason to continue blurring the already indistinct dividing line between "extremist" and "moderate" rebels upon which Western states insist. Even though this neatly black and white categorization of Syria's murky insurgency is at least partly fiction, it remains a politically indispensable formula for Western states that wish to arm anti-Assad forces. Which is precisely why erasing this distinction by extending airstrikes against all manners of rebels as part of an ostensibly anti-jihadi intervention, may turn out to be Putin's long-term plan. Blanket attacks on Syrian rebels on the pretext that they are all "al-Qaeda" would lead to much outraged commentary in the Western and Arab press. But to the Russian president it doesn't matter if you think he's Mad Vlad or Prudent Putin. He isn't trying to win hearts and minds, least of all those of the Syrian rebels or their backers. Rather, he is trying to change the balance of

power on the ground while firing missile after missile into the West's political narrative. Whatever one thinks of that, it is a big and bold idea of the sort that sometimes end up working." ("[Putin's Plan: What Will Russia Bomb in Syria](#)", [Aron Lund, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#)")

We couldn't agree more. Putin is not going to stop for anything or anyone. He's going to nail these guys while he has them in his gun-sights, then he's going to wrap it up and go home. By the time the Obama crew get's its act together and realizes that they have to stop the bombing pronto or their whole regime change operation is going to go up in smoke, Putin's going to be blowing kisses from atop a float ambling through Red Square in Moscow's first tickertape parade since the end of WW2.

*Mike Whitney lives in Washington state. He is a contributor to [Hopeless: Barack Obama and the Politics of Illusion](#) (AK Press). *Hopeless* is also available in a [Kindle edition](#). He can be reached at [fergiewhitney@msn.com](mailto:fergiewhitney@msn.com).*

The original source of this article is [Counterpunch](#)  
Copyright © [Mike Whitney](#), [Counterpunch](#), 2015

---

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Mike Whitney](#)

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)  
[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)