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## What stops America from bombing Syria?

9/20/2013

What is stopping the Americans from a military strike on Syria? What is the interest of the French and British oil companies in the intervention? For whom the "Islamic bell" may toll? Head of the Institute of Applied Research of Oriental and African Studies, Said Gafurov, answered these and other questions in the live video feed of *Pravda.Ru*.

*Last week The New York Times published an op-ed by Vladimir Putin. Do you think it makes sense to address the American nation?*

"I think it made a lot of sense. You have to understand who the target audience of this op-ed was. I think it sounds a bit cynical, but it was not an appeal to the nation. It is difficult to address the nation; it was rather an appeal to the American establishment, the American bureaucracy in general and, first of all, of course, the appeal to the Office of the Secretary of State. We always forget that there is no unity of interest or unity of purpose in the American politics.

The American politics is the result of many, often conflicting vectors. One of the important elements in the formation of the U.S. foreign policy in any field is the position of the State Department, the position of the diplomatic apparatus, the state apparatus. These are people who

do not change with a new president, they are independent of political matters, therefore they are very influential not even in the decision-making, but in the development of these decisions, and it is a very important step.

Putin's op-ed, in my opinion, is aimed, above all, at the apparatus. He used arguments that are understood by the apparatus. These arguments are not for *The New York Times*. This is a liberal newspaper, workers do not read it, it is not for store clerks or even bankers, it is for government officials.

I think it has largely achieved its goal, because he chose the right arguments. But I understand this because somewhere deep inside I am an official, and I understand what arguments reach officials. They are usually different."

*Did the op-ed affect Obama's decision to postpone the bombing of Syria?*

"First, Putin has certainly influenced Obama's decision. As to the question whether the op-ed affected the decision, I don't believe this was its focus. The process between the publication of the op-ed and the time it will affect something will take a few months. The fact that the Americans postponed their intention does not mean that they hesitated, but means that they were not ready for military-technical relations.

Some military experts whose opinion I trust say that the United States has never used the Navy for an offensive operation. For military reasons the Navy, i.e., planes from aircraft carriers and missiles from destroyers and warships are not able to solve the problem. The power of the Air Force has to be used. I am very glad that Russia has taken this position. I'm surprised that it happened for the first time. In fact, we have a very strange situation when in our country the government and the opposition are united."

*You said that the United States is not yet ready to attack Syria. But, according to some sources, the address of President Obama has been rewritten in a matter of minutes before the announcement. Initially, Obama supposedly was going to explain to the nation, Congress, why the U.S. should enter its troops into Syria, but something stopped him. Apparently, they were ready?*

"The U.S. military doctrine has the concept of "acceptable losses" and "unacceptable losses." The success of an operation is directly dependent of this concept. It seems to me that the losses that could have been incurred by the United States might have well proven to be unacceptable. The number of anti-ship missiles at the disposal of the Navy and the Army of Syria and the Syrian Air Force is large enough to destroy an aircraft carrier that is there now, and it would be

an unacceptable loss. We also know that when the French and the British are trying to force President Obama to make a decision to go to war, they certainly act on behalf of their companies, especially Total, British Petroleum, to a lesser extent Norwegian Statoil.

I am not convinced that the people from the U.S. oil industry who influence President Obama want this significant (one shot costs over a million dollars) money spent on protection of the interests of British Petroleum, particularly in the times of a huge budget deficit. While British Petroleum is called BP Amoco, where Amoco stands for American Oil Company, U.S. oil company, everyone knows that this company is mainly controlled by the aristocracy of Great Britain.

It is not clear why the Americans should pull chestnuts out of the fire for the French oil and gas companies that to a very large extent have the goal of redistribution of the EU market and the capture of key capacities in gas infrastructure. Why should the Americans pay out of their budget? This, too, is a very important point.

In America, there are people who genuinely hate war and say that there should be no strikes because it is always a bad idea as missiles can kill humans. There are people in the U.S. who are interested in the profits of a certain company or a bank. There are people who do not know anything at all and are mainly interested in securing additional votes in the election. There is, of course, the state apparatus where there are people who have the inertia of Cold War thinking.

First of all, Putin had in mind the officials, including the intelligence community. We have this idea that intelligence officers are some sort of knights who conduct covert operations. But they are simple bureaucrats who obey their strict regulations, instructions, and are well aware of the logic of the Russian President. In this divergent spectrum of opinions President Obama has to make the right decision.

Indeed, Obama's speechwriter wrote a speech preparing for a war, but he did understand that chemical weapons were not used by the government. This is an obvious thing for a variety of reasons."

*In response to Putin's op-ed in The New York Times, a spokeswoman of Senator McCain contacted the English version of the media holding Pravda.Ru. McCain wanted to publish an address to the Russians. Pravda.Ru posted this address this morning. Why do you think is McCain doing this?*

"Do you think Senator McCain is a serious, responsible politician interested in developing a common solution? In addition, he is also a candidate and a representative of his party. He has a

huge commitment, especially to the apparatus of the party, to the companies that funded his campaign. I think it's an internal political gesture, a great PR. You asked me about it, and we volunteered for his PR.

The audience of your media holding has Russian diplomats, just as the audience of *The New York Times* has the American diplomats, and maybe we will try to understand his logic. But in reality, McCain cannot tell us anything new, just repeat what we've already heard."

*A number of experts said that in the event of the U.S. attack at Syria some "Islamic bell" may toll that will be heard in many countries, and its consequences are absolutely unpredictable. Do you agree that this vibration can be felt in quite a lot of countries?*

"This is certainly true, but everything is very, very complicated. Here the devil is very much in the details, because the U.S., if it does strike, will perform as a direct ally of the most reactionary, the most terrible part of Islam. That is, it is not Islam, it is not a great religion, tradition, these are the people who are changing the great tradition. Do you know what the Wahhabis are changing politically? They are changing one of the crucial theses of Islam. Therefore, in the West in Oriental studies the term "convention" is used."

*Could you please elaborate on this?*

"The convention on the independence of salvation says that on the Judgment Day people will be saved, regardless of their faith. This is what has allowed Islam to become a world religion. This idea was dominant in Islam.

The Wahhabis abandoned it. They say that Christians will not be saved, referring to their own sources. This is a very unpleasant thing because it leads to burning of churches, African conflicts, etc. And this is the part of political Islam largely funded by the Gulf countries, plus they are joined by the moderate wing of Islam - the Muslim Brotherhood. The logic of the struggle in Syria is different from that in Egypt or Iraq.

Syria has led them to one camp. On the other hand, Syria has not only Sunnis but also Shiites, and this will lead to a very strong exacerbated Sunni-Shia trend. We usually talk about Sunni - Shia in the context of the Arab countries, but there is Pakistan, where the problem is far greater in terms of numbers, there is India, where there are more Shiites than Sunnis."

*What are the possible consequences for Russia in the event of implementation of this scenario?*

"Don't forget that Russia has good relations with Shiite Iran, good relations with Iraq, good relations with Syria, where there are influential Shiite communities. We may be indirectly or

directly affected. The North Caucasus is a poor region, Tatarstan is poor to a lesser extent, but still vulnerable to Sunni radicals and can be affected. I am convinced that Russia's position is very correct, and the fact that the government and the opposition were almost unanimous on this issue is a good argument to me."