

Russia's Goals Go Beyond Damascus

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The Kremlin has committed to the long game in the Middle East, so the West should do the same.

It is dangerous to over- or underestimate Vladimir Putin. He had plans for the Middle East, particularly Syria, from the very beginning, and pursued them consistently. As he did so, the West dismissed Russia's influence as inconsequential, wavered, and failed to craft its own clear vision. Yet for all his commitment to undermining the West, Putin could not have entrenched Russia in Syria to the extent he has if Washington had taken the lead and used force against Assad. Putin tested the waters and stepped in when he felt he could get away with it. His Syrian adventure is a testament to the persistent Western failure to understand Russia, a country whose problems go well beyond Putin or any other individual...

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