

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نپاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2016/03/21/five-years-of-the-syrian-saga.html>

Five Years of the Syrian Saga

ALEXANDER KUZNETSOV

3/21/2016

March 15 marked the fifth anniversary of the beginning of the spring 2011 unrest in Syria, which snowballed into a civil war and foreign intervention.

On that day, 15 March 2011, police arrested several teenagers in the city of Daraa for painting anti-government slogans on the walls. A few days later, it became known that some of those detained had died as a result of torture in prison. The news galvanised the populations of Daraa and other cities and there were large-scale anti-government demonstrations across the country, intensified by the interference of Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the West in Syria's affairs...

External forces skilfully used the conditions for an internal crisis already present in Syria at the beginning of 2011. These included the liberal economic reforms carried out in the early 2000s by Abdullah Dardari, which caused the country enormous harm. The 'reforms' increased social inequality and the resulting discontent was compounded by the unlimited power of the Syrian intelligence agencies, of which there were twelve in the country and which began to replace the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party. The situation was complicated by the fact that between 2004 and 2009, Syria suffered a raging drought that saw nearly three million people move from villages to cities. Once there, they were forced to live in slum settlements on the brink of poverty and this was fertile ground for the dissemination of propaganda by Salafi extremists.

In addition, in comparison with Egypt, Yemen and dozens of other Arabic states, Syria was a prosperous country with a burgeoning economy, completely self-sufficient in food production and actively influencing the situation in the Middle East.

This influence is one of the reasons for the hatred that has been heaped onto the country by Syria's enemies since the start of the crisis. The overwhelming dissatisfaction shown by Washington and its allies in the region, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, led to Syria's inclusion in the Axis of Resistance, a military and political alliance that includes Tehran, Damascus and the Hezbollah movement in Lebanon. Incidentally, it was this coalition that managed to stop the Israeli aggression in Lebanon in 2006.

The Axis of Resistance prevented Washington from carrying out a neo-colonial redivision of the Middle East. Back in July 2011, the US Ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford, visited Hama, where he openly interfered in the country's internal affairs by expressing his support for the opposition groups protesting against the Syrian government.

The regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran also played its part. In an effort to weaken the influence of the Islamic Republic, the Saudi royal family decided to overthrow the Syrian regime. In the spring of 2011, during a conversation with the head of former US Vice President Dick Cheney's administration, the Saudi Foreign Affairs Minister Saud Al Faisal expressed confidence that replacing the regime in Syria would be extremely beneficial to Saudi Arabia: «The king», he stated, «knows that other than the collapse of the Islamic Republic itself, nothing would weaken Iran more than losing Syria.»

Turkey's role was particularly treacherous with regard to Syria. It should be recalled that relations between Syria and Turkey had improved significantly during Bashar al-Assad's presidency. A Free Trade Zone agreement was even signed between the two countries.

After the crisis began in Syria, however, Erdogan's government abruptly changed course and set its sights on replacing the regime in Damascus. In November 2011, a training camp for Syrian militants was opened in the Turkish city of İskenderun.

During the first stage of the conflict (up to the summer of 2013), America left Turkey and Qatar in charge of the 'Syrian dossier'. In May 2012, a delegation from Qatar visited Damascus and promised to end hostilities against Syria if Bashar al-Assad agreed to give key posts in the country's government to the Muslim Brotherhood, which is supported by Ankara and Doha. So it was openly suggested to Assad that he hand the country over to external control. When he refused, an undeclared war was unleashed against his country.

Very soon after Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and NATO countries began supplying the Syrian opposition with weapons, Jihadi militants from dozens of countries around the world began to arrive in Syria. The first militants, which at that time made up the backbone of the terrorist group known as the Islamic State, arrived in Syria from Iraq in February 2012 with the knowledge of the CIA...

As a result, by the summer of 2013 radical Islamists had pushed aside the moderate opposition represented by the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and had confidently seized the initiative in the civil war.

The Friends of Syria Group often denounces the Syrian government forces' bombing and shelling of cities and residential areas. However, the military and political conflict in the country would never have escalated so far if the West and the monarchies of the Persian Gulf had not regularly poured oil on the flames of the civil war. As a result, the leading forces in the anti-government camp are the radical Islamist organisations Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra, which have pushed aside or absorbed any smaller groups. An exception to this is perhaps the pro-Saudi Army of Islam (Jaysh al-Islam).

Let us not be deceived: if the Friends of Syria had managed to overthrow Bashar al-Assad in 2013-2014, control of the country would still not have been passed to the 'moderates'. The country would have been divided up between various armed groups that would have immediately started to sort out their differences and Syria would have become like a second Libya – a feral, ungoverned territory of chaos.

Against this background, Russia, along with Iran, has shown itself to be a friend to Syria. You will recall that until 2015, Russia had not interfered in the conflict and had not supplied Bashar al-Assad with weapons. In addition, Moscow was firmly opposed to any attempts by external forces to decide Syria's fate while ignoring the will of the Syrian people. Three times Russia vetoed resolutions at the UN Security Council, thwarting attempts by the West to legalise an intervention in Syrian affairs. It is only thanks to Moscow's position that the United States was unable to repeat the Libyan option in Syria.

Russia's military intervention in the Syrian conflict, which began in September 2015, is fundamentally different from the intervention by the US and its allies. Only Russia and Iran are in Syria at the official request of the legitimate government of the Syrian Arab Republic.

In five and a half months, the Russian Aerospace Forces have managed to do what the Americans could not (or rather did not want to) do in 18 months: stop the further expansion of the Islamic State and undermine the foundations of its existence. For the non-terrorist armed opposition groups, Russia's military operation was an example of 'peace enforcement', as illustrated by the beginning of the Geneva talks.

The Geneva forum should bring a long-awaited peace to Syria. Naturally, however, the country's political system will not be the same as it was at the start of the conflict. Syria is facing a substantial renewal of its political elite, but these are issues that will now be determined by the Syrian people rather than Western strategists and sheikhs from the shores of the Persian Gulf.