The Russian Defense Ministry recently announced that the United States is training a new armed force at the former refugee camp in El Khaseq province, citing the Center for Syrian Reconciliation. It’s believed that this force will be used in an attempt to topple the Syrian government led by President Bashar al-Assad. What is even more curious is that militants of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Jabhat al-Nusra are going to form the backbone of this military force. The Western coalition led by the United States carries on its attempt to utilize radical militant groups in Syria, in spite of repeated statements that it is supposedly engaged in the region to fight such militants. According to the details provided by the Center for Syrian Reconciliation, American special forces instructors are forming new armed units from previously dissociated groups of militants. Local residents report that the Western coalition has been using what used to be a refugee camp for six months to create a new armed force, bringing militants to El Khaseq from various parts of Syria. According to the Russian Defense Ministry, some 750 terrorists arrived from Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, Abu Kamal and the territories to the east of the Euphrates. The newly formed backbone of the gang consists of more than 400 battle-hardened ISIS militants, who, due to the support of the United States left Raqqa last October with little effort. It is expected that soon this armed unit will be deployed in southern Syria to engage government forces. Earlier Russia’s media announced that the spokesman for the Russian Defense Ministry, Igor Konashenkov accused the Pentagon of lying to the international community regarding Washington’s plans to withdraw American forces from Syria. According to the head of the US Department of Defense, James Mattis, ISIS forces are defeated in Syria, but the war with them is not over yet.

It’s curious that as far as similar training camps for militant forces across Syria and beyond its borders are concerned, there’s well over a dozen, with a number of them operating in Jordan. Those camps are being used by
various intelligence agencies, including Iranian, American, and even Turkish organizations. Each agency pursues its own objectives. This unfolds against the backdrop of the recent statement made by Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Khmeimin military base regarding Moscow’s intended reduction of its military presence in Syria. In turn, Washington is busy preparing “its own” militants to fight Assad, taking advantage of what it hopes is a security vacuum once Russia withdraws. Moreover, Saudi Arabia and Israel make no secret of their plans to strike Iranian and Hezbollah forces in southern Syria simultaneously with launching a military operation into southern Lebanon. It is expected that Washington is going to support these actions by providing close air support to Saudi and Israeli forces in Syria. That is why militants of the so-called Free Syrian Army, formed by deserters from the Syrian army, were being trained in Jordan. The strikes inside Syrian territory are to be launched from several directions – from the area of the Golan Heights occupied by Israel, across the Lebanese border once Lebanon is infiltrated by Israeli forces, and across the Jordanian border. It’s curious that there’s no more that 60 miles to cover from the Jordanian-Syrian border to Damascus, and over a half of this territory is already occupied by armed opposition forces. It cannot be ruled out that pro-US SDF Kurdish forces will strike Damascus from the east, although this step can provoke outrage in Ankara which seeks to impede any form of Kurdish expansion in Syria. Spontaneous attacks may also be launched from refugee camps, where ISIS militants are being trained, as it’s been announced by Russia’s Ministry of Defense.

Should events start unfolding along this scenario with Russia’s air corps departing, Damascus is going to find itself trapped by its opponents. After all, the Free Syria Army have recently reached 30,000 in number. There’s another 25,000 ISIS militants are scattered along the Euphrates and hiding in Idlib. In the southwest, there’s another 10,000 anti-government militants prepared for action. As for Damascus, it has no more than 40,000 soldiers at its disposal supported with up to 40,000 Iranian soldiers and Shia militiamen from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. As for the Syrian Air Force, it has been seriously depleted by the ongoing conflict, while the US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia maintain formidable air power. Moreover, Riyadh is building up a military coalition against Syria out of a long list of Arab countries, including the UAE, Jordan and Egypt. This leaves the Syrian government clearly at in a disadvantageous position together with Iran and Hezbollah.
In fact, the announcement made by the Russian Defense Ministry hardly contained any groundbreaking news, except for the announcement that those camps were recruiting militants. All states engaged in the Syrian conflict have been pursuing their own interests between 2011-2015, before the arrival of Russian forces. This struggle entailed the training of forces fighting as proxies for external players. Syria's opponents were better funded, armed, and organized, able to make efficient use of a vast amount of foreign resources on hand. That is why the scales began tipping against Damascus three years ago. In 2015, Russia entered the war, breaking the back of anti-government militants, but this success does not automatically equate to victory. In fact, victory is a long way off for Damascus. What Moscow could do toward this end is destroy the black market economy created by anti-government forces, which could make the struggle against Damascus both extremely costly and highly unprofitable. War is a business, even if it’s a bloody one, and removing the profit from it removes the motive driving it.

In fact, the Soviet Union was fully aware of the fact that if one wants to have strong allied countries, a strong economic foundation was required for those allies to build upon. Back in the day a number of Arab, African and Asian nations would receive economic assistance in order to have sustainable military forces. Due to a variety of reasons this work hasn’t always been highly successful, but the advantages of such a strategy are simply undeniable. Modern Russia hasn’t spent a lot of time doing this largely due to the lack of a common ideology, since back in the Soviet days Moscow believed it was its duty to support national liberation movements aimed at achieving certain social benefits for a government and its people. But even today Moscow is trying to make its allies highly self-sufficient, but the problem is that without direct Russian support they are yet able to survive economically.

Here, in fact, lies the answer to various kinds of questions and statements regarding the end of the war in Syria. Undoubtedly, the United States, the West as a whole and local regional players like Saudi Arabia, Israel, Iran and Turkey will continue to pursue their policies, including through proxy forces. It is only possible to oppose such a game through a symmetrical policy of strengthening the Assad government or to create in its place a more capable one that would enjoy more popular support. If there is no such policy, then calling attention to illegal US actions is merely a distraction from Syria's larger problems. The United States behaves as it sees fit, as it is fighting for its own interests, disinterested in international norms or international law.

As a matter of fact, international law was trampled by Washington itself first in Yugoslavia, then mortally wounded in Iraq and then finally buried under the “color revolutions” of Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Syria, Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. This means that the US is going to recklessly pursue its interests in Syria and the Middle East. Understandably, Washington is desperate to keep under its control the leading oil and gas producing region of the planet, to keep its control over the main sea routes from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic, keeping its hand on the flow of goods from Europe to Asia and vice versa. That is why the US is going to oppose in every possible way growing Russian influence in the Middle East. This means it will be blocking the supply of Russian gas to the EU by land from the south – through Turkey, Syria, whether it is the “Turkish flow” or the “southern stream” through Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq and Syria to the Mediterranean coast and further to Greece and Italy. But there is no ideological struggle, only oneof pure, self-serving pragmatism. As long as Russia is in Washington’s way, it will not be able to resist China, derailing such project as the One Belt, One Road.

And as President Putin tries to withdraw from the Syrian conflict as soon as possible, the task of the West is the opposite – to drag Moscow into Middle Eastern affairs, in Syria, Egypt, Libya and Sudan, while attaining its own goals, among which includes the overthrow of President Assad. This explains the perpetual failure of the Geneva negotiations. It is no accident that Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gennadiy Gatilov has commented regarding the statement of the Syrian opposition calling for the mandatory resignation of the President of the Syrian Arab Republic. According to Gatilov, the opposition of Syria continues to insist on the resignation of President Assad, despite the fact that earlier all parties agreed that there would be no preconditions to the negotiations. Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Foreign Ministry noted that this is a serious embarrassment. In Gatilov’s opinion, it is unclear what kind of reaction the Syrian opposition expects in this case from the Syrian delegation. Therefore, in part the talks took place without the participation of the Syrian government, as it described the opposition’s demands unacceptable. So the games in the peace process are over. Renewed war is unavoidable.

The commanders of the Syrian “Tigers”, a special forces unit that remains the best at Assad's disposal didn’t try to conceal their irritation when the militants of the pro-Damascus Fatemiyoun Brigade and Liwa al-Quds surrendered a number of positions between Mayadin and Abu Kamal, that had previously been liberated by the Tigers at the expense of huge losses. And one can easily understand their position, as ISIS intensifies its operations, Syrian forces have little to no air support to rely on. That is why both Syrian and Iranian forces have been suffering extremely high losses lately. In just two days they have lost more than 100 men, while pro-Damascus forces keep surrendering territories and positions.
Iran assembled two divisions, the Fatemiyoun Brigade and Zeynabiyun with Shia fighters from Afghanistan and Pakistan, respectively. The leadership and training of these units is entrusted to the Iranian special forces of the al-Quds division of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps under General Kasem Sulejmani. Within the territory of Iran there are up to a million refugees from Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the Iranian leadership is trying to employ these people. The war in Iraq and Syria requires huge human resources, that is why Afghan and Pakistani refugees have found themselves involved. In dire situations people are usually forced to agree to sign a contract. Iranian citizens also serve as mercenaries, and a large part of them go to war in about the same way: among them there are many ordinary criminals. It is clear that the morale of all of these people is extremely low, and therefore they are fighting badly. What is worse is that Syrians of non-Alawite origin are not as eager to fight, so the impending beginning of a new anti-Damascus campaign does not hold much hope for peace in this war torn country.

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