

The Syria Breakdown, Episode Two: Putin's Playground

by [Anna Borshchevskaya \(/experts/anna-borshchevskaya\)](#)

Jan 3, 2025

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Anna Borshchevskaya \(/experts/anna-borshchevskaya\)](#)

Anna Borshchevskaya is the Harold Grinspoon Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute, focusing on Russia's policy toward the Middle East.



Articles & Testimony

Part of a series: [The Syria Breakdown \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/syria-breakdown\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/syria-breakdown)

or see Part 1: [The Syria Breakdown, Episode Three: Turkey Turns an Enemy into an Ally \(/policy-analysis/syria-breakdown-episode-three-turkey-turns-enemy-ally\)](#)

In this episode of the Institute's Syria Breakdown series, Russia analyst Anna Borshchevskaya explains why Russia's long military intervention in Syria failed to protect the regime of its local ally, Bashar al-Assad, from collapse in the face of a stunning rebel advance.

The rapid success of rebel forces in Syria begs the question of why Russia did not step in to save its local ally, Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, and prevent the collapse of his family's half-century regime.

In this episode of The Syria Breakdown, Harold Grinspoon Senior Fellow Anna Borshchevskaya explains that Russia's longstanding intervention was neither for the benefit of the Assad regime nor for the Syrian nation as a whole but was intended to strengthen the strategic interests of the Russian state and undermine the U.S.-led global order.

"It appears that Russia was caught by surprise," she says. "They did not understand the full extent of how little Assad could control what territory he had. In the end they decided to cut their losses rather than continue supporting him. They chose to convince him to flee and take

their chances with the new regime.”

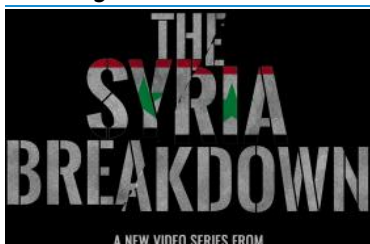
Dr. Borshchevskaya goes on to assess the impact of the regime defeat for Russian interests in the Mediterranean and Ukraine. She emphasizes that while Moscow abandoned Assad, it has not left Syria and will likely seek to secure its position in the country to the detriment of the United States.

Dr. Borshchevskaya is the Harold Grinspoon Senior Fellow in The Washington Institute's Diane and Guilford Glazer Foundation Program on Great Power Competition and the Middle East, focusing on Russia's policy toward the Middle East. She is the author of the 2021 book, *Putin's War in Syria: Russian Foreign Policy and the Price of America's Absence* (I.B. Tauris, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing).

She holds a PhD from George Mason University, an MA from Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), and a BA from the State University of New York at Geneseo. ❖

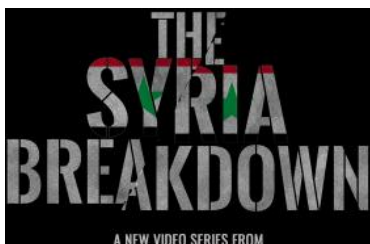
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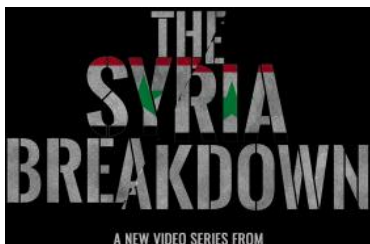
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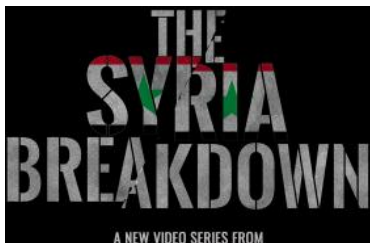
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