Syrian Resolution: The view from Yerevan

On September 27, or, to be more precise, when the European part of the former USSR was already in September 28, the UN Security Council adopted the resolution on transferring Syrian chemical weapons under international control. This was the fruit of many hours of long discussions, primarily between Russia and the U.S., and outwardly seems to be a deep compromise on a number of provisions for both sides.

The west has, finally, received its reference to Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, something it has long strived for, while Russia, at the very least, has obtained U.S. agreement that it will not begin a military operation against Syria immediately and, essentially, Washington’s agreement to act in accordance with international law when dealing with Syria. Everyone can speak of their own victory. At any rate, they have saved face. There is now some breathing room as well as the ultimate prize – the unification of the Security Council, which has been fragmented for over two years due to the Syrian conflict.

It seems that everyone is a winner, including Israel, whose main enemy was disarmed right under its nose without a single shot fired, while at the same time no one is demanding that Benjamin Netanyahu withdraw from the Golan Heights which have been occupied since 1967, nor that he renounce nuclear weapons!

However, some remain disgruntled and the greatest unhappiness comes from the U.S. itself, where the bloodthirsty Republican opposition, represented by Senator McCain and other similar hawks, is demanding to hold Assad accountable and has already started “sounding the alarm”.

McCain stated, “I am deeply disappointed. The Russians have said consistently that they will not enact meaningful repercussions against Syria if they fail to comply. There is no requirement. The only requirement is to go back to the U.N. Security Council. The Russians have never agreed. I know for a fact the morale of the Free Syrian Army is at an all-time low. We’ve now made an agreement, no repercussions for the 1,400 that were killed by sarin gas. They feel abandoned and I am very, very sad.”

It is interesting to see that McCain practically agrees with the interpretation of the resolution that was given not by the State Secretary John Kerry, but by the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. Lavrov stated that this resolution does not give the right to use force under any circumstances, it only transfers the issue of invoking Chapter 7 to a later date. Well, the future will tell!

After all is said and done, who ended up winning this challenging diplomatic game? It seems that it is too early to tell. It is clear, however, that each side was able capture a few of the opponent’s pieces while gaining a tactical reprieve before it once again begins to go on the offensive.

On the plus side for the U.S. is the fact that the loaded gun, in the form of its fully mobilized naval units in the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, is still pointed directly at the temple of Bashar al-Assad. From the point of view of American policymakers, preserving a real threat of delivering a military strike on Syria is currently much more
effective than initiating the strike itself. The unilateral disarmament of Israel’s worst enemy is currently progressing without a single shot being fired. This is critically important for President Obama, who is currently devoting his presidency to rejecting the States’ direct involvement in regional conflicts while at the same time being interested in implementing the foreign policy goals of the U.S. whilst remaining “squeaky clean”.

Why not attempt to overthrow the Assad regime now, exactly in the same manner: to cooperate with Russia verbally, agree to the Geneva 2 resolution and use it to provoke another crisis like the August 21 attacks, then to force the Syrian president to step down and give power to the Transitional Government, where the important positions will be held by marionettes from the U.S. and the Persian Gulf countries.

All of this can be easily understood from John Kerry’s statement to the UN after the vote.

Furthermore, the UN resolution on Syria will open up the possibility for constructive dialogue between Washington and Teheran, especially accounting for the “Rouhani factor”. Although, it has, strictly speaking, already begun.

From the point of view of a few hawks in Washington and the American Military Industrial Complex, which is yearning for the quickest launching of new weapons programmes and is currently fighting for the opportunity to launch the accumulated stock of cruise missiles and other aging equipment, the Security Council session has made an important, if not the final, step towards the path of legalising a military strike on Syria, within the framework of international law, through allowing the very possibility of using force in the latest UN resolution with the unilateral agreement from all members! From this point of view, the decision of the Security Council seems more like a compromise between the different factions within the U.S. itself.

With all of this in mind, has Moscow been duped yet again? Or is Moscow happy to have someone else walk all over it?

One would like to believe that this is not the case. It is important for all of Russia’s allies to understand her motives, including Armenia, which is stuck between Islamic Turkey and Azerbaijan, whose intentions are well-known.

It appears that Moscow’s intentions are clear. The regime of Bashar al-Assad has won an important reprieve with the UN resolution. The attention of the west has been turned to destroying the chemical weapon stockpiles while the Syrian president can focus on eliminating the insurgents, who have not been able to win a single strategic position in Syria, except for a part of Aleppo. The terrorist groups are having a tough time. Every day they lose up to ten of their people to kill a single Syrian soldier, a total of around 100 people every day. In this atmosphere, it is hard to imagine that the UN resolution will lift the opposition’s spirits, as it is still heavily fragmented on the inside.

There are still brutal clashes between the Free Syrian Army and jihadist supporters. The Syrian Kurds, who have clearly picked their side, are successfully fighting against the Islamic fundamentalists. Overall, the opposition is very irritated and disappointed. It feels that it has been abandoned not only by the Americans, but by the Gulf countries as well, who have seemingly pledged to destroy Assad’s regime but appear to do very little to achieve that goal, at least from the point of view of the opposition.

The main Islamist transfer site remains Turkey, but Erdogan has less and less motivation to take part in the Syrian venture. It can be said that the country is experiencing unrest. The governing party is fragmented, the secular opposition to the country’s Islamization is gaining momentum while it, completely unexpectedly for Erdogan, is being supported by the west. The Alevis, who constitute a large part of the population, are against continuing the anti-Syrian campaign. The Kurdish issue has not been resolved. Turkish spoken word can barely be heard in the eastern parts of the country, where even the police speak Kurdish. This is very clearly seen from Armenia.

Foreign policy matters are not looking promising for Ankara either. The doors to the EU have been completely closed to Turkey and the plans with the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arabian countries, where the current Prime Minister had placed his bets, are looking grim as they were forcefully removed from power in Egypt. Turkey itself has become a less attractive model for Islamic modernization, even though it has retained its economic growth potential. Furthermore, even if the country could boast that it was within a circle of friends at an earlier time, now this is far from the truth.

As for the plans of Iran and U.S. cooperation, it appears that they do not worry Moscow for the time being. The experience of mullah reign has shown that there were plenty of attempts at reconciliation with Washington, but they have not been fruitful even to this day. Even presently, Teheran clearly wishes that the sanctions be lifted off Turkey without too much effort on their part, through the “Rouhani smile”, and it is not prepared to simply renounces its aces – the friendly regimes in Iraq and Syria, Hezbollah and its nuclear programme.
Thus, Yerevan-friendly Moscow still has the possibility to preserve and even enhance its geopolitical positions in the region, which would only be welcomed by its friends in the Caucasus. If only they had the political will and the desire to do so!

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