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## Main points

- Russia's intervention in Syria in September 2015 shocked and surprised many, but nothing that Putin did was new. There is nothing fundamentally new about Putin himself either.
  - Historically, the Kremlin tends to get aggressive internationally during times of domestic problems.
- Putin chartered Russia's return to the Middle East when he came to power. His zero-sum anti-Western approach to the region can be traced to Yevgeniy Primakov and the Primakov doctrine.
- **In Syria**, Putin had many goals; ultimately, all are about staying in power:
  - Restore Russia's image as a great power
  - Reduce Western (mainly US) influence in the region.
  - Prop up Assad; Putin genuinely believes the West orchestrates regime change throughout the globe and if he lets Assad fall, he's next.
  - Distract Russia's domestic public with another "short victorious war"
  - Divide NATO and Europe
  - Push the West to lift sanctions
  - Gain entry into the Middle East through warm water port, helps create an anti-area denial area to expand Russia's zones of influence
- Putin's goals in Syria largely coincide with his goals more broadly in the Middle East. Syria turned out to be an ideal case that captures all of Putin's interests.
- **Russia's relations with Iran**—the warmest in 500 years. Analysts tend to focus on the historic rivalry between these two, and while this is accurate, right now they need each other too much and will put their differences aside. Driving a wedge between Russia and Iran is unlikely to work.
  - *Putin favors the Shia axis in the Middle East.* He works with virtually everyone, Sunny powers and Israel, but his actions show he favors the Shia. This is also not by accident. Together, these anti-Western forces in the region are in a better position to confront the West than separately.
- **Egypt and Turkey**
  - Growing military relationship between Egypt and Russia, which could further expand Moscow's growing influence in the region, especially on the military angle. Egypt has been reaching out to Russia recently, and American military had expressed concern about that.
  - Erdogan is falling deeper into Putin's influence than even he himself may realize.
- **What's next**
  - Putin will remain involved in Syria. He will keep working to cast himself as a peacemaker and achieve a settlement on his terms that ensures his interests
  - Libya will be important to watch, and to some extent also Yemen and Algeria
  - The Russian economy is in a slow process of degradation, but it will limp on for quite some time. Putin will need to look for distractions for the domestic audience.
    - He will soon be gearing up for presidential election in 2018
- **What the US can do**
  - Regain leadership position in the Middle East and elsewhere and support our allies. Deal with Putin from a position of strength, coupled with moral and strategic clarity
  - Counter Russian information warfare more effectively
    - Information warfare and "hybrid war" is nothing new
  - Support democracy efforts, stay true to our values