

The Putin-Assad Summit in Sochi Proved that “Balancing” Yields Results

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Russia’s “balancing” strategy was vindicated yesterday after the Syrian President came to Sochi and announced his country’s full participation in the post-Daesh constitutional revisionism process.

Restoring The “Balance”

President Putin’s [feting](#) of “Israeli” **“Prime Minister” Benjamin Netanyahu** as his guest of honor during last week’s Victory Day celebrations shocked many people who were hitherto unaware of the [extent](#) of the [Russian-“Israeli” strategic and military partnerships](#), especially given that this visit was bookended by back-to-back bombings of Syria right before and after the summit took place. Even more surprising to some was that Russia almost immediately afterwards announced that it would not be giving its S-300 anti-air missile defense systems to Syria, which led to howling accusations that President Putin “sold out” his Mideast “ally”. The truth of the matter is a lot deeper than the demagogic allegations would lead one to believe because Russia is actually conducting a complex “balancing” act all throughout the Mideast as explained by these following five analyses:

- [“Russia’s Foreign Policy Progressives Have Trumped The Traditionalists”](#)
- [“Russia’s Grand Strategy In Afro-Eurasia \(And What Could Go Wrong\)”](#)
- [“The Syrian ‘Show’ Must Go On”](#)
- [“Could It Be Any Clearer? Russia Is ‘Urging’ Syria To ‘Compromise’, Now!”](#)
- [“Russia Is Already ‘Balancing’ Iran In The Mideast”](#)

To sum it all up, Russia is leveraging its predominant military-diplomatic position in Syria after the defeat of Daesh and the beginning of the Moscow-initiated Astana peace process to enter into fast-moving multidimensional partnerships with all regional actors, especially those who are untraditional partners such as Turkey, “Israel”, and [Saudi Arabia](#). The existing state of strategic affairs in the Mideast is such that the presence of Iran’s elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and their Hezbollah allies in Syria following President Putin’s announcement of Daesh’s demise is perceived of as a “provocation” by “Israel” in spite of this relationship being entirely within Syria’s sovereign right to maintain however it sees fit. Nevertheless, because of its “disruptive” nature, a regional coalition of forces is increasingly applying ever-intensifying pressure on Damascus to seek their withdrawal, and therein emerges Russia’s pivotal role.

“Israel” Was Putin’s “Cat’s Paw” For Bringing Assad To The Negotiating Table

Envisioning itself as the supreme “balancing” force in 21st-century Eurasian affairs, Russia is using its de-facto military and political “arbiter” status in Syria to manage the growing tensions between Iran and “Israel” in the Arab Republic, to which end Moscow “passively facilitates” Tel Aviv’s regular bombing raids in the country so long as they’re conducted on an alleged anti-Iranian pretext designed to restore the regional “balance”. Concurrent with this, Russia has been “urging” Syria to make tangible progress on the Astana peace process and specifically in implementing UNSC 2254’s mandate for “constitutional reform”. The [“Syrian National Dialogue Congress”](#) in January superficially succeeded in getting all parties to agree in sending delegations to the UN in order to jumpstart this process, something that hadn’t seen any progress whatsoever up until the [Putin-Assad Summit](#).

About this surprise meeting, which in hindsight wasn’t all too unexpected, it can’t be looked at in a vacuum separate from the dynamic events that just took place over the past week. “Israel’s” back-to-back bombings of Syria which bookended Netanyahu’s visit to the Russian capital certainly sent an indirect signal from Moscow to Damascus that the former is going to allow Tel Aviv “free rein” to do as it pleases when it comes to “containing” Iran in the Arab Republic. Shortly afterwards, another signal was sent in the same direction when Russia declined to give S-300s to Syria, with the message this time being that Moscow will not allow Damascus to change the regional balance of forces in such a way as to obstruct “Israel’s” “freedom of action” to strike Iranian forces and their Hezbollah allies.

Under these militarily impossible circumstances, President Assad really had no choice but to beseech his Russian counterpart and reverse his government’s erstwhile unstated policy of procrastinating on the political process by publicly announcing that Damascus will indeed send a commission to the UN-mediated “constitutional committee” for revising his country’s founding document in accordance with UNSC 2254 and the outcome of the “Syrian National Dialogue Congress”. This peacemaking development would never have happened had Russia not “balanced” between “Israel” and Syria, as the latter had no practical intent of participating in this until it literally became the only way for the country to avoid experiencing any more Russian-facilitated “pressure” from “Israel”.

Constitutional Conundrum

The big question that everyone’s wondering about is the fate of the IRGC and Hezbollah, though it’s probable that they’ll be given a “face-saving” and “dignified” exit from the country via a forthcoming “phased withdrawal” as part of the “constitutional reform” process. This isn’t speculation either, as the Russian-written “draft constitution” of January 2017 specifically prohibits non-state military forces such as Hezbollah, as the author explained in his extensive review of this document in his February 2017 analysis about [“SYRIA: Digging Into The Details Of The Russian-Written ‘Draft Constitution’”](#), which all readers should at least skim in order to become familiar with the most interesting aspects of this proposed document. Granted, the whole point of the UN-mediated “constitutional commission” is to agree on amendments to the Russian-written “draft constitution”, so it’s possible that some details might change.

It’s too early to say exactly which of the many controversial clauses included in this document will ultimately be amended, though it’s all but certain that the ones about “decentralization” will remain as they are there’s no way that the foreign-backed “opposition” – and especially those supported by Turkey in Idlib – will allow themselves to be peacefully reintegrated into a centralized Syrian state. To the contrary, the so-called “de-

escalation zone” in which they’re presently operating was already predicted a year ago by the author to form the basis for these prospective administrative entities in his May 2017 piece about “[Syria: From ‘De-Escalation’ Zones To ‘Decentralization’ Units](#)”. Likewise, it’s very possible that the “Israeli”-backed “opposition” abutting the occupied Golan Heights will seek to secure similar administrative “privileges” for themselves too, as will the American-assisted Kurds in the northeast.

That said, there might emerge a consensus decision driven by the many negotiating sides’ shared interests to do away with or at least further clarify several contentious proposals in the “draft constitution”. These concern “compulsory labor” for criminals, the removal of the [2014 Constitution](#)’s prohibition on extraditing Syrians to “foreign entities” (instead changing it to “another state” and leaving open the possibility of sending citizens to the ICC), and the near impossibility of amending the new ‘constitution’ once it enters into force. The second-mentioned point is especially sensitive because it could potentially be abused to send members of the Syrian government and its military to international criminal tribunals despite likely having been originally written with only terrorists in mind.

Concluding Thoughts

Whatever the final outcome of this “constitutional revision” process may be, it needs to be accepted that there wouldn’t be any tangible progress on this whatsoever had Russia not succeeded in “balancing” “Israel” and Syria to this effect, as President Assad had been trying his hardest to hold out as long as possible in the hope that he may be able to negotiate from a better position that prevents him from having to “compromise” on “decentralization” and the presumably eventual “phased withdrawal” of the IRGC and Hezbollah from his country. Unfortunately for him, for as well-intended and deeply rooted as in his country’s national interests as it was, this strategy nonetheless failed to bring about the political-military dividends that it was supposed to and actually backfired to an extent because it made Damascus’ negotiating position much weaker with time.

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