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## Russia follows U.S. script in Syria

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Vladimir Putin opened a new game of high stakes geopolitical poker, backing Syria's President Bashar Assad. But Washington has no complaint. America has been meddling in Syria's tragic civil war from the start.

At the end of the Cold War Washington was anointed as the "unipower" and "indispensable nation," and acted as such. The U.S. intervened anywhere anytime for any reason.

But that world is gone. Russia's dramatic backing for Syria's beleaguered Assad government formally buries any illusion that "what Washington says goes," even in the Middle East.

Moscow has begun bombing regime opponents. Sounding almost like the George W. Bush administration, the Putin government insisted that it was fighting terrorism and there really wasn't a "moderate opposition." Russia also has indicated its willingness to get involved in Iraq, whose authorities praised Moscow's Syria participation.

In contrast, Russia's intervention has resulted in much wailing and gnashing of teeth in allied capitals. In a joint statement America, France, Germany, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Kingdom claimed that Moscow's intervention would "only fuel more extremism and radicalization." The Gulf States separately warned of more "violent extremism" and "terrorists" and increased refugee flows.

Alas, promiscuous American military intervention in the Middle East long has promoted the worst forms of violence and terrorism. Further, for years Qatar and Saudi Arabia have been important sources of finance for "extremism and radicalization."

There's little the U.S. actually can do, at least at reasonable cost, to stop Russia. Which means caterwauling is the only practical option.

President Barack Obama declared that Moscow risked a "quagmire." Probably true. Of course, the U.S. understands quagmires, having spent 13 years unsuccessfully attempting to bring democracy to Afghanistan and being drawn back toward a combat role in Iraq.

The U.S. could push for more sanctions, but the Europeans aren't going to destroy what remains of their relationship with Moscow over Syria. Even the most war-happy neoconservative hasn't

called for blasting the Russian planes out of the sky. To do so would trigger almost certain retaliation and possibly a real war with a nuclear-armed power.

Certainly U.S. officials have no credibility in claiming that their policy will yield a better result. Washington has intervened repeatedly in the Middle East with disastrous consequences.

Washington's participation in the 1953 coup in Iran set that nation on a path toward violent Islamic revolution. Fear of the new Islamic republic caused Washington to back Saddam Hussein's Iraq against Tehran, which encouraged Hussein to assume he could attack Kuwait with impunity, which in turn triggered America's first war with Iraq.

To "drain the swamp" Washington invaded Iraq in 2003, wrecking that society, triggering violent sectarian conflict, generating millions of casualties and refugees, expanding Iranian influence, and empowering a new sectarian Shia government. The Sunni insurgency morphed into the Islamic State which, with the aid of former Baathist soldiers, grabbed control over much of Iraq and Syria.

The U.S. and its European allies also helped destroy Libya, resulting in more chaos and another fertile ground for the Islamic State. In Yemen Washington is backing Saudi aggression which has turned a long-term civil war into another horrid sectarian conflict. Weapons given to supposedly moderate Syrian insurgents have ended up with ISIL forces.

Yet Washington is filled with voices demanding that America intervene more.

The Assad regime is blood drenched and Moscow's efforts in Syria are likely to have ill effects. But Washington bears most of the blame for wrecking and destabilizing the Middle East.

Russia's intervention is merely the latest unintended consequence of foolish, irresponsible U.S. behavior. Maybe Vladimir Putin can make Washington policymakers finally learn from their many mistakes.

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