



Heretic's Musings on the Aftermath of the US-Russia Agreement

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Abstract

On Friday, 13 September, the United States and the Russian Federation signed an agreement aimed to bring to an end the political fiasco engendered by the Obama administration in the aftermath of the 21 August chemical attack in Damascus. The agreement's aftermath only accelerated the emergence of an old-new greater Middle East from the ashes of the "Arab Spring". The crisis in and around Syria is thus returning to being dominated by the regional mega-trends. The CW interlude has a lingering impact – but in the context of the US intrusion into the regional dynamics which the CW incident sought to amplify.

Inside Syria, the legacy of the CW interlude is the acceleration and intensification of the existing trends. This acceleration is made easy by the bursting of the opposition's expectations balloon once the US military intervention failed to materialize. The devastation of the opposition's morale is worse than anything the Syrian military has been capable of inflicting in more than two years of vicious war. No amounts of US-supplied weapons and funds will be able to reverse the sense of despair and giving up. Moreover, the Syrian grassroots know miracles won't happen, and that Assad's patron Russia won't permit them to happen. With the harsh winter coming and destitute growing, the grassroots' slide into the fold of Assad's Damascus is accelerating and expanding if only because the alternative – accepting the Islamist-Jihadist reign during the harsh winter – is unthinkable.

Not to be ignored, Ankara is making strenuous efforts to ignite the Turkish-Syrian border. The shooting down of a Syrian helicopter and the resumption of fighting with the Kurds in Ras al-Ain were provoked by the Turkish military. The on-going Turkish escalation along the border with Syria is sinister because Ankara put itself in position to argue that there is no chance Damascus would abide by the US-RF agreement and therefore the military intervention option should be reconsidered.

The main unresolved issue hanging over the emerging greater Middle East is the role of Iran in lieu of the perplexing policy of the Obama White House. On the one hand, Obama is more desperate than ever before to attain a grand rapprochement with Iran and make a triumphant Nixon-style visit to Tehran. On the other hand, Obama's Washington is intentionally ignoring Tehran's conviction that in Syria is being fought and won the historic battle for the Resistance Front that stretches from Syria to Iran. As much as Tehran would love to see the nuclear crisis resolved favorably and the sanctions lifted – the sustenance of the on-land Shiite-dominated access to the shores of the Mediterranean is the greatest achievement of the Mullahs' regime short of the mere survival of the Islamic Republic. Until Obama comprehends and delivers on Iran's priorities – no rapprochement is possible. Nevertheless, Obama intensifies his desperate campaign to meet Rouhani in New York during UNGA and reach the grand rapprochement virtually at any cost.



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Yossef Bodansky has been the Director of Research at the International Strategic Studies Association [ISSA], as well as a Senior Editor for the *Defense & Foreign Affairs* group of publications, since 1983. He was the Director of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare at the U.S. House of Representatives between 1988 and 2004, and stayed on as a special adviser to Congress till January 2009. In the mid-1980s, he acted as a senior consultant for the U.S. Department of Defense and the Department of State. He is the author of eleven books – including *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America* (*New York Times* No. 1 Bestseller & *Washington Post* No. 1 Bestseller), *The Secret History of the Iraq War* (*New York Times* Bestseller & *Foreign Affairs Magazine* Bestseller), and *Chechen Jihad: Al Qaeda's Training Ground and the Next Wave of Terror* – and hundreds of articles, book chapters and Congressional reports. Mr Bodansky is a Director at the Prague Society for International Cooperation, and serves on the Board of the Global Panel Foundation and several other institutions worldwide.



Yossef Bodansky



ANALYSIS

On Friday, 13 September, the United States and the Russian Federation signed an agreement aimed to bring to an end the political fiasco engendered by the Obama administration in the aftermath of the 21 August chemical attack in Damascus. The broad framework agreement avoided addressing the ostensible root cause for the sudden preoccupation with the Syrian chemical arsenal, and only set general guidelines for the eventual removal and/or destruction of Syria's chemical weapons sometimes in mid-2014 provided the fratricidal violence and civil war permits such undertaking. Significantly, the agreement applies to both the Assad administration and the opposition. In return for this agreement, the Obama administration foreswore the use of force in Syria – thus ending any chance for a US-led international intervention in Syria. While Assad's Damascus promised to try and abide by the agreement even if the first reporting deadline is impractical, the FSA's Brigadier General Salim Idriss called the agreement "just a lie" and announced that the opposition would ignore it.

The military and political dynamics in and around Syria continued to escalate since late last week (September 13/14) and more so in recent days (September 15/16) with the Syrian military clearly having the initiative and the opposition forces either getting out of the war or venting their frustration and wrath on the civilian population. Meanwhile, Tehran continues to dominate the political exploitation of the crisis. Not to be left out, Ankara initiated on September 16 a major escalation in the fighting along the Syrian-Turkish border.

Simply put, the CW interlude only accelerated the emergence of an old-new greater Middle East from the ashes of the "Arab Spring". The crisis in and around Syria is thus returning to being dominated by the regional mega-trends. The CW interlude has a lingering impact – but in the context of the US intrusion into the regional dynamics which the CW incident sought to amplify.

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Inside Syria, the legacy of the CW interlude is the acceleration and intensification of the existing trends. This acceleration is made easy by the bursting of the opposition's expectations balloon once the US military intervention failed to materialize. The devastation of the opposition's morale – particularly the Turkey based forces – is worse than anything the Syrian military has been capable of inflicting in more than two years of harsh war. No amounts of US-supplied weapons and funds will be able to reverse the sense of despair and giving up.

Back in May, Syria entered the final phase of the war. Both sides realized that barring a major Western military intervention in the summer – Assad's Damascus would become the irreversibly dominant power in Syria and the war would subside by fall/winter (except for Jihadist terrorism that will continue forever). The clairvoyant old Sheikhs of rural Syria have made the trend more pronounced for they predict that winter will be longer and colder than usual. Eid-al-Adha – the Feast of the Sacrifice – is both the indicator of the well-being or destitute of the community (through the availability of lambs for slaughter and other quality foodstuff) and the start of the cold season. This year, Eid-al-Adha is in mid-October. This means that the destitute grassroots population will soon need even greater help in food, medicine, fuel and shelter – help that only Assad's Damascus is currently providing unconditionally. In contrast, the Islamists-Jihadists provide limited help only to the Sunni communities along the central Euphrates valley and on condition that they adopt Islamist ruling and governance. Hence, the slide of the population into the fold of the Assad administration is accelerating – as anticipated.



Assad's Damascus is cognizant of this trend. Now that the threat of a game-changing US-led intervention has all but evaporated – the Syrian military has to face two major strategic challenges:

1. The lingering Islamist-Jihadist cells in the urban slums and rural townships of the economic engine of Syria – the populated zone around the Damascus-Aleppo road – and weapon stockpiles they recently received from Turkey; and
2. The possibility of a US-Jordanian-Saudi sponsored surge from the south to try and capture Damascus (tailored after the US-sponsored surge on Tripoli from Tunisia).

Hence, Syrian military activities are focused on addressing these two challenges. The Syrian military launched a major offensive to the south of Damascus. The military enjoys active support from local Sunni Beduin and Druze militias, while the local Jihadist forces stay away from the advancing forces. Hence, the Syrian forces can focus on national-level and trans-national Jihadist forces (that is, Jabhat al-Nusra and its affiliates) and on blocking roads leading from northern Jordan. Throughout the rest of western and northern Syria, the military launched a multitude of localized raids and sweeps – again, with growing support from, and even participation of, Sunni Arab local self-defense militias. These localized military operations aim to destroy national-level and trans-national Jihadist forces and the storage sites of the heavy weapons recently pushed into Syria from across the Turkish border. Locally-based and nationalist rebel forces largely stay out of the fighting mainly because of the sweeping despair in their ranks.

In mid-September, the Syrian military intensified their offensive-sweeps against predominantly Jihadist strongholds in the northern and western parts of the country. This escalation evolves as ever larger segments of the nationalist and traditionalist opposition forces are focusing on the self-defense of their home-communities rather than confronting the Syrian security forces. For their part, once contact is made with local leaders at the village and township levels, the Syrian army avoids entering these communities and confronting their self-defense forces. On the contrary, the Syrian security forces are delivering both military and humanitarian aid to help the local self-defense forces withstand both the Jihadists and their own destitute. Consequently, the Syrian military can focus almost solely on Jihadist enclaves - storm and clear them.

The most intense fighting took place in the Idlib area and the greater Aleppo area. In the northwest, the military focused on clearing Jihadist strongholds, cells and networks in the al-Arbreen mountain area and surrounding villages in the Idlib region. The military reported the destruction of several storage sites of weapons and ammunition. The most intense fighting were against Jabhat al-Nusra units. However, the Syrian army also destroyed bases and arsenals of the locally-based Jihadist forces of the Dra'a al-Jabal Brigade, the Sqr al-Sham Brigade, the Ahrar al-Thawra Brigade, the Suyuf al-Haq Brigade, the Asar al-Sham Brigade, the al-Abbas Brigade, the Fursan al-Quds Battalion, the Ablin Battalion, the Omar al-Faruq Battalion, and the Maghawir Aryha Battalion.

An interesting phenomenon reported by the Syrian security forces since the weekend of 13/14 September is that the food, supplies and clothes of virtually all the Jihadist fighters encountered in the northern and north-western parts of Syria were from Turkey. This means that the opposition's fighting forces can no longer rely on local villages for food and basic supplies, and that the majority of the Jihadist fighters encountered are recent infiltrators who had to bring everything with them.

In the greater Aleppo area, the Syrian security forces have mainly further expanded the secure zone surrounding the city and eliminated pockets of resistance inside the city. The scope and pace of these operations keep



growing. Meanwhile, the Jihadists' abuse of the civilian population – mainly the more affluent Sunni Arab neighborhoods – has intensified in the greater Aleppo area. The Jihadists are committing crimes, murders and overall abuse in the name of resisting the government encroachment. Significantly, there has been discernible upsurge in crimes and abuses in the areas where the influx of Jihadist foreign fighters are most pronounced. The Jihadists – both local and foreign – accuse the population of betraying them and their sacred cause. They then rob and pillage in the name of Jihad and for the needs of Jihad. Since late last week, several thousands of people have been evicted from houses and apartments and forced into exile while leaving their entire property behind.

Meanwhile, the Jihadist forces in the rural areas in northern and western Syria are increasingly focusing on taking their revenge against the civilian population that they are convinced has betrayed them and their cause. Thus, the abuse of the Christian-Aramaic city of Maaloula, and particularly the effort to force the population to convert to Islam under the threat of death, was a trend setter. The main objectives of the Jihadists' wrath are the Alawites, Druze, Ismailis and all those defined as "Nusairis". The forces of Jabhat al-Nusra received a Fatwa by a very senior Islamist jurist ordering them "to kill the Nusairis – the enemies of God." Late last week, Jabhat al-Nusra fighters entered Alawite villages in the Homs area and massacred dozens of civilians. The Jihadists consider these atrocities to be more important than confronting the Syrian army. "The people's wall of fear has been broken, as this was the first time these villages were entered and such a high number was killed," the Jabhat al-Nusra communique reads. These attacks were "in revenge for the killing in cold blood of Muslims and their women in Eastern Ghouta" by chemical weapons.

By now, September 16, the impact of the legacy of the CW interlude is palpable. Since early-summer, the opposition had great hopes and expectations that a US-led military intervention was imminent and would turn things around dramatically. The opposition was genuinely convinced that the defeat of early summer will, by the magic of US and NATO bombing, transform into a strategic victory before winter, and that the largesse and generosity of the affluent West will resolve all the endemic shortages so that winter will not be horrendous. The US needed an excuse – and the opposition provided. But no intervention happened and, in the aftermath of US-RF agreement, none will happen. Hence, the grassroots know miracles won't happen, and that Assad's patron Russia won't permit them to happen. Opposition commanders believe that there is no longer any point in holding on against the superior Syrian military now that it is clear that the US will not intervene militarily and turn around the otherwise lost war. Consequently, the slide into the fold of Assad's Damascus is accelerating and expanding if only because the alternative – accepting the Islamist-Jihadist reign during the harsh winter – is unthinkable.

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Not to be ignored, Ankara is definitely making strenuous efforts to ignite the Turkish-Syrian border.

On September 16, during the afternoon (local time), fighting between the Syrian army and Jihadist forces attempting to withdraw back from the Idleb area across the Turkish border into the Hatay province escalated. Backed and guided by one or two Mi-17 helicopters, the Syrian forces were in hot pursuit after the Jihadists. Several Turkish F-16s were scrambled from the Malatya airbase to patrol over the area. According to the Turkish military, around 14:20-14:25 (local time), one Mi-17 strayed about 2 km across the Turkish border in the Yayladagi district of Hatay province. The Syrian military insists the Mi-17 was on the border line and if it crossed the border at all – it was by a few meters only. Two F-16s immediately closed in and fired a few air-to-air missiles at the Mi-17 and shot it down. According to the Turkish military, the helicopter exploded in mid-air.



According to the Syrians, the Mi-17 made an emergency landing on the border line – most likely just on the Syrian side. According to the Syrian military, two aircrews were seen emerging from the helicopter alive. The Turkish military insists the two jumped by parachute and landed safely on the ground. Both the Turkish and the Syrian military agree that the two aircrews were immediately surrounded and summarily executed by Jihadist fighters. The Jihadist forces then withdrew safely across the border into Turkish territory.

Meanwhile, in the early morning of 16 September, the Turkish military committed the newly formed Jihadist brigade called Katibat al-Taliban to saving the Jabhat al-Nusra forces just across the border. In recent days, the Jabhat al-Nusra forces attempted once again to retake the town of Ras al-Ain on the Syrian border, just across from Turkey's Ceylanpinar district in Sanliurfa province, from the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) forces holding it since July. Although Turkish artillery provided fire support to the Jabhat al-Nusra forces – they failed to push the PYD defenders. Fighting were heavy, and large numbers of Jihadist casualties were transported in Turkish ambulances to hospitals in Urfa, Turkey. Hence, the Katibat al-Taliban was committed to battle in a desperate effort to save the Jabhat al-Nusra from defeat. The Katibat al-Taliban is comprised almost exclusively of Kurdish Jihadists, including ex-PKK fighters who became Islamists in Turkish jails and were offered amnesty and \$1,000 bonuses if they joined the new unit. The Katiba is controlled by Turkish Military Intelligence and is commanded by Turkish Jihadists (both Turks and Kurds).

In the early afternoon (local time), the PYD forces defeated both the Jabhat al-Nusra and Katibat al-Taliban forces. The PYD launched a major counterattack from inside Ras al-Ain and pushed the Jihadists toward the Turkish border. The PYD's thrust continued despite heavy fire from Turkish artillery just across the border. Hence, three F-16s were scrambled from Diyarbakir airbase. The F-16s were fully loaded with bombs. According to the Turkish military, the F-16s were dispatched to conduct reconnaissance flights over the Turkish-Syrian border in order to ensure that "the intensified clashes between PYD militants and Jabhat al-Nusra fighters" did not "stray across our border". According to the Syrian-Kurdish leadership, the F-16s bombed the PYD's forces and positions in order to compel the PYD to not only stop the pushing back of the Jabhat al-Nusra and Katibat al-Taliban forces, but withdraw from the border area and the town of Ras al-Ain. After the Turkish bombing, the PYD forces stopped their counterattack and withdrew back into their fortified positions inside Ras al-Ain. Fire ended by nightfall but both sides describe the situation in the entire border area as very tense.

The on-going Turkish escalation along the border with Syria might be even more sinister.

The collection and destruction of the Syrian CW should be accomplished by, or under the supervision of, the Organization for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Putting aside the question if they are capable of such undertaking – there emerged a major political quandary. The chairman of OPCW is Ahmet Uzumcu of Turkey – a close ally and confidant of both Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan. Even if there existed in the past a remote chance that Damascus, Tehran or Moscow would trust Uzumcu to be objective in dealing with the Syrian CW – the vitriolic anti-Syria and anti-Assad statements made by both Davutoglu and Erdogan in the aftermath of the border clashes obliterated any such possibility. There should be no doubt that official Ankara was cognizant that the raising of the military tension along the border and the virulent political rhetoric would doom Uzumcu's relations with Syria and Russia. Hence, Ankara is now in position to argue, on the basis of Uzumcu's reports, that there is no chance Damascus would abide by the US-RF agreement and therefore the military intervention option should be reconsidered.

Meanwhile, the slowing down of the war in Syria is already having a devastating effect on neighboring Iraq. The main Jihadist forces in the area – particularly the al-Qaida affiliated Islamic State of Iraq and Sham – are



emerging from the Syrian chaos and can now afford to allocate resources – fighters, funds, weapons and bombs – to fighting the Shiite Arabs for the dismemberment of Iraq. The Jihadist objective is to effect the de-facto joining of Sunni western Iraq to the functioning Jihadist al-Jazira with its bastion in the central Euphrates valley. Petrified about their ability to hold onto power in a region falling apart, Iraq's Shiites – both the security forces and militias – are escalating their own war against the Sunni Arabs. Moreover, adamant on securing on-land lines of communications to Syria, the Iranians are deploying their own Shiite proxies – loosely organized under the banner of the Iraqi HizbAllah – to also fight Iraq's Sunni Arabs. Hence, the slew of car-bombs by both sides and the overall fratricidal carnage will keep escalating in order to force Baghdad and Tehran into decision they don't want to make about the long-term Sunni-Shiite balance of power.

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The main unresolved issue hanging over the emerging greater Middle East is the role of Iran in lieu of the perplexing policy of the Obama White House. Presently, Obama is more desperate than ever before to attain a grand rapprochement with Iran and make a triumphant Nixon-style visit to Tehran. However, Obama is also convinced that the only thing that matters to everybody all over the world is Obama's words and NOT his actions.

Since July 2013, once then president-elect Hassan Rouhani started his transition to the presidency, Obama reached out in order to revive the Jarrett-Velayati venue of direct negotiations. The Obama White House sent letters, messages and emissaries to several leaders in Tehran. In late August, Obama sent a personal letter to Rouhani. Obama proposed to "turn a new page" in bilateral relations and promised loosening of the economic sanctions. US emissaries also made all the usual promises – to prevent Israel from striking Iran, to accept a de-facto nuclear Iran, to permit Iranian hegemony over the Persian Gulf and the regional energy economy, to permit the spread of Iranian influence into Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia, etc. Initially, Obama seemed to be following on his promises. The semi-public pressure on Israel has been incessant, the disengagement from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States has been humiliating, the acceptance of Iranian domination over Iraq has been unconditional, and the protection of Egypt's Islamists genuine if futile. Finally, Obama had some financial sanctions on Iran unilaterally undermined (ostensibly in support of humanitarian causes).

But Tehran's profound mistrust of Washington endures. The sustenance of the on-land Shiite-dominated access to the shores of the Mediterranean is the greatest achievement of the Mullahs' regime short of the mere survival of the Islamic Republic. In preparations for the anticipated intervention in Syria, Washington started assuring Tehran that the Ikhwan-dominated regime Obama's Washington was planning to install in Damascus would not be anti-Iran and would guarantee all of Tehran's strategic and economic interests. Obama does not realize the depth of hatred and mistrust between the Persian Shiites and the Arab Ikhwan. (That Iranian Intelligence and the IRGC are sponsoring Sunni Jihadist entities, including Ikhwan-affiliated, against the West or Israel does not mean Iran trusts them.) Tehran cannot fathom that Obama does not comprehend the quintessence of Shiite-Ikhwan relations, and therefore interprets the Obama White House's plans to empower Sunni Islamists in Damascus a manifestation of Washington's hidden agenda against the Mullahs' Tehran and Shiite Islam.

Even Obama's Washington could not ignore the adversarial impact that a US-led intervention in the Syrian war and the planned toppling of the Assad administration would have on the nascent negotiations with Tehran. Realizing that a crisis that might affect the entire grand rapprochement was brewing, Obama dispatched his confidant Jeffrey Feltman (the UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs and the former Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs under Hillary Clinton) and the Sultan of Oman to meet with Ayatollah Ali



Khamenei just a day before the chemical attack in Damascus. Both delivered Khamenei and the Iranian upper-most leadership guarantees of Obama's enduring commitment to a grand rapprochement that would include the sustenance, and even increasing, of Iran's influence in Syria and Lebanon, as well as in the Persian Gulf. Both emissaries also encouraged Tehran to consider a meeting between Obama and Rouhani at the wings of the UNGA in New York. Tehran was non-committal and reluctant to accept any dependence on the good will of US-empowered Sunni Islamists in Damascus. Khamenei warned Qabus that Tehran would reexamine the trust in the American sincerity on nuclear and all other pertinent issues should Iran's posture in Syria and Lebanon be undermined. (The timing of Feltman's and Qabus' trips to Khamenei suggests that Obama knew that a major provocation was coming. There is no indication whether Obama knew it would be a chemical strike.)

And then the Syrian CW crisis erupted. While Tehran would hear nothing about compromise over access to the shores of the Mediterranean, Tehran grasped the extent of the desperation of Obama's Washington. If anything, Tehran's resolve to triumph only strengthened in the aftermath of the chemical strike. Quds Force commander General Qassem Soleimani briefed Iran's Assembly of Experts that Iran "will support Syria to the end." Iranian propaganda became virulent and threatened a regional war should the US strike Syria. Moreover, Iranian proxy militia groups in Iraq threatened that they would attack the oilfields of Saudi Arabia and cut off the "economic jugular" of the West if the US attacked Syria. At the same time, Iranian propaganda kept reiterating Tehran's desire for the resumption of nuclear and other negotiations, even though Rouhani vowed Iran would not abandon or compromise over its nuclear program.

Hence, the moment the threat of a US-led military intervention in Syria was removed, there began more intense direct negotiations. Tehran is both relieved and emboldened by Obama's decision not to launch strikes against Syria. Iran is determined to do its utmost to squeeze the best possible deal from the desperate Obama. In early September, the Obama White House started boasting about "a possible thaw in long-frozen relations" with Iran. The Obama White House claimed to be "communicating with Tehran" and "moving behind the scenes toward direct talks" on reducing tensions, resolving outstanding problems and disputes, and normalizing relations. Obama hopes to revive direct negotiations and even potential face-to-face talks during Rouhani's visit to UNGA in late September. Ultimately, Tehran is convinced, Obama would not dare to confront Assad's Damascus for fear of disrupting the fledgling US-Iranian bilateral negotiations, and Tehran intends to exploit this to the fullest.

Tehran's priorities are clear. In mid-September, Soleimani addressed a closed forum in Tehran about the crucial importance of victory in Syria to Iran. He stressed that "Syria's pivotal role in defending the anti-US and anti-Israel Resistance Front [Iran, Iraq, Syria and the HizbAllah] in the region and its continued victories over the terrorists in the last one year are the cause of increased foreign pressures against Damascus." He further elaborated that "the Syrian army's continued victories against the rebel and terrorist groups in recent months have angered the enemies and increased their threats and attacks against the country." It is therefore imperative for Tehran's own vital interests to secure the ultimate victory of Syria. "In the eyes of the West, Zionists and the reactionary regimes, Syria's real problem is not the ruling of the minority Alawites or the lack of democracy, but the reality is that the West and the reactionary regimes know that the resistance's powerful position in the region is indebted to the Syrian government," Soleimani stated.

Meanwhile, official Tehran considers the US-RF agreement the official removal of the threat of US-led Western intervention in Syria. "The new situation means in fact that any pretext for the United States and certain countries to engage in military action against Syria has been removed," Deputy Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-



Abdollahian stated. Like Soleimani, Amir-Abdollahian attributed the success of Syria's steadfast policies to the strength of Iran and its allies. "We can even talk of a success by the Resistance Front" in delivering the US-RF agreement, he explained. With the threat of a US intervention effectively gone and with Obama focused on the grand rapprochement – Iran and its proxies can increase their support for the Syrian war effort. On the political front, Iran is now setting the agenda for exploiting the ramification of the US-RF agreement both regionally and globally.

The Iranian campaign intensified markedly on September 16 during a closed conference of top commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). Virtually all the key leaders of Iran addressed the conference.

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani set the tone. He stressed that the ongoing crisis in Syria is "merely part of a wider conspiracy plan" the West is pursuing all over the Middle East. "We are well aware that the disputes are not over one person or one president or the coming to power of a particular faction in Syria; it goes beyond that and it is obvious that the West has plans for the whole region," Rouhani explained. "What has happened in Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Bahrain are rings of a single chain of events which aims to impact the region and weaken the Resistance Front." Rouhani asserted that Iran was not seeking to control the region. "Our discourse is one of fighting terrorism in the whole region," he said. Regarding Syria, Rouhani emphasized, all of Iran's "efforts are directed at restoring peace and stability to Syria, and [Tehran] will accept whomever the Syrian citizens choose to run their country." Tehran will reject any leader and leadership imposed by Washington.

The next address was by the IRGC Commander in Chief Major General Mohammad-Ali Jafari. He declared that "the world powers suffered their latest defeat against the Resistance Front when their conspiracy to launch a military strike against Syria failed." However, Iran cannot afford to rest on its laurels. "So far, the enemies' plot for military intervention in Syria has failed," Jafari warned, but that does not mean Iran's enemies will not attempt to avenge their defeat elsewhere. It is because of Iran's continued vigilance and military might, Jafari stated, "that almost all the schemes drawn up by the enemies against the Resistance Front have failed." This development has profound ramifications for Iran's own vital interests and strategic posture. "Given the fact that enemies cannot overcome the Resistance Front in Syria, they definitely cannot take any action against the Islamic Republic of Iran," Jafari concluded.

Meanwhile, even though the White House claims no such plans exist, Obama is intensifying his desperate campaign to meet Rouhani in New York during UNGA and reach the grand rapprochement virtually at any cost.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.