Does Washington have a Viable Strategy in Syria

The recent US attack against Syrian forces deployed at the Shayrat airbase carried out with the use of a total of 59 Tomahawk missiles at the beginning of this month has marked a new milestone in Washington’s military and political game in the Middle East. Yet, it seems this new approach is more clear-cut than previously pursued by previous US administrations.

What then precisely is current US President Donald Trump and those forces behind him up to this time? There are factors apparent on the surface, even though they are in no way connected with the pretext of this recent attack. In fact, what we’re witnessing has been a carefully orchestrated media campaign aimed at relieving the extensive amount of media pressure that has been put on the new US president after allegations that he’s unable to challenge Vladimir Putin and pursue a comprehensive policy in the Middle East. So, the missile attack can be regarded as a “creative” way of making Trump’s critics go quiet. The sitting American president seems to be convinced that after such a radical change in Washington’s policies he will have his hands untied which may allow him to make adjustments to the way the country is actually being run.

Additionally, there is a distinctively visible a desire to somehow humiliate Russia held among circles in Washington today, based on the assumption that it is neither capable, nor willing to protect its sole ally in the Middle East. At the same time, the Trump administration remains convinced that Moscow will continue seeking dialogue with Washington, so presumably it will not dare to answer such provocative attacks with any reckless steps of its own.

What is also of great importance to Washington is a need to show its regional allies that after its miserable defeat in Syria, it will still continue supporting the ongoing struggle of the Sunni monarchies against Iran that first got itself “entrenched” in Syria. It’s believed that such strikes may raise the morale of the the Persian Gulf monarchs and show America’s commitment to the defense of its national interests in the region, both real and imaginary. The White House wants to secure this objective as quickly as possible since Obama’s days in office have corroded the trust that the majority of regional allies had in Washington.

At the same time, a signal is being sent to those forces in the Arab world who have already begun to reorient toward Russia who appears a more reliable partner overall, short on promises but is willing to fulfill those that it has made, like its pursuit of and utter and complete destruction of terrorist forces in Syria. The message is addressed to Egypt, Iraq, as well as the region of Libya controlled by the parliament in Tobruk. The ultimate goal is to show Moscow’s “helplessness” in the face of American military might. Additionally, Ankara is being hinted that it shouldn’t defy NATO’s rules or it may regret its decision.
From a strategic point of view, these strikes have actually managed to weaken the Syrian Air Force, which has until now been inflicting massive loses upon the ranks of pro-Western terrorists, now the latter have a narrow window of opportunity to strike back and Trump knows it.

As for the reasons for this reckless step that are not directly connected to Russia or Iran, it’s pretty clear that Trump decided to come to rescue of Francois Hollande and Angela Merkel, as their support ratings have hit rock bottom in the middle of respective pre-election periods.

If all the above mentioned tasks are to be summarized, it is that all of them follow a pattern that could serve as the best proof yet that the era of a unipolar world has come to an end. In spite of Trump’s actions, the US will not and cannot change the course of its faltering foreign policy under any president. If it at some point chose to force its soldiers to pack and go home, Washington would find itself in the middle of nowhere with 20 trillion dollars in debt on its hands and no additional lands or resources to expand into. After all, American politicians recognizing the obvious – that the economic initiative is in the hands of China, and military-political initiatives – in Russia’s, means an end to the dollar era. That is why we’re witnessing Washington’s desperate attempts to seize this initiative, to undermine Russia’s geopolitical positions and get an upper hand yet again.

It’s true that Washington’s reckless moves may result in it securing certain short-time goals and scoring propaganda points, but this won’t change the larger geopolitical picture. Russia will not accept America’s dictate and will not abandon its major ally, so it will be taking military steps to strengthen Syria’s defense capabilities, which in turn will lead to even faster rapprochement between Moscow, Tehran and Damascus.

Can we expect Trump to to expand upon this current bluff? It’s quite possible. But he needs to be cautious so as to not jeopardize America’s relations with China. Firing missiles at the height of Xi Jinping’s visit to the US was the worst idea one could come up. Aggressive steps against Syria, in which Beijing is partially invested in as well, appears to be an ill-conceived means of intimidating the Asian economic powerhouse. And China can hardly be interested in a partner that does only fight terrorism on paper, while continuing to sponsor it. Chinese politicians remain mindful of the Uyghur separatists at this time, since they’ve been seeking ways to make Xinjiang “independent.” So, such acts of aggression will alert the already cautious government in Beijing. So it’s true that a Tomahawk can inflict a lot of damage, but is Washington aware of the exact extent of damage it has inflicted upon itself by firing them?

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