

Putin Praises Trump, Downplays Arms Race

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Anna Borshchevskaya is a senior fellow at The Washington Institute, focusing on Russia's policy toward the Middle East.

The Washington Institute's Anna Borshchevskaya and Cipher Brief's Leone Lakhani review Moscow's 2016 track record on the Syria war, Iran, and other Middle East-related issues.

Cipher Brief: In reference to the Russian Ambassador Andrei Karlov's assassination, Putin said it would not affect Russian-Turkish relations, but earlier this week, you said that it's likely to "spur a Russian escalation against 'terrorists' in Syria." Why?

Anna Borshchevskaya: All indicators are pointing to that. We saw the meeting in Moscow with Russian, Turkish and Iranian officials on Syria. Certainly both Erdogan and Putin are saying that whoever murdered the Russian ambassador was trying to drive a wedge between Russia and Turkey, and some commentators in Russia said it is the West that has exactly such an interest. So there are no indicators that the Russian-Turkish relationship is going to deteriorate.

Putin never actually wanted a real solution in Syria, and he still doesn't. He says he wants to fight terrorism. He's been saying it for years, but most of his airstrikes have not been against ISIS. If anything, at certain times he even strengthened ISIS. So one possible outcome is an intensification of operations in Syria under the guise of fighting terrorism. Putin wants to keep Assad in power, or at least if not him, then someone like him, who would ensure Moscow's interests in Syria and the Middle East. Remember that Putin has been helping Assad carry out an ethnic cleansing in Syria, and it is Assad who is responsible for the rise of ISIS in the first place...re

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