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The impossible clash between US and Russia

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As if everything else had already been sorted out, this brand new problem was all we needed in Syria! Now it is the U.S. and Russia who are in confrontation in the country.

First, the U.S. announced that it mistakenly hit Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's soldiers near Aleppo. Upon that Moscow got furious. Immediately afterwards, U.N. aid trucks were bombed by either Russian or al-Assad jets. This time it was Washington who steamed up. This all, in turn, ended the only one-week old cease-fire on the ground.

This new confrontation between the two super powers in Syria made both regional countries and Syrians ask themselves how this all would affect the war and the balance of power in the country. Yet there is no ground for worry, since a direct clash between the two global powers is not in question at all.

Syria is not a strategic objective for the U.S., whereas this is the case for Russia. The U.S.' long-term strategic target is the Asia-Pacific region, as it has been trying to slowly shift its focus from the Middle East to this area. This is mainly why U.S. President Barack Obama has turned over the "Syria case" to Russian President Vladimir Putin since the beginning of the war.

Moreover, the priority of the anti-Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) coalition led by the U.S. in the Middle East is oil. This makes Iraq the primary issue for the Western camp.

Russia, on the other hand, has two main objectives. Firstly, in the post-Cold War era it has been trying to prevent the expansion of the West toward the east. To this end it has blocked the EU and NATO membership of Ukraine and Georgia. Plus most lately Moscow succeeded to taking eastern Ukraine and Crimea under its control. Hence as for now, the Kremlin has successfully hindered the West's long-term strategic objective of expansion.

Moscow's second objective has been to save its interests in the Middle East and in the eastern Mediterranean through Syria.

Putin aims at enhancing Russia's leverage in the region by designing Syria according to his own taste. And his main key to enter the 21st century as a "Middle East power" is to secure Russia's two bases in Syria. One of them is the naval base in Tartus and the other one is its air base in Latakia. On top of that he also took Syria's airspace under his control by deploying the S-400 missile system in the country last year. After all, these interests are what make Putin stick to al-Assad.

Besides, this strategy of the Kremlin's is not new at all; diplomatic relations between Soviet Russia and Syria date back to 1944. Later in 1971, then President Hafez al-Assad allowed the Soviet Union to use the naval base in Tartus, which Moscow continues to use to this day. The West, on the other hand, has accepted Syria as under Russian dominance since World War II.

Furthermore, Russia is also showing up as an "Eastern Mediterranean power." As well known, huge gas reserves have lately been discovered in the offshore of Cyprus, Israel, Gaza and Egypt. Russia's objective is to become the strongest power in this region by reaching the eastern Mediterranean coast via Syria.

All these reasons push Moscow to dominate Syria, as a result of which no one can make any move in the country without its consent.

In short, the West, particularly the U.S., is mainly interested in Iraq rather than Syria. This is why the international coalition against ISIL supports the U.S. in Iraq and therefore Washington doesn't need Russia's cooperation in this country.

However that's not the case in Syria. The coalition members pay no heed to this country. Hence the U.S. needs to hold Russia's hand in Syria in the fight against ISIL in the short-term, leaving the country to Russia for the long-term.

But still, Washington wants to keep an eye on the country. Its policy of supporting the cantonal autonomy of the Syrian Kurds in northern Syria points to such a long-term yet only tactical step.

All in all, this picture means the U.S. would not engage in any serious clash with Russia and will have to approach Moscow's priorities in Syria due to its need for cooperation.

For Turkey, on the other hand, this all means that Ankara will have to pay attention to Russia's priorities in Syria if she is planning to stay in the country for a longer term. It is worth reminding that Putin's top priority is to secure al-Assad's stay, in other words al-Assad's victory against the opposition groups which are backed also by Turkey. Hence Russia expects Ankara to slowly withdraw its support from these groups and not to expand its ongoing operation, i.e. its sphere of influence in Syria, further to the south.

That being said, the fact that the Syrian Kurds are not a strategic but rather a tactical issue for the U.S. does not eliminate the possibility of a clash between Ankara and Washington, taking into account Turkey's serious sensitivities on this issue.

This is why Ankara will have to walk on top of super-thin ice in the upcoming months, without breaking it or sliding down.