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Methodology of Russia's hard hit on Syria

Original article

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Abstract

Objectives: The aim of this study is to determine the activities of different countries in the context of the Syrian conflict.

Methods: The following research methods and techniques have proven to be useful: starting material analysis, cause-effect analysis, scientific observation.

Results: An analysis of the available literature has shown that the Russian Federation has refrained from direct participation in the war in Syria since the beginning of the war. First, it supplied arms and ammunition to Syria to support the Assad regime, and in Damascus and other areas, Russian trainers were deployed to support Assad's war efforts. But in the fall of 2015, when Assad's government forces were severely weakened, Russia began to implement direct and open military support on the scale of a world power with global ambitions.

Conclusions: The political-military measures of the Russian Federation had enormous destabilizing effects on the entire region of the Middle East. The strategic interests of many countries in the region are under threat, and the Russian Federation has become and will continue to be an important player in the Middle East. Russia's engagement in Syria is part of the Russian Federation's multifaceted policy aimed at achieving various objectives.

The Russian operation in Syria is Russia's return to the Middle East Games as an important military and political player with the aim of strengthening its own position and weakening the position of the United States. With its military actions in Syria, Russia has reaffirmed its influence in the Middle East region.

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Introduction

The Russian Federation has been involved in the war in Syria since the beginning of the conflict, but initially its aid consisted only in supporting the supply of military equipment. It was only in September 2015 that Russian forces joined the war in Syria by launching an air operation, thus supporting the government forces of Bashar al-Assad. The support of the Russian forces significantly improved the operational situation of the Syrian government forces, which at that time were already significantly weakened and probably if it were not for the help of the Russian Federation, President Bashar al-Assad would be overthrown soon.

The last massive attacks by Russian aviation took place at the end of 2019. In Idlib province, President Bashar al-Assad's army, with the support of the Russian air force, led an offensive to regain control of the region. It was not until March 2020, after several rounds of consultations, that the cessation of hostilities in this province was announced, which may eventually end the suffering of the civilian population and create conditions for the establishment of peace in Syria.

By operating in Syria, the Russian Federation pursues several of its strategic interests. "The main goal of the activities was to eliminate the solutions of the US and other Western countries in the field of investments in Syria. In addition, by maintaining the regime of Bashar al-Assad, the Russian Federation has undertaken its own order in the Middle East, where it wants to play a key role. It is helped by Iran as a long-standing opponent of the USA and Turkey, a new coalition partner, who also have their own particular goals in the region" (Brażkiewicz, 2018).

Through its consistent actions, the Russian Federation aims to rebuild its superpower role in the world. These actions often cause concern and criticism of other countries, yet none of them has so far taken radical steps to oppose it.

Referring to the subject of the publication, the following research problem was established as follows. What was the involvement of the Russian Federation's troops in supporting President Assad's regime in Syria? The purpose of this study is to indicate the actions of various countries within this conflict.

The following research methods and techniques were helpful in the study. The primary method was the analysis of source materials. Using the method of analysis, it was possible to obtain the answer why the Russian Federation made the so-called hard strike on Syria and how the Russian air force carried out air attacks on objects, cities. The grounded theory based on the assumption that the reality manifested in armed aggression is best understood by

politicians involved in the war was helpful in this method, and the military is only an executive tool of this policy. A cause-and-effect analysis was used to develop the conclusions, which made it possible to compare the forces of the attacker (Russia) and the forces under attack (Syria).

Moreover, one of the research techniques was scientific observation, which provided information on the phenomena that occurred after the hard hitting of Syria by the Russian Federation. Observing these political and military phenomena, it was possible to make their course and evaluation.

1. Selected material overview

At the beginning of the 21st century, the Russian Federation was systematically rebuilding its international position through political activities aimed at improving economic cooperation with neighbouring and cooperating countries. This mainly concerned the countries that imported gas and oil from the Russian Federation. Such activities contributed to significant financial successes (Brażkiewicz, 2018). “One of the directions on which the Russian Federation focused was the Middle East area, especially building cooperation with Iran and Turkey and maintaining strong ties with the Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad” (Brażkiewicz, 2018). Additionally, the Russian Federation has built good relations with other Arab countries (Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia) as well as with Israel. Good cooperation in political, diplomatic and military relations with Iran and Turkey allowed the Russian Federation to make a military intervention in Syria.

Since the beginning of the war, the Russian Federation has refrained from direct involvement in the war in Syria. Initially, it dealt with the supply of weapons and ammunition to Syria, in order to support the Assad regime, in addition, Russian instructors were deployed in Damascus and other regions to support Assad’s war efforts. (Souleimanov and Dzutsati, 2018). As Tomasz Otłowski (2015a) claims, over time, in addition to the instructors mentioned above, the scope of assistance was extended to include the presence in Syria of Russian advisers, military trainers and the assistance of intelligence and radio-electronic reconnaissance (SIGINT). However, in the fall of 2015, when Assad’s government forces were already very weakened, Russia began to implement military support in a direct and open manner, on the scale of a power with global aspirations (Otłowski, 2015a). Over a period of just 7 days, the Russian air force made over one hundred combat fights, targeting groups supported by the United States, Arab states and Turkey. “The target of the attacks clearly indicates that Moscow’s primary goal is to strengthen the position of Syrian president Bashar

al-Assad. [...] The immediate pretext for the intervention of the Russian Federation in Syria was a request for help from the Assad government in Damascus” (Domańska and Rodkiewicz, 2015). From the beginning of operations in Syria, the Russian Air and Space Force has used the Khmeimim air base located in the Latakia airport. This base was previously properly prepared for the reception of the air force of the Russian Federation, among others by expanding infrastructure, building an air traffic control tower, extending the runway, and more.

“The contingent of the Russian Air and Space Force in Syria was the equivalent of a reinforced tactical aviation regiment of a mixed nature, aimed at conducting operations against ground targets independently (bombers, attack and combat support) and in direct cooperation with units operating on land (attack aircraft and helicopters). The contingent included: 12 bombers Su-24M2; 12 attack aircraft Su-25SM; 4 multi-role combat aircraft Su-30SM; 6 bombers Su-34; 1 radio-electronic reconnaissance plane Il-20; 10 combat helicopters Mi-24/Mi-35; 10 combat support helicopters Mi-8. In total, the contingent was equipped with 34 combat aircraft and 10 combat helicopters as well as 11 support and operation support machines” (Domańska and Rodkiewicz, 2015).

In addition, the contingent was protected on the eastern side of the Mediterranean by a group of ships from the Black Sea Fleet, and the radio-electronic shield was secured by a radio-electronic reconnaissance vessel. It was also thought about securing the contingent with fuel (in case of unforeseen problems) by tankers of the Navy of the Russian Federation.

Combat missions of the contingent of the Russian Air and Space Forces began on September 30. As already mentioned above, during 7 days (September 30-October 6), planes of the Russian Federation made over 100 flights (they were mostly night flights), attacking many objects in Syria (Domańska and Rodkiewicz, 2015).

The main goal of the Russian Air and Space Force was to provide air support to the land forces and thus create the possibility of a ground-based offensive by the Syrian army, which was to lead to the expansion and consolidation of the territory controlled by government forces. The tasks of the Russian air force consisted in isolating the battlefield, preventing the opponent from regrouping, and destroying important enemy objects (Dyner, 2017). “The Russian air operation was an element of the ad hoc coalition of Russia, Syria and Iran, created under the banner of the fight against terrorism in Syria, whose declared goal is to stabilize this country and the region” (Domańska and Rodkiewicz, 2015). However, in the initial phase, in many cases, Russian air strikes were directed at other, often civilian targets, so the war in Syria can be described as a political drama of civilians.

At the same time, for the Russian Federation the military operations in Syria provided an opportunity to test various types of weapons, armament and equipment in combat conditions. “In total, around 600 types of weapons and armament were tested. It was therefore an opportunity for the Russian arms industry to test the equipment in combat conditions and work on its improvement, which will most likely affect the number and value of international arms supply contracts concluded in the coming years” (Dyner, 2017).

The Russian military involvement in Syria, the efficiently carried out transfer of the Air and Space Forces and supporting forces, and then their quick inclusion in combat operations, surprised other countries that have been involved in Syria for many years. As rightly noted (Otlowski, 2015 b), “the active Russian military presence in Syria on the side of the government forces also means the actual end of the bold strategic plans of many regional powers, e.g. Turkey or Saudi Arabia, which assume the imminent removal of Bashar al-Assad and his entire political camp”. The change of actions supporting Syria, described by Russia as actions aimed at combating Islamic jihad groups (anti-terrorist actions), also surprised external actors on the international scene, such as the United States, France, and Great Britain (Otlowski, 2015 a).

Russia’s control over most of Syria’s territory is a threat to this region, notes Mateusz Zielonka, “Turkey under Erdogan seems to be falling into the Russian embrace more and more quickly, and Russia itself turns out to be the only player in the region capable of effectively influencing the actions of this state. Iraq has recently started to take an increasingly anti-American course and move closer to Iran and Russia, as evidenced by, for example, the pressure to quickly withdraw American troops evacuated from the Kurdish Rojava. Iran, as a traditional one for many years, and at present a special opponent of the USA, maintains good relations with the Iraqi and Syrian authorities, which it supports directly and indirectly” (Zielonka, 2019).

Thanks to the effective political and military actions of the Russian Federation, the dispute in Syria has been successfully played out to our advantage, but we must be aware that ultimately this problem has not yet been resolved.

Conclusions

After analysing detailed studies of selected experts dealing with the issues of the Middle East, it appears that the course of military operations in Syria, among other things, resulted in an increase in the combat capabilities of the Russian Federation forces, became an opportunity for them to test equipment and improve their capabilities. The operations carried

out indicate the ability of the Russian Federation to command large operations carried out with the cooperation of various types of troops and services. Additionally, attention should be paid to the ability to use aviation for joint operations, the ability to use reconnaissance, electronic warfare and unmanned means. The war in Syria has also become an opportunity to introduce new types of weapons, demonstrate the capabilities of the Russian army and to gather experience, because through combat operation the Russian army has gained new experiences, which are much more effective than standard exercises, training courses conducted at the training ground.

However, as Witold Rodkiewicz (2017) points out, “The main goal of the operation was not only military, but also political and psychological. The idea was to deprive the opposition of any hope of victory on the battlefield and to force it to talk directly with the Assad regime. Russia’s blocking of the possibility of an armed settlement of the conflict was also supposed to, if not primarily, persuade Washington and its regional allies to agree to start the negotiation process according to the formula proposed by Russia”.

The Russian operation in Syria marks Russia’s return to the Middle East games as an important military and political player, whose aim was to strengthen its own position and weaken the position of the United States. By military actions in Syria, Russia has confirmed its influence on the Middle East region.

Summarizing the situation in Syria, it should be stated that the political and military actions of the Russian Federation had a huge destabilizing effect on the entire Middle East region. The strategic interests of many countries in this region have been threatened, and the Russian Federation has become and will remain an important player in the Middle East games.

“Russia’s involvement in Syria must be perceived in many ways, as an element of the Kremlin’s complex and multi-threaded policy. Russian actions were taken in order to simultaneously implement the strategic interests of the Russian Federation towards Syria, the Middle East and the West” (Otlowski, 2015 b).

It should also not be forgotten how the war in Syria affected the civilian population of this country, as it led to one of the most tragic humanitarian crises of modern times. Experts estimate that so far the war in Syria has claimed 400,000 lives (www3) , and over 5.5 million Syrian refugees have fled to neighbouring countries (Wilk, 2016), including Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt. With the support of his allies, President Bashar al-Assad remained in power and regained control of much of the country’s territory.

The publication indicates how the Russian Federation supports the activities of the regime of President al-Assad, and what goals this is to serve, as assumed in the research problem adopted.

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