

Churchill once said: Democracy must be something more than two wolves and a sheep voting on what to have for dinner.

China in the SCS, Russia in Ukraine and Syria may have profound effects on the future geostrategic landscape in Europe and the Pacific.

One very senior military officer told me yesterday morning that we know what Putin is doing we just do not know why.

Let me postulate a guess.

Putin wants to end NATO.

China wants to achieve the goals outlined in Pillsbury's 100 Year Marathon: Based on interviews with Chinese defectors and

newly declassified, previously undisclosed national security documents, *The Hundred-Year Marathon* reveals China's secret strategy to supplant the United States as the world's dominant power, and to do so by 2049, the one-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic.

Russia's Syria adventure was a limited war and limited objectives; no quagmire; sought to leverage Russian military to keep Assad in power and cement Iranian alliance; Russia seen as a protector in the Middle East—seeking others to make accommodation.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine was to stop any further integration of Eastern Europe into Western Europe.

By [John R Bradley For The Daily Mail](#)

For it is now clear that during those tumultuous five months, the Kremlin ran rings around other world leaders, consolidating its power and influence not only in Syria, but throughout the wider Middle East. And it pulled off its Syria gambit on the back of its brazen military adventurism in Ukraine — something the international community was also unable, or unwilling, to confront in any meaningful way.

The Syria debacle may come to be seen as the moment the West conceded hegemony in the region to Russia. It's clear that in our post-nuclear weapon age, Putin understands that brash and unapologetic deployment of conventional forces is what gives countries military and economic dominance.

This from CNA just this past week:

**THE RUSSIAN QUAGMIRE IN
SYRIA AND OTHER WASHINGTON
FAIRY TALES**

[MICHAEL KOFMAN](#)

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Facts on the ground change so quickly in Syria that one could be forgiven for suffering whiplash. Still in December of last year we were reading headlines that depicted a lackluster Russian military campaign, unable to change much on the ground for the fledgling Syrian Arab Army. Not long after the winter holidays, the opposite appears to be true. Moscow seems to be making strategic gains and has seized the momentum on the ground. Just a few months ago, in early October 2015, President Obama stated, “An attempt by Russia to prop up Assad and try to pacify the population is just going to get them stuck in a quagmire and it won’t work.”

As Syrian forces surround Aleppo, backed by the Russian military on the

ground and in the air, it is hard to square the situation in Syria with those predictions. Thus far, the Russian quagmire in Syria has not materialized. In a fantastic piece for *Foreign Affairs*, titled “Assad Has It His Way,” experts Joshua Landis and Steven Simon have sounded the alarm that Assad is winning in Syria. Is he? And if so, what explains this reversal in fortune? At first glance, it could be that the press is suffering a typical case of sharply changing the narrative on Russia from one incorrect assessment to another. Where Russia was achieving nothing in Syria only two months ago, today it is winning handily. Now the recently suspended negotiations in Geneva are cast as a Russian-crafted ruse, designed to busy the United States with dreams of a peaceful settlement. For

Moscow, one is not a substitute for the other. Both the military and the political track are part of an evolving strategy to end the war on Russian terms. The United States should put this quagmire narrative to bed and get a bit more serious about dealing with Russia in Syria. Below is my take on how we got here and where this conflict is going.

Russia's changing approach to the battlefield

Today Syria is essentially divided into two wars: one fight led by the United States to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and a separate battle led by Russia to stabilize the Syrian regime. Albeit uncoordinated, over the past several months both Russia and the United States have been steadily winning their respective military

campaigns. While U.S. forces look set to sever the linkages between the ISIL capital of Raqqa and Mosul in Iraq, the Russian-led coalition is making advances both north and south in Syria, clearing the way to regain Aleppo. Having taken Rabia in Latakia province, Syrian forces may have a clear path to the Turkish border by the coast, while elsewhere to the south they have been consolidating regime territory and clearing pockets of rebels behind lines.

After a stymied offensive south of Aleppo in mid-October 2015, Western observers quickly judged the Syrian army to be incapable, and the Russian air campaign as insufficient to change the balance of forces. While Russia put on a show with cruise missiles strikes of various kinds in an effort to demonstrate

a parity of capability with the United States, it was also adding aircraft, helicopters, and ground equipment. Thousands of sorties with locally based aircraft and a mix of bombers from bases at home have chipped away at the forces opposing Assad. Meanwhile Russia provided Syrian forces with modern equipment, some undoubtedly operated by the Russian army. The Russian contingent is relatively small, perhaps numbering 4,000 to 5,000, with 70 aircraft based in Syria, but it is having an outsized impact.

Unable to deal a decisive blow to the amalgamation of Syrian groups fighting Assad in October, Russia had settled in for a lengthier campaign, designed to pick apart pockets of rebel resistance, destroying them one at a time. Instead of

major offensives, the ground effort shifted to relieving besieged Syrian bases and freeing access to roads between major cities. Perhaps drawing on its experience in the second Chechen War, Russia is signing ceasefires with some groups of fighters and assassinating the leaders of others. Steadily, Moscow is killing off and diminishing the existing prospects for any moderate alternative to the Syrian regime, radicalizing some groups and crushing the rest.

Far from perceiving themselves in a quagmire, some in the Russian leadership may even see the war in Syria as an opportunity. From a training and weapons-testing perspective, it is better than any of the large-scale exercises Russia throws annually. The mix of ship-based, submarine-based, and bomber-

based missiles being used is part political theater and parts arms expo, outclassing anything you could see at MAKS (Russia's annual air show). Algeria, a regular Russian customer, has already announced that it will be the first foreign buyer of the Su-34s. So far the war has cost Russia one plane and one helicopter, while potentially landing it several lucrative arms deals, some already in the works

Why were U.S. predictions wrong?

At the outset of the Russian air campaign, U.S. officials called it a predetermined failure. Here their foresight proved as faulty as many other a time when predicting the course of events in the Middle East. This incorrect reading stems from an inherent bias among the ruling policy establishment.

Since Washington had judged that force could not be used to achieve political ends in Syria, it assumed the same would be true for Russia. Indeed, why would a great power or a major power be successful where a super power had decided to stay out after a careful analysis of the facts. The Middle East absorbs military power like a sponge, giving little back in terms of desired political end states. Surely only a fool would seek gains here. Hence the early narrative on Russia's intervention seemed an accurate reflection of American experiences, and in some respects an alibi for U.S. recusal from the war surrounding Assad.

When Moscow approached Washington with a serious plan for peace talks in Vienna on October 30, 2015, it was

viewed in light of that attractive analytical lens. Russia was seen as looking for a political way out, having failed to make major gains in October, and disappointed with the Syrian army's performance. The unexpected progress on talks in Vienna was viewed in stark contrast to supposed Russian military failures on the ground. Far from seeking an off-ramp out of the conflict, Moscow instead was looking to shift the U.S. position on Assad's fate closer that of its own, postponing the decision on his future.

Instead of the United States seizing on Russia's desire to get out, it was Moscow that took advantage of the American wish to see an end to the humanitarian catastrophe without having to intervene. Washington is not gullible — any

ceasefire was worth the political effort. The Russian plan for this war was better anyway, since the United States had no plan. Suddenly Washington gained a policy on Syria, a negotiations scheme, and a political way forward with prospects. Russia, entering this vacuum, would produce a win-win scenario for itself and the West. If that sounds too good to be true — it is. Everything has a price.

The political track

The Geneva talks reflected battlefield realities. The demands of the opposition groups, coming together into the High Negotiations Committee, are for lifting of the sieges, suspension of the Russian air campaign, and release of captured prisoners of war. You don't have to be a military expert to know that these are the

demands of the losing side in a war. Russia agreed to a format of negotiations whereby the two sides talk while they fight so that it could shape the Syrian opposition on the ground, by eliminating those parts of it that it finds disagreeable at the negotiating table. This is why Moscow agreed to Salafist groups like Ahrar al-Sham being present, even though it considers them to be terrorists. Both the military and the political effort are meant to divide the rebel groups, pitting them against each other. If Landis and Simon are right in their analysis, that plan is working.

The recently negotiated “cessation of hostilities” in Munich will not hold. It is, at best, a diplomatic offering by Russia for the West to save face, and engage in a humanitarian mission, while the Syrian

opposition stands on the precipice of defeat in Aleppo. If Russia and its allies are intent on making such strategic gains, and have the means to do so, why would they stop? Even if a ceasefire is declared, Moscow will conclude hostilities only after it has achieved military objectives. This is exactly what we saw in Ukraine in early 2015. The tentative deal in Munich has far less firm footing. It will fail predictably with recriminations from both sides of the conflict. As long as the Russian-led coalition has the momentum on the ground, there is no logical basis for a ceasefire.

In a recent *War on the Rocks* article, Sen. John McCain lamented:

Russia presses its advantage militarily, creates new facts on the ground, uses the denial and delivery of humanitarian aid

as a bargaining chip, negotiates an agreement to lock in the spoils of war, and then chooses when to resume fighting. This is diplomacy in the service of military aggression. And it is working because we are letting it.

This is the swan song of the era when the United States had little need to worry about other powers intervening. The United States fired much of its economic and political ammunition already in response to the invasion of Ukraine, with debatable results. Outside of scornful op-ed pieces in the Western press, what is there left to fire over Syria, besides actual weapons?

Yet those who dream of seeing Assad out should not despair. Assad is not necessarily winning in Syria. The Russian-led coalition, together with Iran,

Hezbollah, and what's left of the Syrian army, is winning. That is a distinction with an important political difference for Assad to play out at the end of this conflict. While Saudi Arabia and Iran have intractable positions on Assad's fate, Russia seems much more open-minded on alternative futures, though it will not condone regime change by discussing his removal publicly. It is difficult to see how Russian leaders could count on Syria being stable in the long term under his leadership. They've made a much larger political and military stake in the country, and Assad does not look like the man to keep it secure in the long term. Some are certain that Russia will never give up Assad, but who has a good track record in predicting events in the Middle East?

The Geneva negotiations are not just a ploy; Russia needs that settlement eventually in any scenario. It is simple battlefield reality. The more territory the Russian-led coalition regains, the more a political settlement is a necessity. If Assad's forces could not hold the rapidly dwindling piece of Syria they had left in 2015 how can they defend much larger real estate, together with major cities? The answer is they can't. We can see how the Assad regime might retake Aleppo, but what's the plan for holding it along with other cities for the next decade or so? Gaining terrain is one thing, keeping it is another. Assad said he plans to retake the whole country — a dictator can dream. Russia started the negotiations precisely to avoid retracing America's steps in Iraq and Afghanistan,

where military victory is day one of the quagmire to come. Certainly Russian leaders remember the Soviet Union's own fruitless struggle in Afghanistan. Political settlement is the only way for Russia to lock in any gains in Syria. If this is so, then why have the Geneva talks been suspended through February, while Russia keeps bombing? The short answer is that the Russian-led coalition is not done capturing the territory they feel must be regained, especially the city of Aleppo, and as a result have no intention of giving rebel groups a respite. Russia's intervention forced them to the table, but they are not weak enough and some of them Moscow does not want to see in Geneva at all. Aleppo is a hulking ruin, but its fall would be a colossal symbolic defeat. It could split the rebel groups

Saudi Arabia worked hard to unite in Riyadh. Russia is pressing its advantage, hoping to secure the major cities for the Syria regime, while leaving the ISIL-held eastern part of the country as an “American problem.”

We should not expect anything otherwise from Moscow. The cost of getting a deal in Syria while staying out is that it will be on Russian timetables, and in many ways, Russian terms. Munich is a good example. Secretary of State John Kerry said the deal was a “nationwide” cessation of hostilities, which is “ambitious.” It’s not ambitious, but impossible, by Russian design. The larger the scope of the agreement, the more obvious its lack of feasibility. Nobody controls, or speaks for, the myriad of groups fighting across Syria.

Of course hostilities will not cease, and Russia will blame them and continue bombing (assuming it will even take a break). This agreement is a consolation to ameliorate Western humanitarian urges, and give the United States something to do.

A valuable lesson for future dealings with Russia

The Turkish downing of a Russian Su-24 in November certainly made this military adventure a more serious undertaking for Moscow. Yet for all the technical inadequacies and deficiencies in its operations, the question we should ask is whether or not Russian use of force in Syria is achieving their desired political ends. The answer is yes. The United States made a mistake by waving off this intervention as a doomed adventure.

Failing to take it seriously has ramifications for the region beyond the Syrian war.

If Moscow shows that it can get the job done in Syria, and secure Assad's fortune from what appeared to be certain defeat, then other dictators may see Russia as a potential alternative guarantor of their rule. Few in the region were happy with the U.S. policy during the Arab Spring. If there was another power capable of providing security and acting independently, but one that prized stability over democracy (the way the United States used to), it would be welcome in the Middle East. This is why U.S. success against ISIL is even more paramount from a geopolitical perspective. America no longer has a

monopoly on being the only viable actor in the Middle East.

Syria reveals an unhelpful pattern of U.S.–Russian interaction, visible in other exchanges over Ukraine: The United States spends its time explaining to Russia what will be, while Moscow works to change what is. That could be evidence of a chasm within the U.S. policy establishment between the desire to do something about Russia and the knowledge of what to do. Lt. Gen. Vincent Stewart, head of DIA, testified earlier this month that “the Russian reinforcement has changed the calculus completely.” If we go back through official statements last fall on the Russian intervention, will we find a calculus at work?

Occasional suggestions from interventionist circles to unilaterally declare a no-fly zone over Syria are not only unhelpful, but demonstrate a base lack of understanding for how to deal with another major power. This is the “do something” school of international affairs, and more evidence that the debate on how to respond to Russia’s intervention in Syria is largely between no ideas and bad ideas. Of course, years from now the U.S. read on Syria could prove prescient, but right now the quagmire is less visible in Russia’s military operations, and more in U.S. thinking on how to deal with Moscow’s intervention.

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Center's Kennan Institute. Previously he served as Program Manager at National Defense University. The views expressed here are his own though I present them here to encourage discussion.

China's building of thousands of acres in new territory which it claims has always been part of China—while using a map put together by Imperial Japan that claimed similar jurisdiction over the Pacific islands.

China is seeking to extend the reach of its military capability---throughout the western Pacific and SE Asia—oil and gas resources; control the straits of Malacca;

seek leverage over SCS area through which \$7 trillion in goods and services transit every year.....

Former AF Secretary Thomas Reed also explains that China has been a top proliferator of nuclear weapons technology—Pakistan, NK and Iran. And there is a lack of transparency re China's own nuclear weapons inventory. Depending on how large China is making its warheads it could have 400 or 3000 nuclear warheads.

Russia Nuke mods tactical

The National Interest ran a recent essay in which the analysts asserted Russian tactical nukes are at most 1000 in number

but largely all in storage and not available for military use;

One analysts told me that there were no sources for the assertions including no Russian sources. .

The best recent Russian sources are Arbatov, Yesin and Dvorkin. They say 2,000 and give a breakdown of this number but they don't count any Russian weapon that violates INF or the PNIs although they admit that they have ground force nuclear weapons.

At a late 2008 or early 2009 meeting of the Nuclear Strategy Forum Gen. Yesin said they had 3,800 of which 1,200 were battlefield Army weapons. More recently Yesin said that estimates of Russian tactical nukes range from 4,000-tens of thousands.

The Obama administration estimate in 2011 was 2,000-4,000. The 2009 U.S. Strategic Commission estimated 3,800.

The Russian have consistently claimed that they have reduced their tactical nukes by 75%. If you compare that to estimates of their late Cold War tactical nuclear inventory the number is 3,750 to 6,000.

What does this mean?

Vice Chairman, Gen. Paul Selva,
Closing Keynote briefing at annual
McAleese/Credit Suisse “2017 Defense
Programs” Conference (Thursday,
March 10, 2016):

1. **“Great power competition”** has returned. But the American public is largely unaware of the threat. Both strong tactical deterrence, and credible strategic nuclear deterrence, are needed. China and Russia increasingly are letting us know they will not honor international rules, accepted norms of diplomatic behavior, and “rules of the road” now in place since the end of World War II and the beginning of the Atlantic alliance and NATO.

3. Emerging “lessons-learned” from Russian operations in Ukraine and Syria. Heavy Army armor role, plus USAF Space, mobility, air-superiority, and CAS roles. To be effective against emerging Russian combat doctrine, will require increased capability in rapid C2, cyber/EW, aircraft ASE, countering long-range artillery, assured PNT, and combat vehicle Active-Protection-Systems.

4. China is increasingly-transmitting that it will not honor international rules and judicial verdicts, and will act by coercion instead. There must be consequences for those actions. Chinese cyber attacks are now bordering on acts-of-war. (North Korea is predictably

saber-rattling after recent US/South Korean training maneuvers).

I. Priorities of CNO Adm. Richardson, and “N8” Resources VADM Joe Mulloy, at McAleese/Credit Suisse “2017 Defense Programs” Conference (March 10, 2016). [“Great power competition” returning. Updating “FSA” to add more submarines beyond 308 Ship Plan. Chinese attempting to outrange US Forces, driving “Distributed Lethality”.

- Navy has returned to “Great-Power-Competition” against both Russia and China, with threat exploding three-dimensionally because of exponential maritime trade growth, adversaries targeting undersea IT cables, plus adoption of cutting-edge commercial

technologies by adversaries. This will occur at flat Navy-resourcing at-best.

- Previous “Force Structure Assessment” (FSA) establishing 308 Ship requirement did not include fully-resurgent Russia. Navy will deliver immediate 2017 30-year Shipbuilding Plan, but will update new FSA during summer 2016. It is highly-probable that 308 Ship requirement will be adjusted upward to include additional Virginia-class submarines, given aggressiveness of Russian undersea operations against Allies.

What does the DNI say about China?

Would you assess China has militarized its reclaimed features in the Spratly Islands?

o...is building airfields and ports that can support military operations. Based on the extent of land reclamation and construction activity, we assess that China has established the necessary infrastructure to project military capabilities in the South China Sea beyond that which is required for point defense of its outposts.

oThese capabilities could include the deployment of modern fighter aircraft, surface-to-air missiles (SAMS), and coastal defense cruise missiles, as well as

increased presence of People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) surface combatants and China Coast Guard (CCG) large patrol ships.

oPLAN surface combatants have pulled into the three largest outposts: Fiery Cross, Mischief, and Subi Reefs. One PLAN frigate was berthed at Fiery Cross Reef in early December 2015, one PLAN guided-missile frigate was anchored at Subi Reef in late December 2015, and a guided-missile destroyer was anchored at Mischief Reef in early January 2016.

oWe judge that the airfield on Fiery Cross reef is operational and can accommodate all Chinese military aircraft.

oChina has installed military radars, most likely air-surveillance/early warning radars, at Cuarteron and Fiery Cross Reefs and a beacon for aircraft direction at Fiery Cross.

Yes, China continued its land reclamation efforts at Subi and Mischief Reefs after 5 August 2015, based on commercial imagery. Between that date and late October, when reclamation activity ended, China reclaimed more than 100 additional acres of land.

oAt its Spratly Islands outposts, China has constructed facilities to support the deployment of high-end military capabilities, including modern fighter aircraft.

oWe assess that the underwater features at the four smaller reefs would support additional land reclamation. We do not assess that China will conduct reclamation efforts in the East China Sea.

oWe assess that China will continue to pursue construction and infrastructure development at its expanded outposts in the South China Sea. Based on the pace and scope of construction at these outposts, China will be able to deploy a range of offensive and defensive military capabilities and support increased PLAN and CCG presence beginning in 2016. Once these facilities are completed by the end of 2016 or early 2017, China will have significant capacity to quickly project substantial offensive military power to the region.

WHAT IS CHINA DOING/GOALS

1. Building furiously to attain military superiority over all other Asian nations as a first step toward global strategic preeminence by 2040 or so.
2. Building to attain control of the Earth-Moon system to contribute to #1.
3. Strengthening and ensuring the survival of its client dictatorships North Korea, Iran and Pakistan, arming them with nuclear missiles.
4. Preparing to destroy the democracy on Taiwan and then to subordinate all the other non-dictatorships, first in Asia and then the world.

5. Building the military means a strategic position to secure control of disputed territories and regions to advance 1, 3 and 4.

6. Strengthening the CCP's *internal* security by stoking Chinese nationalism against the US and other external enemies, showing China (in Mao's terms) truly "standing up" against the Western imperialists and oppressors.

In the Pacific, Russia is:

1. Conducting joint naval exercises in the Mediterranean
2. Joint naval exercises in the East China Sea and Sea of Japan

3. Forthcoming joint naval exercises in the South China Sea
4. Years of joint military exercises in China, Russia, and Central Asia sharing intelligence on terrorists in Central Asia
5. Arms and technology sales to China
- 6 Regular staff talks

1. Russia's grand strategy is to expand Russia's power and control—necessarily at the expense of others reestablishing its global role as a multi-regional great power and “Russification” of the near abroad (i.e., imperial domination).

2. If they succeed on that, the imperial goals will expand to include domination of Europe.

3. The Soviet Union is Russia's role model resulting in great emphasis on nuclear weapons both because of the Soviet legacy nuclear strategy and current necessity resulting from limited economic and technical capabilities.

4. Russia extensively employs threat including nuclear attack threats as a means of intimidation and advertising its military and nuclear capability.

5. While it hopes to achieve its objectives through intimidation, Russia is now expanding militarily and is preparing for a major war with the West and plans on nuclear first use.

6. The Ukraine model of "hybrid warfare" may be replaced by an overt conventional attack against weak NATO

states and nuclear threats to prevent a NATO response, a very risky strategy.

The Vice Chief has said:

5. The US must have credible strategic nuclear deterrent. National debate must start now, because 2018-2022 PoM is already underway. DoD must have traditional increase in overall topline funding, to avoid zero-sum cannibalization of conventional force structure.

6. “3rd Offset” is needed to increase combat capability, not to generate cost efficiencies. Specifically, DoD is looking to harvest breakthroughs in “machine-

learning” AI, that can present warfighters with immediate combat options.

Separately, DoD is looking at reducing internal duplication, focusing on “must-do” actions at expense of “like-to-do” actions.

THESE ARE NOTES FROM PETER HUESSY, PRESIDENT OF GEOSTRATEGIC ANALYSIS AND SENIOR DEFENSE CONSULTANT AT AFA RE HIS REMARKS AT THE MARCH 2016 PSA CONFERENCE IN SPRINGFIELD, VIRGINIA. THESE NOTES ARE FROM A VARIETY OF SOURCES WITH THE LINKS IMBEDDED IN THE TEXT OR IDENTIFIED AS SUCH. THESE ARE LARGELY ASSESSMENTS OF NATO AND THE PACIFIC SECURITY

CHALLENGES THAT I FOUND
WELL STATED/WRITTEN. SOME OF
THIS IS ALSO MY OWN WRITING. IF
YOU HAVE QUESTIONS SIMPLY
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THANKS