After the Russian aviation from the Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) group based in Hmeimim started to participate actively in the military operation of Damascus in the provinces of Daraa and As-Suwayda (Nota Bene: on some days there are as many as 70 operation flights per day), the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR) government forces have advanced further ahead and, as of July 6, approached the Jordan border, restoring the security checkpoints therein.

However, the advancement could have gone faster, had it not been for 2 factors:

- the great caution while advancing the Israel border lest Tel Aviv should react in a forceful manner by mistake;
- the desire to reduce the inevitable civil casualties to the minimum among the population that found themselves in the middle of the intensive military conflict.

Liberating the southwestern part of the SAR is following the same routine: the major part of the settlements are joining the truce mainly via negotiations supported by the Russian Reconciliation Centre, after which the militants yield heavy arms and face the choice: either join the government armed forces, that is, the army controlled by Bashar al-Assad (Nota Bene: i.e., first of all, the 5th Army Corps established with the active participation of the Russian military councilors who remained there); or go to Idlib or to the north of Aleppo; or switch to peaceful living under the supervision of the security services (Nota Bene: the Mukhābarāt).
Most militants choose first two options. They fear getting into the hands of the Mukhâbarât because of the consequences for those of them who took an active part in combating the Syrian Army and reprisals of the civil population.

Damascus proactively uses artillery and air forces against those who carry on with their resistance. No negotiations are held with the troops of the implacable opposition and the outlawed terrorist organisations: Shabab al-Sunnah, the Al-Nusra Front (or Jabhat al-Nusra) and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), etc. The cornered militants of the latter often try to find refuge on the Jordan territory, hiding in the refugee crowds. This caused a great anxiety in Amman, where hundreds of armed terrorists are something the authorities and the locals are least happy to see.

Southern Syria is currently one of the last remaining bulwarks of the rebels and the terrorists. This region has been characterised by relative stability since the day it was included in the de-escalation areas as per the agreement between Russia and the USA that was reached in July 2017 with the participation of Jordan and Israel. However, there was no doubt that the existence of this de-escalation area was but temporary. Conquering Daraa has a symbolic meaning for the Bashar al-Assad regime, since it was in this district that March 2011 saw the Islamists’ insurgency that later turned into a full-scale war. The Damascus strategy in the southwest is similar to the ones employed in the other parts of Syria: strong ordnance shelling of the rebels’ bulwarks, air raids, including those carried out by the Russian VKS, and the Russian invitation to take part in the negotiations leading to the rebels laying down the arms, i.e. their surrender. Just like elsewhere throughout Syria, this military pressure led to the rebels losing their ground and to the surrender of many formerly terrorist-controlled settlements without fighting. However, while the rebels are refusing to lay down the arms voluntarily, the attacks on their bulwarks are increasing and the Russian ceasefire conditions are becoming tougher.

Generally speaking, it is worth noting that there are de facto 2 ongoing wars in Syria. One of the wars is being waged by the classical terrorists who are using the civil population as a human shield. As a rule, in this case the civilians flee sooner or later, and the terrorists find themselves facing the government army in single combat. The other war is that where the militants are the local militia rebelling against the Bashar al-Assad regime and fighting their own battle against it. It is no accident that both in the West and in the Arabian monarchies of the Persian Gulf, Daraa is called the cradle of the Syrian revolution, where the insurgence of the radical Sunni groups supported in both financial and military ways by the USA, the UK, France, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and Qatar originally began. Actually, most of the militants currently defending Daraa and As-Suwayda are the region’s militia mainly comprised by the locals who have nowhere else to go.

This state of affairs became the crucial weakness of the so-called moderate militants who are prepared to fight and die to become Shahids. However, the local militiamen are not prepared to see their kith and kin die in the course of the current military operation with its shelling, air raids and tank attacks. Naturally, the newcomer militants could not care less about the local population, but the local ones have to consider this point, the side effect of which is a mass flight of the civilians. Before the beginning of the military operation in Daraa, its population (both the locals and the newcomers from the other SAR regions) was estimated as 900,000 – 1,000,000 people. The current refugee estimate is 280,000 – 300,000 people. That is, practically every third person. Jordan continues to keep its borders closed, dozens of thousands of people are located in close proximity to the border on open terrain, which results in their suffering occasional bombing and shelling that are inevitable in such cases.

The US-led West had to make a decision to hand this part of Syria over to Damascus, which is why the Western mass media practically ignore the humanitarian catastrophe in this region. Even more so, now that there are just several days left before the meeting of the Russian and the US Presidents. This does not exclude the possibility that propaganda fuss will begin right after the summit in Helsinki.

Moreover, thousands of refugees settled in the demilitarised area at the border with Israel (Nota Bene: the area of the UN forces observing the disengagement) which was established as per the Israel-Syria Disengagement Agreement in 1974. Jordan and Israel constantly reiterate that they are adamant in their determination to keep the refugees outside their territories, and Tel Aviv adds that it will not let the Syrian army enter the demilitarised area. To demonstrate its determination, Israel reinforced its troops on the Golan Heights.

It is worth noting that Tel Aviv is behaving rather peacefully despite the harsh statements made on the eve of the beginning of the Damascus military operation in Daraa which is another stage in the liberation of the whole country teeming with rebels and terrorists. The fear of Syrian terrorists infiltrating the Israeli territory and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and performing terrorist acts against their traditional Zionist enemy defined Israel’s policy
of non-resistance to the deployment of the Syrian troops in the south, including the Syrian part of the Golan Heights. It proves again that Israel has no objection to Bashar al-Assad’s restoring control over his southern border and destroying the terrorist bases therein. It is also true that the main Tel Aviv’s condition in this relation is still being met: the Iranian military councillors, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) troops, the troops of the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Shiah volunteers from the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), Iraq and Afghanistan are not taking an active part in the fighting. Israel relies on Russia in preventing the Iranian armed forces and Shiah militias from the border area from joining the fighting in exchange for the Israeli troops refraining from attacking the forces of Bashar al-Assad. Furthermore, as Damascus is regaining control over the Syrian Golan Heights and the government troops are approaching the Israel borders (Nota Bene: the Quneitra province), the latter will have to begin the dialogue with the administration of Bashar al-Assad. At this stage, there is already some contact between Israel and Syria, but the dialogue will go on with the participation and mediation of Russia. Tel Aviv needs to reach an agreement on the stability in the Golan Heights, establish the rules of the game and discuss the limitations (Nota Bene: in terms of geography, armed forces and armaments) which ceased to exist in Syria as the war progressed. Furthermore, the Israelis need to reach an agreement on the modality of Iran’s (and Iran-controlled forces’) presence in the region, even more so, since Russia would not be interested in the increased IRI military presence in the SAR southwest. At the same time, Israel will carry on with its effort to prevent the establishment of Iranian military infrastructure in Syria and will preserve its opportunity to do Damascus some damage should the latter abandon the mutual understanding reached and the rules of the game agreed on. It is no accident that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) aviation tried to strike the Tiyas Military Air base on July 8 (Nota Bene: T4) in the Homs Governorate, located far from the Daraa military action area. The goal was to demonstrate Tel Aviv’s readiness to react to any Tehran’s move on increasing its presence at any given moment. Truth be told, this time the SAR air defence not only shot down the Israeli drones, but also an Israeli plane, making the other ones leave the Syrian air space.

However, Israel’s engagement in the Syrian conflict has been far from perfect, despite its pronounced readiness to combat terrorism. Even the mass media several times alleged that the Syrian government troops had found traces of Israeli involvement in supplying armaments to the militants. In particular, in the districts of the Deir ez-Zor province liberated from the militants from the terrorist organisation the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (outlawed by Russia and other states), warehouses were found containing a huge number of missiles, mortars and tank shells, some of which were produced in Israel. A year ago, in the northwestern Homs Governorate liberated from the militants, the Syrian troops found a warehouse with weapons produced in Israel. The documents proving this fact spread in the mass media. This way, the Syrian authorities produced the proof of the fact that the Israeli special services support the Syrian militants whom they call the armed opposition.

In any case, Southern Syria has already become a relatively easy prey regarding restoring the legitimate authority of the SAR, compared to the 2 other regions remaining under the control of the rebels and the terrorists. These are Idlib in Northern Syria, which has become a bulwark of the Salafists and the Sunni Islamists, and Northeastern Syria controlled by the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) supported by the USA.

Moreover, at the current stage, the Syrian Civil War is also an armed confrontation between the world and regional powers. The USA and Israel are trying to strike some kind of a deal including the withdrawal of the Iranian troops, councillors and proxy forces from Southern Syria in exchange for Washington DC and Tel Aviv agreeing to accept Bashar al-Assad’s controlling the whole Syrian territory.

The aforementioned considered, Israel’s acceptance of the Syrian government forces deployment in the south, including the Syrian Golan Heights, de facto means Tel Aviv accepts Moscow’s demand to refrain from attacking the Syrian army and the military assets of the regime in exchange for the withdrawal of the Iranian forces and the Iran-controlled troops from the regions in close proximity to Israel and Jordan. Following this logic, Israel refrains from interference when Bashar al-Assad’s troops regain control over the districts adjacent to the Israel border on the Golan Heights. And Russia is trying to fulfil its promise made to the Israelis. Simultaneously, Russia is maintaining contact with the US before the coming meeting of the two Presidents in Helsinki on July 16.

Moscow is studying the option voiced by President Donald Trump on the withdrawal of the US troops from Syria. Russia wants the US to evacuate the Al-Tanf base in Southeastern Syria which is no longer the central platform for organising and training rebel groups, but over time it has become an obstacle on the direct land route from Iran to Syria via Iraq. There is some data showing that the US is reconsidering the necessity of this base, especially after the recent statement made by the White House to the rebels claiming that the US troops will neither interfere, nor support them in fighting in Southern Syria. As for Russia, during the summit, it will be offered to withdraw the Iranian troops from Syria, provided that the Trump administration does not object to Bashar al-Assad’s remaining in
power after he regains control over the whole Syrian territory. One can only wait for the Helsinki meeting. Meanwhile, the Syrian army is advancing to Daraa even faster supported by the Russian VKS. While the armed troops of the opposition and rebels in Syria are facing the usual scenario of being abandoned by the allied countries at the moment of an inevitable catastrophe. This time, these allies are the US, Jordan and Israel who used to support the rebel forces, first and foremost, the Free Syrian Army (FSA). Now, these countries remain aloof watching the pro-government coalition attack the militants whom they used to support. And in a short while, they are going to be defeated completely.

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