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Russia sends clear message to NATO

1/22/2016



What goals is Russia pursuing in Syria? Why did the West miss the start of the Russian operation in Syria? Pravda.Ru editor-in-chief Inna Novikova sat down to talk about it with chief editor of National Defense Magazine, Igor Korotchenko.

"You have recently returned from Syria - the country where the civil war has been raging for five years already. Russia's decision to start a military operation in Syria came as a surprise to many. Some say that Russia will sink in this conflict. You have seen many things with your own eyes. What is really happening in Syria now?"

"During my trip to Syria, I visited the Hmeimim air base, I went to Tartus, Latakia and several other Syrian cities. I also traveled on the strategic highway between Damascus and Aleppo and went to the Syrian Mediterranean coast. I had the feeling that Syria is a wonderful country in so many ways. The only bad thing is the war.

"By the beginning of the Russian special operation, President Bashar al-Assad was controlling about 30 percent of the country, where nearly 70 percent of the Syrian population was staying at that time.

"Why did Russia start the operation? The analysis shows that the fall of Damascus would have become a powerful factor for the Islamic State to strengthen and expand further. We could not give Islamic militants a possibility to take Damascus, because it would legitimize Islamism.

"Secondly, it is no secret that there are up to 7,000 Russian citizens, mainly immigrants from the Northern Caucasus, who are now fighting in the ranks of the Islamic State. They are not just religious fanatics - they are people who practice terror, and we have to do everything to prevent them from returning back to Russia.

"Finally, this is a matter of our commitments. Syria has been our historical ally, and Russia could not leave Syria to the mercy of fate. But again, the main motives of our president was the destruction of our potential internal and external enemies.

"It took Russian military men months to develop the Syrian operation. Everything was elaborated in detail on maps. We started delivering military hardware and ammunition to Syria, the Hmeimim airbase had to be reconstructed. The base had to be protected too, so we had to redeploy several groups of the Black Sea Fleet to Syria. Surprisingly, the US intelligence and intelligence services of other NATO countries missed all that out of their attention."

"They missed the Crimea as well."

"Of course, they have their problems and errors. The Russian General Staff took measures to deceive the enemy. In general, the West was literally flabbergasted, when only one day before Putin's speech at the UN General Assembly, they saw Russian warplanes lined up on Hmeimim airbase.

"Do you know what Americans were marveled at in the beginning? They were shocked with the intensity of Russian air strikes. I spoke with US military analysts, and they said that no one was expecting that Russia was capable of such things.

"Many of them panicked when the Russian Caspian Flotilla attacked ISIS. The attack was conducted by small ships of tiny displacement - no one took those ships into account. Yet, the small ships demonstrated an immense destructive force.

"Afterwards, our Western partners were awed with the attacks of our strategic bombers, such as Tu-22M3, Tu-95MS and Tu-160. The aircraft were armed with cruise missiles, and they conducted the attacks from above the Mediterranean Sea. Finally, the Rostov-on-Don submarine struck ISIS from under the water. All those attacks put the West into a stupor.

"Frankly, Russia's demonstration of new military and technical capabilities was not incidental. We showed everyone that we have very powerful weapons on the water, in the air and under the water. Putin said that nuclear warheads could be installed on all our missiles, should it be necessary. That was a message that Putin sent to the West. He gave them to understand that their missile defense system would never be able to stop Russia. Putin showed the West that any possible aggression against Russia would be repulsed.

"The government forces of Syria launched an offensive with Russia's military help. We started cooperating with moderate Syrian opposition."

"The question is how to distinguish between the moderate and immoderate Syrian opposition."

"When the West started accusing Russia of inaccurate bombings, we asked them to give us the coordinates of those who need to be bombed. The question was left unanswered. We officially asked them to provide the coordinates of the moderate Syrian opposition - the ones that did not need to be bombed. There was no reaction given either.

"As a result, the Russian General Staff established its own contacts with Syrian field commanders and offered them to stop military activities against Assad troops to start acting against the Islamic State. We found such people and we are working with them.

"There is an indisputable truth: the winner is always right. Therefore, it will be up to Russia to set the rules of the game in Syria, whether others like it or not. Russia's prime goal is to preserve Syria as a state in its existing borders.

"It is important for Russia to conduct political and constitutional reforms. Syrian Kurds are fighting for their right to an autonomy and this autonomy should be granted to them. Further, the moderate Syrian opposition should participate in the upcoming parliamentary elections before the time of the presidential vote comes."