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Russia's Military Operation in Syria: Results and Conclusions

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Moscow's military involvement in the Syrian crisis has led to an increasingly important role for Russia in regional and global politics. The military operation is Russia's first combat deployment away from its borders in decades. So far, it has demonstrated advanced military capabilities in a highly visible manner.

The Russia's Aerospace Forces launched a military operation in Syria on September 30. Over 1,000 sq. kilometers have been liberated from Islamic State militants. The aircraft have flown 5,662 sorties. The military have launched 97 cruise missiles against terrorist targets, Lt.Gen.

Sergei Rudskoy, the head of the Chief Operations Directorate of the Russian General Staff, [said](#) on January 15.

«Since September 30, the Russian Aerospace Forces in Syria have made 5,662 sorties, including 145 sorties made by strategic missile and long-range bomber aviation, the Russian military have also carried out 97 launches of sea-based and air-based missiles», he reported.

The General noted that the airstrikes are targeted at infrastructure sites, fortified facilities and concentrations of manpower and weapons systems. Previously, Rudskoy said that since December 25, 164 sorties have been flown and 556 terrorist targets have been hit in the provinces of Aleppo, Idlib, Latakia, Hama, Homs, Damascus, Deir Ezour and Raqqa. The rate of attacks is increased to cut off the Islamic State from supply routes. Setting aside the question who is to blame for Turkey's downing of a Russian Su-24 bomber - and there are good reasons to consider Ankara's actions both disproportionate and dangerous - a jet, a pilot and a soldier attempting to rescue the plane's crew were the only losses Russia has suffered up to now.

The Syrian Army has made advances in Aleppo province thanks to Russian air support. According to Rudskoy, the Syrian troops have considerably expanded the security zone around Kweiris airbase.

There is another aspect that is somehow rarely mentioned by media. The Russian military provides humanitarian aid to Syrian civilians. Although a number of international non-governmental organizations are involved in humanitarian activities, most of the supplies have gone to the territory under terrorists' control and got into wrong hands. There have been attempts to deliver arms and munitions, and evacuate wounded militants under the guise of humanitarian convoys. At present, most of the aid is channeled to Deir ez-Zor, which was under siege by terrorists for a long period of time, Rudskoy said. The first 22 tons of humanitarian aid have been delivered by Syrian Il-76 transport aircraft using Russian parachute platform airdrop systems.

Let me add some more facts to the picture. In addition to Hmeymim, Russia has used Shairat airfield in Homs and al-Gayas airfield in Palmyra. In order to protect the facilities, the 810th marine brigade, special operations units and airborne units were deployed on Syria soil.

The operation marked the first combat use of the advanced Kh-101 cruise missile. This strategic air-to-surface missile utilizes stealth technologies and can hit targets at a distance of up to 5,500 km, with an accuracy of five meters. The missiles were fired by Tu-160 strategic bombers which did not even need to enter the Syrian airspace.

Pantsir-S1 and S-400 Triumf air defense systems have been deployed to protect the Russian aircraft.

The Russian forces in Syria have also been supported from sea. In early-December, the B-237 Rostov-on-Don submarine fired Kalibr-PL missiles against Islamic State positions in Syria. Guided missile surface ships of the Caspian Flotilla were involved in the operation. On October 7 and then on November 20, they fired Kalibr missiles from the Caspian Sea to successfully hit

the targets from a distance of 2,500 km.

Russian military operation has acquired a new political dimension. Russia has come up with an initiative to act as an intermediary between Saudi-Arabia and Iran to mitigate the growing conflict. It has been involved in bilateral coordinated effort with France after the Paris terrorist attacks in November. The Russia-Syria-Iran-Iraq coordination cell has been set up in Baghdad to exchange information on the Islamic State. A few days ago a Russian war room was set up in Jordan to bring the coordination with Amman, a traditional US ally, to a much higher level.

So far, Russia has successfully coordinated its activities with Israel.

Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani had talks with Russian President on January 18 on a visit to Moscow. The both leaders agreed that a «satisfactory solution» to the Syrian crisis should be found. The summit took place just a week ahead of planned peace talks in Geneva. *«Russia plays a main role when it comes to stability in the world. We very much want to develop relations with Russia and find a solution to a number of problems related to stability in some countries of our region»*, Sheikh Tamim said at the outset of the meeting.

Qatar is an old US ally.

On December 18, 2015, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution delineating the main contours of the political resolution of the conflict in Syria. It was a unanimous decision to reflect the key actors' new determination to end Syria's internal conflict. The conflict management process is definitely related to the results of Russia's military campaign in Syria in 2015, as well as to the challenges faced by anti-Islamic State forces in 2016.

The US diplomatic efforts to isolate Russia have gone down the drain. The strategic dialogue with the US, which was not easy to renew, has been intensified and broadened. Moscow is viewed as a partner well prepared for decisive action in the fight against the global threat while cooperating on equal terms. This fact was confirmed by the January 20 meeting between US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

The Russia-US contacts are conducted according to the pattern that Moscow had been promoting for a long time. The two great powers responsible for global security will discuss confidentially the most pressing security issues. Obviously Ukraine, the issue intensively discussed recently on bilateral basis, Syria and the fight against Islamic State will dominate the agenda making other issues pale (for instance, non-proliferation), but that's a start.

It's not another «reset», for sure. Russia no longer needs it. The contacts take place in the format of «situational but equal partnership». And it serves the purpose.

The US and Russia must work together to solve the various international problems. As in the case of the agreement on the Iranian nuclear program, progress reached benefits all. The January 20 Russia-US foreign chiefs meeting is another step on the way of developing fruitful dialogue on the basis of equality.