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## Mission Accomplished: Fallout Between Iran and Russia in Syria?

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Since the start of 2016 the mainstream media in the US and the countries that are in Washington's sphere of influence have been talking about fallout between Russia and Iran over the conflict in Syria. These media reports continuously talk about Russia becoming afraid of Iran or vice-versa, Iran becoming afraid of Russia. These reports constantly talk about competition and rifts between the Iranian and Russian governments over Syria.

Here are two examples. The *Financial Times* reported that Iran should be afraid of Russia on February 24, 2016. A few weeks later, *Bloomberg* reported that the Russian military downsizing in Syria risks a rift with Iran in an article by Ilya Arkhipov, Dana Khraiche, and Henry Meyer, published on March 16, 2016.

For months, however, the steady streams of reports about a Russo-Iranian split have been utterly wrong. They are part of a campaign of misinformation (wrong information and analysis) and disinformation (propaganda). The relations between Moscow and Tehran are stable, and their cooperation is strategically oriented. In fact, Russia is supporting Iran against the US initiative at the United Nations Security Council to say that Iranian ballistic missile tests are a violation of

Joint Comprehensive Action Plan (JCAP) signed between Iran and the US, Britain, France, Germany, China, and Russia (the P5+1 or EU3+3).

By the same token, other misleading and deceiving reports have been released about Iranian and Russian tensions. Some have been over the levels of Iranian oil production exports. Others have been about fallout between Moscow and Tehran over an Iranian transfer of Russian arms to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Many have also been about the deal and delivery of the Russian-manufactured S-300 anti-missile system to the Iranian military.

In regards to a Russo-Iranian rift over Iranian oil production, these reports focus on demands by Saudi Arabia and Russia that Iran cut back its oil production. Moscow, however, has said that Iran is a special cases and it understands that Iran is working to regain lost energy markets. It has exempted Iran from its call to cut back global oil exports under a global output freeze as part of an initiative to raise the price of oil. While visiting his counterpart in Tehran in mid-March 2016, Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak even announced that the Russian government understands and accepts the Iranian position, which demands that Iran be allowed to regain its pre-sanction output levels.

In regards to Israeli media reports that there has been fallout between Iran and Russia over Russian arms being transferred to Hezbollah, no signs of this have manifested themselves empirically anywhere. The Russian government has made no statements against Iran. Nor have the Israeli reports been verified in any substantive way.

It was reported in Kuwait that the S-300 deal had been annulled on March 9, 2016. On the same day *Sputnik* interviewed an Iranian military spokesperson, who rejected the claim. While, from what the public knows, the delivery of the S-300 system to Iran by Russia has been delayed, this does not automatically insinuate tensions between Moscow and Tehran. Both Iranian and Russian officials have repeatedly denied reports saying that the deal has been cancelled. Delays have taken place due to legal provisions and technical matters, according to officials in Moscow and Tehran. Rostec, the government-owned national arms manufacturer of Russia, has even announced that the first orders of the S-300 will be delivered to Iran sometime running from August to September 2016.

### **Russo-Iranian Cooperation in Syria**

About three weeks after a cease-fire agreement for Syria officially started (on February 27, 2016), Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that Russia would begin a partial withdraw from Syria on March 14, 2016. The next day the Russian military began downsizing its presence in Syria. This began being presented as a stumbling block between Tehran and the Kremlin.

Reports were published that claimed that Tehran was upset at the Russian move. The Russian withdrawal is portrayed in these reports as a surprise to the Iranian side. The Iranian government, however, has announced that the reduction of the Russian military force in Syria is a positive sign of success, which means that Iran and Russia have achieved their key objectives inside

Syria. Moreover, if the Russian move hurt Iranian interests inside Syria, it would not have resulted in Israeli President Reuven Rivlin making a request on March 16, 2016 to Moscow to ensure that Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah do not benefit from the Russian decision to reduce its military presence.

Nor was Iran caught off guard by the Kremlin's decision to reduce its military presence in Syria. Iranian and Russian generals and officials have been shuttling back and forth from one another's capitals for months speaking on and strategizing over the conflict Syria. It is highly unlikely that Moscow's decision to reconstitute its military position in Syria was not coordinated with either the Iranian or Syrian governments. Tehran, Moscow, and Damascus have been constantly consulting one another about the military operations in Syria.

If it was not for Iranian and Russian cooperation and resoluteness in Syria, the cease-fire agreement in Syria would not have materialized. The most recent wave of false reports about Russian and Iranian tensions in Syria are aimed at creating suspicion and managing the perception of US clients. This discourse is not only aimed at misleading people or targeting Iran and Russia, it is aimed at deceiving US clients and Syrian opposition figures in the Middle East about the reality of the situation on the ground in Syria, which is that the camps supported by the Iranians and the Russians in the Middle East are the ones on top.

Any ideas about some type of Russo-Iranian fallout are wishful thinking. Both powers are moving towards even deeper cooperation across the Eurasian landmass from the Mediterranean littoral and Iraq to the Caucasus and Central Asia. They are not only cooperating militarily together, but both Tehran and Moscow are also deepening their industrial, agricultural financial, political, and economic ties too. This is no temporary alliance, but part of a long-term engagement and strategic partnership.