

Week Thirteen of the Russian Intervention in Syria: Debunking the Lies. “This Will be a Long War”

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Ever since the first rumors began to circulate about an impending Russian military intervention in Syria the Internet and the media have been flooded with all sorts of silly rumors, myths and outright lies about what could/would happen. These rumors, myths and outright lies are still being spread today, and not only by pro-US interest groups, but even by supposedly pro-Russian “analysts”.

All this nonsense completely obfuscates the reality of the Russian intervention in Syria (but maybe that was the goal all along?) and tries to paint the Russian operation as a failure. After three months of Russian air and missile strikes in Syria, it is a good time to ask the question of whether the Russians have achieved some tangible results or whether, as some are suggesting, this has basically been a big PR operation.

The key issue here is what criteria to use to measure “success”. And that, in turns, begs the question of what the Russians had hoped to achieve with their intervention in the first place. It turns out that Putin clearly and officially spelled out what the purpose of the Russian intervention was. On October 11th, [he declared the following in an interview with Vladimir Soloviev on the TV channel Russia 1](#):

Our objective is to stabilize the legitimate authority and create conditions for a political compromise

That’s it. He did not say that Russia would single-handedly change the course of the war, much less so win the war. And while some saw the Russian intervention as a total “game changer” which would mark the end of Daesh, I never believed that. Here is what I wrote [exactly one day before Putin made the statement above](#):

Make no mistake here, the Russian force in Syria is a small one, at least for the time being, and it does not even remotely resemble what the rumors had predicted (...) There is no way that the very limited Russian intervention can really change the tide of the war, at least not by itself. Yes, I do insist that the Russian intervention is a very limited one. 12 SU-24M, 12 SU-25SM, 6 SU-34 and 4 SU-30SM are not a big force, not even backed by helicopters and cruise missiles. Yes, the Russian force has been very effective to relieve the pressure on the northwestern front and to allow for a Syrian Army counter-offensive, but that will not, by itself, end the war.

I was harshly criticized at that time for “minimizing” the scope and potential of the Russian operation, but I chose to ignore these criticisms since I knew that time would prove me

right.

What happened then was a typical exercise in hyperbole: many putatively pro-Russian commentators took turns writing euphoric “analyses” which day after day spiked the public’s hopes only to then later come crushing down in disappointment. Predictably, the more the gap between expectations and reality on the ground grew, the more the critiques Putin and Assad could gloat about the Russian “failure to win”. That kind of pseudo-analysis is built on a typical “[straw man](#)” fallacy: the ridiculous notion that the Russian intended to single-handedly defeat Daesh. Sadly, “pro-Russian” commentators greatly contributed to the construction of that “straw man” by their (and not the Russian military’s) completely unrealistic expectations and predictions.

Following the second week of the Russian intervention in Syria [I wrote](#):

The Russian force is small and vulnerable. Of course, one option for the Russians would be to expand the airfield near Latakia, but that would take time and more resources and my understanding is that they want to consolidate their current airfield first. However, as a stop-gap measure, the Russians could use Russian-based bombers. If Iran allows Russia to conduct in-air refueling in Iranian airspace or if Iran allows Russia to use Iranian airbases, then many more SU-34/SU-35SM or SU-34/SU-30SM “air force packages” could be engaged in Syria. In theory, Russia could even provide her [Tu-22M3](#) to deliver gravity bombs, her [Tu-95MS](#) to deliver cruise missiles and her [Tu-160](#) to deliver either one or both. I don’t think that there is any military necessity to use these strategic bombers right now, but it might be a good idea to do so for political reasons – just to flex some more ‘military muscle’ and show the Neocons that Russia is not to be messed with. Submarine launched cruise missiles would also work, especially if launched by a Russian sub in the Mediterranean which the USN did not detect.

And this is exactly what happened next: Russia began to use her strategic aviation to augment her capabilities and to show the West that the Kremlin meant business. I then concluded by saying:

So far, the Kremlin has done a superb PR job explaining that Daesh is a direct threat to Russia and that it was better for Russia to “fight them over there than over here”. This logic, however, is predicated on the idea that a very limited Russian intervention can tip the balance. There is a very fine conceptual line between tipping the balance and fighting someone else’s war and that is something the Kremlin is acutely aware of. Hopefully, this line will never be crossed.

To be fair to the Kremlin, saying that it is better to “fight them over there than over here” is in no way a promise the tip any balance. But there were many Russian commentators who did say that the Russian intervention would, indeed, tip the balance and the Kremlin did not directly refute these claims. So I suggest the following goal setting by the Kremlin:

- Primary objective: *stabilize the legitimate authority and create conditions for a political compromise*
- Secondary objective : *tip the balance of the war in favor of the Syrian armed forces.*

Having discarded the silly strawman arguments and we have established the real Russian goals we can now evaluate whether Russia has been successful or not.

Following only three weeks of Russian air and missile operations, Assad came to Moscow and the first multilateral negotiations, which brought together the foreign ministers of Russia, the US, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, took place in Vienna. All the countries which had unleashed their aggression against Syria under the “Assad must go” slogan now had to accept that Assad was not going anywhere. This was a complete diplomatic triumph for Russia. This first triumph was followed by [another series of triumphs at the UNSC](#). In the meantime, on the ground in Syria, the Syrian military, for the first time in months, actually began a series of counter-offensive which slowly, but systematically, began to push back Daesh in most sectors of the front. So if the criteria is “*stabilizing the legitimate authority and creating conditions for a political compromise*”, then the Russian operation is nothing short of a total victory, a true diplomatic triumph achieved in a very short time. In less than one month, the Russians succeeded in making Assad’s presence at the head of a legitimate government in Damascus an indisputable reality which all Assad-haters had to accept, and the conditions for a political compromise were created, at least in diplomatic terms.

Now let’s take a closer look at what has actually happened in military terms. But before we do that, let me repeat once again that tipping the military balance has never been the primary Russian objective, only a secondary one which could be achieved, or so the Russians hope, in the process of achieving the first, main, one. To prove my point, I will have to repeat again and again something I have been mantrically repeating for the past three months: the “*operational-tactical group of the Russian AirSpace Force(RASF) in Syria*” (that is its official name) is roughly equivalent to just one aviation regiment. Without going into many details, you need to know that Russian military theory has developed a very strict set of norms which outline in great detail the kind of forces needed to successfully execute any specific task. What is absolutely clear to anybody with even a basic understanding of warfare and, especially, air operations, is that one single aviation regiment cannot be used to defeat a force with well over 100,000 combatants deployed across a territory of roughly 150,000 km² (just in Syria) supported by a network of bases and training camps in Turkey and other countries of the region and which gets a quasi infinite supply of weapons, combatants and money from numerous wealthy state sponsors. Ask anybody with even a superficial knowledge of Russian military theory and he/she will tell you that this is not the kind of task an given to an aviation regiment. Those who say otherwise simply don’t know what they are talking about.

What is truly remarkable is that *the range of missions accomplished by this aviation regiment equivalent size force has been one which normally have been given to an aviation division* (a force roughly 3 to 5 times larger). Let me repeat that: *this regimental size force has, for three months nonstop, successfully executed the amount of airstrikes normally given to a force 3 to 5 times bigger*. Now I don’t know about you, but for me this sure is the sign of a fantastically successful operation. Ask any military commander how he would feel if the force he commands could accomplish not just the full set of tasks it is supposed to accomplish, but 3 to 5 times more, and this in real combat operation. I assure you that this commander would be elated. The fact that some are still capable of speaking of a Russian military failure is a sign of either dishonesty or ignorance (or both).

Some pseudo-analysts have tried to justify their negative evaluation of the Russian operation by counting the percentage change in the territory controlled by the government forces as opposed to Daesh and its allies. Again, this is a case of either dishonesty or

professional incompetence. The fact that Daesh controls roughly 80% of the Syrian territory is meaningless nonsense. Not only because this 80% of land only includes 20% of the population of Syria, but because the very notion of “control” means nothing in the context of this war.

What is really happening is this: most of the combat operation are centered around major urban areas (cities) and specific lines of communications (roads). In terms of small towns or the rest of the countryside, it is not really “controlled” by anybody. Typically, when the government forces take village “A”, the Daesh forces go to “B” and when the government takes “B”, Daesh goes back to “A”. (Those interested in these tactical issues should read [this interview](#) of a Russian military specialist with a great deal of experience of Syria translated by my friend Tatzhit Mihailovich). The government forces are already overstretched and are barely capable of mounting an offensive without having to move their forces allocated to the defense of key cities. This is also why the Syrian counter-offensive has been so slow: a dire lack of manpower.

Furthermore, since the real fighting centers around urban areas and key axes of communications, the very use of percentages of territory are meaningless in measuring the success or failure of these operations. Take the example of Aleppo: if/when the Syrians finally fully liberate the city from Daesh, which would be a major success, the percentage shift in controlled territory will be absolutely insignificant. Yet it would be a major success for the government forces.

None of the above, however, really answers the question of whether the Russian military intervention in Syria has tipped the balance in favor of the Syrian government or not. Some say that it has, others deny that. My strictly personal opinion is that no, it has not or, I should say, not yet. But there are some signs that it might in the near future. What are these signs?

First, the pressure on Turkey to stop acting like a rogue-state led by an irresponsible megalomaniac has been increasing ever since the downing of the Russian SU-24 and the subsequent Russian revelations about the Turkish regime and, specifically, the Erdogan family’s involvement in the illegal purchase of Daesh oil. So far the regime is holding fast, but it is clearly hurting politically and the tensions are now flaring up inside and all around Turkey. While I don’t expect Erdogan to cave in to external pressures, I do think that the tensions in Turkey will end up hurting Daesh, probably in a minor way unless the conflict with the Kurds truly blows up, at which point Daesh will be affected in a much more significant manner.

Second, there are some signs that Daesh is running into military difficulties in Iraq and political difficulties in the rest of the Arab world. The fact that the Saudis have now felt the need to create what is basically a Sunni anti-Shia terrorist force (aka officially as “[Islamic anti-terrorist force](#)”) is a clear sign that Daesh is not living up to their expectations.

Third, the Russians are now providing heavy artillery systems and training to the Syrians who are now slowly but surely acquiring the kind of firepower which the Russians have used with devastating effectiveness against the Wahabis in Chechnia.

Fourth, while the Russian air operations are, by definition, incapable of defeating a well-dug in and dispersed guerrilla force, it can place a great deal of stress on its logistics and supply lines. It also severely restricts the mobility of Daesh forces, especially by night.

Fifth, with the direct support of the RASF, the Syrians, backed by Hezbollah, have begun retaking control of some segments of the Syrian border with Lebanon and Turkey. That is, by the way, one of the most difficult yet crucial tasks for the government forces: to take as much of the Syrian border with Turkey under control (the Iranians will do that with the Iraqi border). This has not happened so far, and it will not happen in the near future, but the events are moving in the right direction.

But what will really decide of the outcome of this war is not firepower but logistics. Currently, the Syrians are at a huge disadvantage: not only are they short on ammunition and, especially, spares, but their entire armament is outdated and way past its theoretical service life. The Syrian government forces have also suffered terrible losses in manpower but the Syrians cannot afford a full mobilization as this would greatly hurt an already suffering economy. Keep in mind that the Syrians have been fighting this war for longer (4 years and 9 months) than the Soviet Union fought WWII (3 years and 10 months). The fact that cracks are showing everywhere are normal. In fact, the only thing which the Syrians seem to have an infinite supply of is courage.

Daesh (and when I speak of Daesh I mean all of them, the “good terrorists” and the “bad ones”) is, so far, enjoying a quasi limitless supply of combatants, equipment, supplies and, most importantly, money. With the full backing of the USA, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, Israel and many European countries, this is hardly surprising. Daesh also enjoys a huge geographical advantage because it can use Turkey, Jordan and Iraq as a rear base and safe haven.

Make no mistake here, the Syrians are the underdog here and there is nothing the Russians can do to change that, at least not alone. The key issue here is what Iran is capable and willing to do in this situation. Iran has already done a lot and I believe that the Iranians will do more but only if there is no other way. It is not that the Iranians lack courage or means, but the fact that they are already taking a huge risk in being so deeply involved in this war. I am personally surprised by the fact that the USA, especially, Israel have not already started to denounce an “Iranian invasion of Syria”, especially since the USA did not have any qualms about denouncing a totally fictional “Russian invasion” of the Donbass. But if the number of Iranian boots on the ground goes up this kind of propaganda will be used (even if the Iranians are legally present at the request of the legitimate Syrian government).

Sadly, the AngloZionists have succeeded in creating an immense and truly toxic mess with their interventions in the Maghreb and the Middle-East. Just as in the Ukraine, there is no simple solution to stop the conflict and return to peace. In the Ukraine, the Empire unleashed a nauseous mix of Nazis and Jews, while the Middle-East is now threatened by a massive Takfiri infestation. Neither Russia nor Iran will ever be able to solve this conflict by “winning” it. Things have gone way too far and just as peace will return to the Ukraine only after a full-denazification, peace will only return to the Middle-East after a full de-Takfirization of the region, including in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. To those who will accuse me of being naïve about the realistic prospects of ridding the Ukraine of Nazis and the Middle-East of Wahabis, I will reply with a few simple and basic questions: do you really and sincerely believe that peace can be made with Nazis and Takfiris? Do you think that either group will simply “give up” their delusional insanity and become a “normal” political force? Or do you really believe that only liberating the Donbass and Syria of these *shaitans* and leave them in control of the rest of the Ukraine/Middle-East will really bring peace to the Donbass or Syria?

The truth is that the war in the Ukraine will only end when all of the Ukraine is liberated, just as the war in the Middle-East will only end when all of the Middle-East is liberated. You might not like this notion – I sure don't – but reality has never been dependent on our likes or dislikes. This will be a long war.

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