

Why Did the US Sabotage President Putin's Peace Plan for Syria?

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Secretary of State Pompeo's direct and fiery demand earlier this week that Iran withdraw from Syria overshadowed President Putin's indirect and polite request during last week's Sochi Summit for the same, thereby putting Syria on the spot in having to publicly deny that any such talks were ongoing in order to "save face", though the American strategy of sabotaging Russia's peace plan isn't as clear-cut as it may seem.

Damascus' Curious Statement

President Putin's [peace plan for Syria](#) was off to a smooth start after the Russian leader stood next to his Syrian counterpart and called for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from the Arab Republic, but then newly appointed Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's reiteration of this request as part of his [provocative 12-point ultimatum to Iran](#) put Damascus in the uncomfortable position of having to deny that any such talks with Tehran were happening. Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mikdad told Sputnik in an [exclusive interview](#) that:

"This topic is not even on the agenda of discussion, since it concerns the sovereignty of Syria. We cannot let anyone even raise this issue. Those who ask for something like that — and this is definitely not our Russian friends — are considering the possibility of intervention in all parts of Syria, including the support of terrorists in Syria and elsewhere in the region. The main goal of such statements is to pump the money out of the Arab countries. This will force them to pay more to the US treasury, which may be empty. As well as drawing the Arab states in direct conflict, as far as I can guess — with the Syrian government, and this is a dangerous situation."

This was a curious statement because Syria's "Russian friends" did in fact call for exactly that – the withdrawal of Iran and Hezbollah from the Arab Republic – with President Putin speaking about this in general during his [Sochi Summit with President Assad](#) and then his own Special Envoy to Syria Alexander Lavrentiev shortly thereafter elaborating on his boss' suggestion by [confirming](#) that "this includes the Americans, Turks, Hezbollah, and of course, the Iranians". As such, there are no grounds for denying that Russia officially wants Iran to withdraw from Syria.

Message To America

Mikdad must obviously be aware of this but chose to ignore it, instead tailoring his response

to specifically address the US' demands that this happen. This is different from Russia's request in the sense that Moscow would allow Damascus to do this its own way and according to its own timeline in coordinating a "phased withdrawal" with both Tehran and Hezbollah so that these two can leave as heroes. Washington, meanwhile, is insisting that this be done as soon as possible in order to humiliate its enemies by making them seem weak and intimidated.

The Iranians, for their part, said over the weekend that they'll [stay in Syria for as long as Damascus wants](#), which can be read a rebuke to Russia, and which also set the stage for their Syrian ally to deny that any such talks were ongoing after the US made that demand of Tehran earlier this week. What's really happening is more complex than the general public may be aware of, and it's that Syria was probably in the process of initiating or already engaging in these negotiations with Iran but was forced by Pompeo to deny it.

The reason for this interpretation is that Mikdad's response only addresses the American demands by ignoring the earlier Russian request, which is clear from the language that he used in touching upon the [US-led plan](#) to draw Saudi and other Arab conventional military forces into the Kurdish-occupied region of northeastern Syria. In order to "save face" and not have its secret peacemaking response to Russia's foreign withdrawal request misinterpreted as "bowing to Trump's threats", Mikdad was compelled to publicly deny that anything of the sort was going on.

The Three Reasons For Sabotage

This begs the question of why the US would include such a provocative demand in its set of ultimatums to Iran and essentially sabotage President Putin's peace plan for Syria, especially when considering that Russia's request for an Iranian and Hezbollah withdrawal from the country fully aligns with American strategic objectives (albeit for completely different reasons). It needs to first be accepted that with Pompeo already planning to make a keynote speech about the Trump Administration's so-called "Plan B" for Iran, that there was no way that he could leave out a withdrawal from Syria when demanding the same from Yemen and Iraq.

Secondly, the US is always trying to "one-up" Russia and exert what it believes to be its "global leadership", so personal egos and professional jealousy may have played a role in why he was ordered (perhaps even at Trump's own request) to say that so as to "steal the thunder" from President Putin's proposal and remind the world that this was originally Washington's idea from the beginning of the conflict, though issued in a completely different context and for entirely different ends. This boast, however, may backfire by getting Iran and Syria to refuse Russia's request, though that might be exactly what the US wants, at least for now.

The third and most cynical explanation for why Pompeo implanted this demand as part of his 12-point ultimatum to Iran is that the military-industrial complex wants to temporarily delay what might have even been a somewhat speedy withdrawal for just a little bit longer in order to give "Israel" some more opportunities to [test its F-35 jets](#) in the field. If President Putin's peacemaking proposal was "too successful", as it very well could have been until this happened, then America's top global ally wouldn't have had any more reasons to carry out strikes in Syria, thus depriving the Pentagon of valuable data on the in-battle operational capabilities of its newest warplanes.

The Five-Point Plan

What the US therefore sought to do through this “strategic intervention” in disrupting President Putin’s peace plan for Syria was to stoke the flames of “controlled chaos” in the country, hoping that it could drive a wedge between Russia, Syria, and Iran as regards the latter’s “phased withdrawal” from the Arab Republic in order to reopen the “window of opportunity” for “Israel” to recommence strikes against the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and their Hezbollah allies as a means of collecting battlefield testing data for the F-35s. According to the American game plan, the ultimate success of which remains to be seen, here’s what Washington intends to have happen:

1. President Putin sets the basis for a dignified and “phased” withdrawal of the IRGC and Hezbollah after his Sochi Summit with President Assad;
2. Pompeo preempts the immediate success of this initiative by including the aforementioned as one of his provocative 12-point ultimatums to Iran, knowing very well the response that this would elicit;
3. The hoped-for stalling of President Putin’s peace plan implementation could create the “window of opportunity” for “Israel” to continue “testing” the F-35s on the IRGC and Hezbollah
4. In the face of overwhelming Russian-facilitated “Israeli” force, the IRGC and Hezbollah would eventually have to leave Syria, though it would be framed as them “running scared” from the Zionists;
5. If the IRGC and Hezbollah refuse to withdraw, then this would fracture the Russian-Syrian-Iranian triangle and turn the Arab Republic into a zone of competition between these multipolar Great Powers.

The US is doing its utmost to exploit the preexisting distrust between Russia and Iran over the former’s [military partnership with “Israel”](#) in order to turn it into a full-fledged rivalry that could then be manipulated to the point of having Moscow willingly [“balance” Tehran](#) even further in the Mideast than it already is, all to America’s grand strategic advantage. Both partners are now vying with one another for predominant influence over Damascus, which is unhappy with having to pragmatically “compromise” on its “maximalist” objectives for President Putin’s peace plan but nevertheless recognizes that this might be the best deal that it’ll ever be offered given the circumstances.

Concluding Thoughts

The fate of this proposal, as well as Russian-Iranian relations more broadly, therefore depends on what Syria decides to do regarding Moscow – and now Washington’s – requests (and more specifically, demands, in respect to the latter) that the IRGC and Hezbollah withdraw from the country. Going along with this idea would definitely allow the multilateral internationalized peace processes (Astana, Geneva, Sochi, and the “constitutional commission”) to move forward but would undoubtedly be framed by the Mainstream Media as a “loss of face” for Iran, while going against it would (temporarily) bolster Syria & Iran’s “Resistance” image at the risk of provoking discord with their Russian partner.

The specter of another “Israeli” “shock and awe” bombing campaign in southern Syria and perhaps even deeper into the country’s hinterland hangs heavy over the heads of Damascus’ decision makers because they know very well that Netanyahu will soon be dispatched by Trump to “give some teeth” to Pompeo’s demand and that President Putin will passively facilitate this given his “deconfliction coordination” with the “Israeli leader”. Syria has no means to adequately defend itself from any forthcoming “Israeli” attacks against the IRGC and Hezbollah no matter its commendable intent in [vowing to respond](#) to them, so this might become the deciding factor in what Damascus ultimately does.

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