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## ISRANET DAILY BRIEFING

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### **SYRIA IV “THE DEAL”:**

## **PUTIN NOW IN CHARGE, OBAMA FOLLOWING FROM BEHIND AS DUBIOUS DEAL REACHED TO DISARM ASSAD OF WMD; U.S. POLL: SEND CONGRESS TO SYRIA!**

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**Syria Could Still Blow Up in Putin's Face:** *Shashank Joshi, The Telegraph*, Sept. 16, 2013—The deal looks like a humiliation for Obama – but what happens if it starts to unravel? Whichever analogy one chooses, the conventional wisdom is hardening: Vladimir Putin has judo-flipped, checkmated and floored Barack Obama this week with a plan to inspect and destroy Syria's chemical weapons.

**The Price of the Syria Debacle:** *Amir Taheri, New York Post*, Sept. 15, 2013— Even those who worried about how President Obama would handle the Syrian chemical-weapons crisis are shocked at his weird behaviour, which puts the world at risk of becoming even more dangerous. To start with, he has created confusion regarding the US president's public statements.

**Humour: In a Poll, Majority Of Americans Approve of Sending Congress to Syria:** *The Onion*, Sept 5, 2013—As President Obama continues to push for a plan of limited military intervention in Syria, a new poll of Americans has found that though the nation remains wary over the prospect of becoming involved in another Middle Eastern war, the vast majority of U.S. citizens strongly approve of sending Congress to Syria.

### **On Topic Links**

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## **US, RUSSIA REACH DEAL ON CONTROL OF SYRIA CHEMICAL WEAPONS**

*Jerusalem Post*, Sept. 14, 2013

Russia and the United States put aside bitter differences over Syria Saturday, to strike a deal that by destroying Syrian President Bashar Assad's chemical arsenal may avert US military action against his regime. The agreement after three days of talks in Geneva between US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov demands that Assad give a full account of his secret stockpile within a week.

International inspectors would rapidly get to work to eliminate all the weapons by the middle of next year - an "ambitious" target, in Kerry's words. If Syria reneges on a commitment to comply, Washington and Moscow pledged to cooperate at the United Nations to impose penalties - though these remain to be determined and Russia is highly unlikely to support military action, which US President Barack Obama has said must remain an option. Kerry said Obama retained the right to attack, with or without UN backing.

For Assad's opponents, who two weeks ago were expecting US air strikes at any moment in response to a poison gas attack on rebel territory last month, the deal was a big disappointment. Despite Kerry and Lavrov's assurances that the pact may lay a foundation for broader peace, they said Assad would not comply and that the deal brought an end to their battles no closer. Warplanes struck rebel-held suburbs of Damascus again on Saturday.

For the world's two greatest military powers, however, the Syrian conflict has chilled relations to levels recalling the Cold War, and Saturday's agreement offers a chance to step back from further confrontation. For Russian President Vladimir Putin, it brings management of the Syrian crisis back to the United Nations. For Obama, it solves the dilemma created by Congress's reluctance to back military strikes that he was preparing without a UN mandate.

Yet many difficulties lie ahead - not least the technical challenge of enforcing a major disarmament involving complex and dangerous materials in the midst of a vicious civil war that has inflamed the entire Middle East. Kerry told a joint news conference in Geneva: "The implementation of this framework, which will require the vigilance and the investment of the international community, and full accountability of the Assad regime, presents a hard road ahead."

Lavrov said: "It shows that when there is a will ... Russia and the United States can get results on the most important problems including the weapons of mass destruction problem." "The successful realization of this agreement will have meaning not only from the point of view of the common goal of eliminating all arsenals of chemical weapons, but also to avoid the military scenario that would be catastrophic for this region and international relations on the whole."

In Istanbul, the head of the Syrian rebel Supreme Military Council was dismissive of the deal, however, saying it would not resolve the country's civil war, now in its third year. General Selim Idris called it a blow to opposition hopes of overthrowing Assad and accused the Syrian president of circumventing any disarmament by already sending chemical weapons to allies in Lebanon and Iraq in recent days.

Qassim Saadeddine, a rebel commander in northern Syria and a spokesman for the Supreme Military Council, told Reuters his forces would not cooperate: "Let Kerry-Lavrov plan go to hell. We reject it and we will not protect the inspectors or let them enter Syria," he said by telephone. A US official, however, said Washington believed all Syria's chemical weapons remained in areas under the Assad government's control....

On Saturday, Syrian warplanes struck rebel-held suburbs of the capital Damascus and government forces clashed with rebels on the frontlines, according to residents. The residents and opposition activists, asked about the deal, said that it would not benefit normal Syrians. "The regime has been killing people for more than two years with all types of weapons. Assad has used chemical weapons six or seven times. The killing will continue. No change will happen. That is it," said an opposition activist in a rebel-held suburb of Damascus who uses the name Tariq al-Dimashqi. "The most important point is the act of killing, no matter what is the weapon," he said.

Syrian state media broadcast the Kerry and Lavrov news conference live, indicating that Damascus is satisfied with the deal. Having taken the surprise decision two weeks ago to seek congressional approval for military action to punish Assad for using poison gas, Obama faced a dilemma when lawmakers appeared likely to deny him that - citing unease about helping Islamist militants among the rebels and a wariness of new entanglements in the Middle East after wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The weapons deal proposed by Putin, a former KGB agent intent on restoring some of the influence Moscow lost with the collapse of the Soviet Union, offered a way out. Russia has protected and armed Assad and has been alarmed at what it sees as Western willingness to bypass the United Nations to impose "regime change" in other states. Under the terms of the US-Russian agreement - a bilateral document which in itself may represent something of a landmark in the management of global affairs, recalling East-West deals of the Cold War-era - Syria must let the OPCW complete an initial inspection of its chemical weapons sites by November.....(for more of this story, please follow the link: [Jerusalem Post](#))

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## SYRIA COULD STILL BLOW UP IN PUTIN'S FACE

***Shashank Joshi***

*[The Telegraph](#), Sept. 16, 2013*

The deal looks like a humiliation for Obama – but what happens if it starts to unravel? Whichever analogy one chooses, the conventional wisdom is hardening: Vladimir Putin has judo-flipped, checkmated and floored Barack Obama this week with a plan to inspect and destroy Syria's chemical weapons. For the sceptics, this was the diplomatic equivalent of polonium-210 in Obama's teacup; Russia has sucked the Americans into a needless distraction, buying time for Assad and leaving Syria's rebels adrift.

The critics have two charges. The first is that the agreement, hammered out in Geneva after late-night arms control talks reminiscent of the Cold War, is unworkable. Assad will cheat, inspectors won't be able to operate in war zones, and the Americans will look unreasonable if they call foul. Just as Saddam toyed with UN inspectors throughout the Nineties, so will Assad hand over some chickenfeed while dispersing the crown jewels. The second criticism is that the plan might be too successful: Assad will trade off his chemical weapons for regime survival, by making himself indispensable to the disarmament effort. The United States will quietly sever what little military aid it is extending to the beleaguered rebels, and drop its insistence that Assad must go as part of a political transition.

Yet things aren't so clear-cut. Russia has certainly scored a tactical diplomatic victory, but this deal – unprecedented in its ambition and timetable – could still blow up in Moscow's face. If it works – even if only a fraction of Syria's chemical weapons and sites are inspected and eliminated – this will do much more to degrade that capability than cruise missiles would have done. If this comes at the price of boosting Putin's ego, that's cheap. Inspectors will never catch every last ounce of poison gas, but so what? Remember, those missiles were never going to touch the actual stockpiles, and the strike was to be "unbelievably small", in US Secretary of State John Kerry's memorable and foolish words.

It is irrelevant that the process may take years to complete: just having inspectors inside Syria is an advance on what was thought possible a week ago. Recall, that for all of Saddam's deception, the UN did in fact destroy virtually all of his chemical weapons by the end of the Nineties. Syria is a tougher case, because a war is raging across the country. But if Assad admits inspectors and consolidates his weapons into fewer sites, this automatically makes it harder to use them. If he does not, then he will eventually breach the agreement – and bring punitive strikes back into the picture. Providing that the US keeps the heat on Damascus – an important proviso – it has little to lose. Yes, Assad is likely to cheat. His regime developed its chemical arsenal in response to Israel's nuclear weapons, and it will not give them up without a fight. But the United States has, rightly, insisted that the threat of force will stay on the table. The UN resolution that backs up this deal won't explicitly authorise force, but this was never on the cards.

Remember Obama's position last week. The president had lost British support for military action, was poised to lose a Congressional vote, and faced opposition from half of the G20, including Nato members such as Germany. His authority was sapped, and his options narrowed. If the cynics are right and this deal falls apart, the US will be well positioned to occupy the diplomatic high ground and renew its case for strikes. Congress will be more readily persuaded that the use of force is necessary, and even Britain – though the prospects are slim – may reconsider the issue in Parliament. Today's UN inspectors' verdict,

reported to confirm chemical weapons use in Syria and point to regime culpability, will further strengthen the US hand. If some of Syria's chemical weapons have already been inspected and destroyed by this time (the plan demands that inspectors visit by November), this might even make strikes easier. If Russia is intent on stringing along the Americans and shielding Assad, its plan will only buy a few months.

Critics are also overstating the technical difficulties involved in tackling Syria's chemical weapons. The task is daunting, but last month's successful inspections demonstrates that it is not impossible for inspectors to enter contested areas. Chemical weapons expert and former UN inspectors have made it clear that there are ways of putting at least some of Assad's chemical arsenal beyond use.

However, in emphasising chemical weapons over conventional slaughter, has Obama given Assad a new lease of life? The text of the Russian and American agreement makes it clear that the Syrian government will be responsible for the safety of inspectors. Moreover, the guardians of Syria's chemical weapons – the elite Unit 450 – will surely have to remain intact through any political transition if the plan is to work. The problem with this line of argument is that it assumes that a regime-shattering intervention was derailed by half-baked diplomacy.

But the cavalry was not coming – as, indeed, we have known for several weeks. Even as they were making the case for war, American officials were adamant both that strikes would not be intended to change the military balance, and that a negotiated political solution – via the so-called Geneva II conference – remained the US objective. With or without Russia's gambit, the US was terrified at the prospect of Syria's chemical warfare units dissolving and leaving their stockpiles unsecured.

In many respects, this deal doesn't change much. Russia will continue to arm and fund the Syrian regime as it consolidates its rump state. The US will continue its tepid support for rebels, and Saudi Arabia and Qatar their more enthusiastic contributions. If Syria's most obscene weapons can be taken off the battlefield, good. If not, our powder stays dry.

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## **THE PRICE OF THE SYRIA DEBACLE**

*Amir Taheri*

[New York Post](#), Sept. 15, 2013

Even those who worried about how President Obama would handle the Syrian chemical-weapons crisis are shocked at his weird behavior, which puts the world at risk of becoming even more dangerous. To start with, he has created confusion regarding the US president's public statements.

Except for Jimmy Carter, all presidents for the past century have taken care not to commit themselves to any action when they didn't mean it. In global diplomacy, the phrase "America has spoken" carried special weight. America's word was America's bond.

Obama has depleted that capital of trust. A man who loves the sound of his voice has devalued that bond in speeches and TV appearances, setting "red lines" that slowly vanish, shouting "Assad must go" then doing nothing to make that happen and promising to arm Syrian rebels only to have the arms never arrive. And now, after waxing lyrical about "the conscience of humanity," he has dropped everything in exchange for a ride on the anfractuous path of Russian diplomacy.

The second danger is the perception that Russia may have gained a veto on aspects of US foreign policy. In his New York Times op-ed last week, Russia's Vladimir Putin made it clear his "veto" goes beyond foreign policy to include cultural topics such as the "specialness" of the United States.

Putin claimed equivalence between the USSR ("the Evil Empire," according to Ronald Reagan) and the United States, recalling the time when "we were allies" during World War II. He forgot to mention that the USSR had been allied to Nazi Germany, switching sides only after Hitler invaded.

In the blink of an eye, Obama has shrunk into second fiddle to Putin. Speaking in Geneva on Friday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov made a point of showing who was running the show: He said a new

round of talks on Syria would start soon, with Iran and Saudi Arabia invited, to discuss transition plans for Syria.

The deal concocted by Moscow and bought by Obama gives Bashar al-Assad a free hand to kill Syrians as long as he doesn't use chemical weapons. Moscow always wanted Assad to remain in power until the end of his presidential term next May. This is precisely what Obama has signed up for, since the deal gives Syria at least until next June to deliver on Moscow's promises. The Damascus-Moscow-Tehran axis hopes to crush the Syrian rebellion within the next six or seven months and then hold fake elections in which Assad is re-elected or has one of his minions elected as president. In other words, the US has agreed to abandon Obama's stated "Assad must go" policy in exchange for a Russian-led process. The fact that Assad is a war criminal is brushed under the carpet, a signal to actual or burgeoning war criminals across the globe to operate with impunity.

Whatever happens in Syria, the United States is likely to lose. If Assad's gang keeps power, they'll have no reason to abandon their Russian and Iranian protectors. If the rebels win, they'll have a hard time forgetting Obama's betrayal. The perception that America is led by a group of amateurs (some where they are only because they have risen to the level of their incompetence) is already encouraging other dangerous trends....

Obama's Syria fiasco has also encouraged Iran to harden its position on the nuclear issue. In his speech at the Bishkek summit, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani tried to link the issue of Syria's chemical weapons to Israel's alleged ownership of a nuclear arsenal. He also said that Tehran was ready for talks with the 5+1 Group to secure recognition of "our legitimate right" to enrich uranium — ignoring five Security Council resolutions that demand an end to enrichment....

The perception that, out of ideology or incompetence, Obama is leading the United States into strategic retreat has persuaded nations in Eastern Europe, Transcaucasia, Central Asia, the Middle East and Latin America, to review their foreign policies.

Finally, the Syria episode sends another message: While all nations can use force to impose their will (in 2008, Russia invaded Georgia and occupied 25 percent of that nation's territory), only the United States is denied that right even to enforce international law. That's the kind of "American exceptionalism" that Obama has secured.

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## **HUMOUR: IN A POLL, MAJORITY OF AMERICANS APPROVE OF SENDING CONGRESS TO SYRIA**

*[The Onion](#), Sept 5, 2013*

As President Obama continues to push for a plan of limited military intervention in Syria, a new poll of Americans has found that though the nation remains wary over the prospect of becoming involved in another Middle Eastern war, the vast majority of U.S. citizens strongly approve of sending Congress to Syria.

The New York Times/CBS News poll showed that though just 1 in 4 Americans believe that the United States has a responsibility to intervene in the Syrian conflict, more than 90 percent of the public is convinced that putting all 535 representatives of the United States Congress on the ground in Syria—including Senate pro tempore Patrick Leahy, House Speaker John Boehner, House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, and, in fact, all current members of the House and Senate—is the best course of action at this time.

"I believe it is in the best interest of the United States, and the global community as a whole, to move forward with the deployment of all U.S. congressional leaders to Syria immediately," respondent Carol Abare, 50, said in the nationwide telephone survey, echoing the thoughts of an estimated 9 in 10 Americans who said they "strongly support" any plan of action that involves putting the U.S. House and Senate on the

ground in the war-torn Middle Eastern state. “With violence intensifying every day, now is absolutely the right moment—the perfect moment, really—for the United States to send our legislators to the region.” “In fact, my preference would have been for Congress to be deployed months ago,” she added.

Citing overwhelming support from the international community—including that of the Arab League, Turkey, and France, as well as Great Britain, Iraq, Iran, Russia, Japan, Mexico, China, and Canada, all of whom are reported to be unilaterally in favor of sending the U.S. Congress to Syria—the majority of survey respondents said they believe the United States should refocus its entire approach to Syria’s civil war on the ground deployment of U.S. senators and representatives, regardless of whether the Assad regime used chemical weapons or not.

In fact, 91 percent of those surveyed agreed that the active use of sarin gas attacks by the Syrian government would, if anything, only increase poll respondents’ desire to send Congress to Syria. Public opinion was essentially unchanged when survey respondents were asked about a broader range of attacks, with more than 79 percent of Americans saying they would strongly support sending Congress to Syria in cases of bomb and missile attacks, 78 percent supporting intervention in cases of kidnappings and executions, and 75 percent saying representatives should be deployed in cases where government forces were found to have used torture.

When asked if they believe that Sen. Rand Paul should be deployed to Syria, 100 percent of respondents said yes. “There’s no doubt in my mind that sending Congress to Syria—or, at the very least, sending the major congressional leaders in both parties—is the correct course of action,” survey respondent and Iraq war veteran Maj. Gen. John Mill said, noting that his opinion was informed by four tours of duty in which he saw dozens of close friends sustain physical as well as emotional injury and post-traumatic stress. “There is a clear solution to our problems staring us right in the face here, and we need to take action.”

“Sooner rather than later, too,” Mill added. “This war isn’t going to last forever.”

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## **ON TOPIC**

**[Text: Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons:](#) *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sept. 14, 2013*—Taking into account the decision of the Syrian Arab Republic to accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention and the commitment of the Syrian authorities to provisionally apply the Convention prior to its entry into force, the United States and the Russian Federation express their joint determination to ensure the destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons program (CW) in the soonest and safest manner.**

**[Into the Syrian Bazaar:](#) Editorial, *Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 15, 2013—Politicians on the right and left are praising Saturday’s U.S.-Russia “framework” to dismantle Syria’s chemical weapons as a step away from American intervention. That is true only in the looking-glass world in which politicians are desperate to avoid voting on a military strike. The reality is that the accord takes President Obama and the U.S. ever deeper into the Syrian diplomatic bazaar, with the President hostage to Bashar Assad and Vladimir Putin as the friendly local tour guides.**

**[Russia Wants Seat Back at Mideast Table:](#) Steven Hurst, *Real Clear World*, Sept. 16, 2013—The U.S. deal with Russia to eliminate Syria’s chemical weapons has pulled the Obama administration into deep waters: the Kremlin’s long-standing drive to put the brakes on American power and to restore Moscow to its place as a pivotal Mideast player.**

**[Shiites: Syria War Will Ignite End Times:](#) Ryan Mauro, *Front Page Magazine*, Sept. 16, 2013—A Lebanese reporter for the Al-Monitor Middle East news service explains that Iran and Hezbollah view the Syrian civil war not only in a strategic context, but in a prophetic one. In their belief, the radical Sunnis will conquer Syria for a short period of time and then Iranian forces will intervene on their way to destroying Israel.**

**[Across Enemy Lines, Wounded Syrians Seek Israeli Care:](#) Maayan Lubell, *Reuters*, Sept. 13, 2013—Not a hundred miles from Damascus, a Syrian rebel lies in a hospital bed, an Israeli sentry at the door. Nearby a Syrian mother sits next to her daughter, shot in the back by a sniper.**