

In Search of Syria's True Friends

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The 'Friends of Syria' is a contradiction in terms. In reality, these countries are Syria's enemies which are not trying to reach a peaceful settlement but want to provoke a civil war, the Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee for International Affairs Alexey Pushkov has declared. An international conference of the Friends of Syria, which includes countries and organizations that advocate a unilateral ceasefire in Syria, is being held in Tunisia on Friday. The opposition Syrian National Council has already demanded that the participants supply weapons to the militants of the so-called Syrian People's Army.

The agenda of the first session of the self-proclaimed 'Friends of Syria' was kept secret until the beginning of the consultations. However, because of various leaks, it became clear that the LAS initiative to officially recognize the Syrian National Council as a legitimate government would be approved. This method of solving the crisis would be unacceptable, the Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee for International Affairs Alexey Pushkov believes. The MP stressed that those who propose initiatives of this kind can hardly be called 'friends of Syria'.

"I put the word 'friends' in inverted commas because this name is a contradiction in terms. They are friends of Syria's armed opposition, so in the context of Syria's future, I would call this conference 'a conference of Syria's enemies'. One should take into consideration that every country, Russia included, is subject to serious pressure. We are dealing with a powerful political union between leading NATO member-states and the wealthiest and non-democratic members of the League of Arab States. If you look through the reports on today's conference in Tunisia, you will realize that all the documents had been drafted prior to the conference. These documents will be put up for approval of all the participants, even those which had nothing to do with their drafting, for example, Algeria which has a rather skeptical attitude to military action as a way to solve the Syrian problem."

Alexey Pushkov stressed that the Syrian opposition is fragmented and the Syrian National Council itself cannot be considered even to be capable to represent the opposition, let alone the entire Syrian nation.

"The internal Syrian opposition believes that the West-backed SNC has practically no support inside the country. Why then is an immigrants' organization, virtually unsupported in Syria, considered to be an official representative of the Syrian nation? The SNC is actually promoting a military interference in Syria's affairs which is opposed by two other opposition groups which are based in Damascus. These groups say that they do not want an intervention or a replay of the Libyan scenario. Some political forces are

demanding a ceasefire and al-Assad's resignation, but not all of them. The Liberation Front, for example, believes that multi-party talks on Syria's future will not be complete without al-Assad."

Alexey Pushkov declared that "al-Assad's regime is not 'isolated' and all the talk about his departure is completely groundless." The situation is being grossly exaggerated as a number of interested parties are trying to launch the conflict into a new orbit and incite a civil war.

The SNC's latest actions, i.e. its demands of weapons supplies for the militants of an opposition army, prove that these forces are not aiming at reaching a peaceful solution. Nevertheless, the opposition and its foreign supporters declare that their main goal is a 'democratic Syria'. However, at present, the majority of Syria's population believes that an overthrow of the regime would only result in religious strife and a civil war.

The Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee visited Syria earlier this week. He met with the country's leadership and spokesmen representing various political forces. Alexey Pushkov said that a Russian parliamentary organization could visit Syria in the near future. He brought back with him an invitation for the Speaker of the Russian State Duma from the Syrian leadership.

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