

War of words between Barack Obama, Vladimir Putin over Syrian crisis

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United Nations: US President Barack Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin clashed on Monday over their competing visions for Syria, with Obama urging a political transition to replace the Syrian president but Putin warning it would be a mistake to abandon the current government.

Obama and Putin's dueling speeches at a United Nations general assembly summit served as a public preview of their private meeting late Monday. The sit-down marks their first face-to-face encounter in nearly a year and comes amid escalating Russian military engagement in Syria.

Obama said he was open to working with Russia, as well as Iran, to bring Syria's civil war to an end. He called for a "managed transition" that would result in the ouster of Syrian President Bashar Assad, whose forces have clashed with rebels for more than four years, creating a vacuum for the Islamic State and other extremist groups.

"We must recognize that there cannot be, after so much bloodshed, so much carnage, a return to the prewar status quo," Obama said.

Putin, however, urged the world to stick with Assad, arguing that his military is the only viable option for defeating the Islamic State. Not utilizing Assad's military would be a "huge mistake", Putin said.

Obama and Putin's disparate views of the grim situation in Syria left little indication of how the two countries might work together to end a conflict that has killed more than 250,000 people and resulted in a flood of refugees.

- AP