

A Page Has been Turned: Western Retreat from Syria

NATO Packs It In. Turkey on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown

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On October 8, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CTSO) began maneuvers dubbed “Inviolable Fraternity” (“НЕПУШИМОЕ БРАТСТВО”). The scenario focuses on the deployment of a peace force in an imaginary country where international jihadists and terrorist organizations operate against a backdrop of ethnic and confessional divisions. The accredited diplomatic corps, which was invited to attend the exercises, listened attentively to the opening address of the deputy secretary general of the organization. He clearly indicated that the CTSO is preparing for an eventual intervention in the Greater Middle East. And for those feigning deafness, Nikolai Bordyuzha specified that his deputy was not speaking of Afghanistan.

The Geneva Declaration negotiated by Kofi Annan on June 30 foresaw the deployment of a peace force if the Syrian government and the opposition jointly made the demand. The Free Syrian Army rejected the accord. The term “opposition” refers only to the political parties who have been meeting since in Damascus, under the auspices of the Russian and Chinese ambassadors. As the Geneva Accord was validated by the Security Council, the deployment of the “blue chapkas” can be set in motion without requiring an ad hoc resolution. Valery Semerikov stated that 4,000 men had already been enlisted in the Peace Force with 46,000 others in the wings available for the rapid mobilization.

With this as background, the signs of Western retreat from Syria are multiplying. The influx of Western arms and combatants is drying up except for the ongoing transfers funded by Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Even more surprising: on six successive occasions, the NATO Command at Incirlik gave jihadists instructions to regroup within specified zones to prepare for huge offensives. While the Syrian Arab Army, which was formed to confront the Israeli Army, may be ill-adapted for guerilla warfare, it is highly effective in conventional combat. In each of these engagements, it easily encircled and wiped out the assembled units of the Free Syrian Army. Though the initial defeats suffered by the jihadists could have been attributed to a tactical error or to an incompetent commander, after the sixth debacle another hypothesis must be considered: that NATO is willingly sending these combatants to their deaths.

In contrast to popular perceptions, the motivation of the jihadists is not, properly speaking, ideological or religious but rather, aesthetic. They are not looking to die for a cause and are not focused on the future of Jerusalem. They strike a romantic posture and seek to intensify their sensations whether through drugs or through death. Their behavior makes them easy

to manipulate; they seek extreme situations which they are then placed in, and their movements are totally steered. Over the last years, Prince Bandar bin Sultan became the leading architect of these assemblages, including those of al-Qaeda. He supplied them with preachers promising a paradise where seventy virgins would provide them with ecstatic pleasures not if they accomplished a particular military or political feat but only if they died as martyrs wherever Bandar had need for them.

It seems Prince Bandar has disappeared from the scene since the attack on him on July 26. He may well be dead. From Morocco to Xinjiang, the jihadists have been left to their own devices, without any real coordination. They could be recruited by any number of actors, as the recent assassination of the U.S. Ambassador in Libya confirms. As a result, Washington wants to unload this risky and burdensome rabble or at the very least reduce their number. The orders that NATO gives to the jihadists are designed to expose them to fire by the Syrian Arab Army which is eliminating them en masse.

Recently, the French police killed a French Salafist who attacked a Jewish business establishment. The investigation that followed revealed that he belonged to a network including individuals that had gone to do jihad in Syria. The British police made a similar discovery four days later.

The message from Paris and London is that the French and British killed in Syria were not agents on a secret mission but fanatics who acted on their own initiative. This is obviously false because certain of these jihadists were carrying communication instruments of NATO specification, supplied by France and the United Kingdom. Whatever the case, these events are marking the end of the Franco-British involvement alongside the Free Syrian Army, while Damascus discretely exchanges its prisoners. A page has been turned.

Under the circumstances, one can understand the frustration of Turkey and the Wahhabist monarchies who at the request of the Alliance invested in the secret war unreservedly, but who now must assume alone the failure of the operation. Going for broke, Ankara threw itself into a series of provocations designed to prevent NATO from pulling out. Anything goes, from the firing of Turkish artillery into Syrian territory to the pirating of a civil airline. But these gestures are counterproductive.

Specifically, the Syrian air plane coming from Moscow which was turned around by Turkish fighters contained no weapons but rather high-explosive detection equipment to be used for the protection of civilians. Turkey, actually, did not seek to prevent Russia from delivering material aimed at protecting Syrian civilians from terrorism but aimed instead to increase tension by mistreating the Russian passengers and refusing to allow their ambassador to render assistance. Wasted effort: NATO did not react to the imaginary accusations put forward by Recep Tayip Erdogan. The only consequence is that President Putin has postponed sine die his visit to Ankara originally scheduled for the first half of December.

There is a long way still to go on the path to peace. But even if Turkey now or the Wahhabist monarchies later attempt to prolong the war, a process has been set in motion. NATO is packing up and the media are turning their gaze to other horizons.

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Translated from French by Michele Stoddard

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