



Debating the Pros and Cons of Russia's Syria Campaign

OE Watch Commentary: September will mark the 5th year anniversary of Russia's combat operations in Syria. Throughout the summer, the military news source *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* published a series of articles arguing both for and against Russia's continued armed support for the Assad government in Syria. These arguments reflect the wider debate within Russian society surrounding the ongoing Syrian campaign.

Arguing against continued involvement, the first excerpt contends "that the civil war in Syria is still far from over," and that given the problems associated with millions of refugees and the low support for the current Syrian leadership, "it is hardly advisable to conclude any long-term and costly agreements and contracts with the Assad government." The author compares the current situation in Syria to the chess condition known as "zugzwang, when each subsequent move only worsens the position of the losing player," asserting that "only with the new coalition government in Damascus will it become possible to



Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on a working visit to Russia, November 2017.

Source: The President of Russia, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56135>, CC BY 4.0 Intl

discuss the issue of the military bases of the Russian Federation on a long-term basis." Also arguing against continued involvement, the second excerpt mostly focuses on the future economic costs of the Syrian campaign, pointing out that to rebuild Syria will be "ten times" more expensive than the price Russia paid to restore Chechnya. Given the state of the Russian domestic economy, "and the embitterment of an impoverished society," the author states that "it's time to really stop wasting resources in dubious foreign policy endeavors and focus efforts on our own salvation."

The third excerpt identifies some of the positive aspects of Russia's continued military operations in Syria. First and foremost, the Russian military has been able to destroy radical volunteers from Russia "on someone else's territory [which] is a unique historical success." The author argues that had the Kremlin not got involved in Syria, these terrorists would have almost certainly staged "another wave of terror against Russia." The author also asserts that the fighting in Syria has provided "the best training grounds," allowing Russian military personnel to gain experience that "no exercises and training grounds will provide." While the current Kremlin leadership has portrayed the Syrian campaign as an overwhelming success, these articles suggest that not all Russians agree with that assessment. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"We should not forget that the civil war in Syria is still far from over..."

Source: Stanislav Ivanov, "Камень на шею (Stone around the neck)," *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 24 June 2020. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/57495>

...How justified are the plans of the Russian Federation to expand cooperation with Assad? The Russian media reported on the intentions of the Russian leadership to expand military cooperation with the Assad government in Syria....

...However, from a political point of view and future prospects, many questions arise. We should not forget that the civil war in Syria is still far from over. ...

But it should be borne in mind that most of the Syrians were still not with Assad. Seven to eight million people live as refugees abroad in camps, most of whom fled not from terrorists or opposition militants, but from missile and bombing and shelling of the Syrian armed forces and their allies....

...Under the circumstances, it is hardly advisable to conclude any long-term and costly agreements and contracts with the Assad government....

...Thus, it is not necessary to speak seriously about the stability and strength of the Assad regime. The situation in the country, speaking the language of chess, resembles zugzwang, when each subsequent move only worsens the position of the losing player.... Only with the new coalition government in Damascus will it become possible to discuss the issue of the military bases of the Russian Federation on a long-term basis.



Continued: Debating the Pros and Cons of Russia's Syria Campaign

Source: Y. Karny-Rozshuk, "А если взвесить все трезво? (And if you weigh everything soberly?)," *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 24 June 2020. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/57494>

...Syria destroyed by the war is a "black hole" in the economy.... Imagine the epic of the restoration of Chechnya, only increased ten times. Yes, and the Assad government will have to be maintained. Sorry, but we need to equip Crimea with Sevastopol... it is criminal to lift Syria at the expense of the Russian hinterland.

Due to the economic recession and the embitterment of an impoverished society, it's time to really stop wasting resources in dubious foreign policy endeavors and focus efforts on our own salvation.

Source: A. Khramchikhin, "Сирия: боевой опыт недорого (Syria: combat experience cheap)," *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 1 July 2020. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/57586>

...The fact that we finally had the opportunity to destroy this enemy with literally "little blood, a mighty blow, on someone else's territory" is a unique historical success.

...After the fall of Assad, the arrival of another wave of terror in Russia would have been a matter of several months, the damage from it would certainly have exceeded many times the notorious unknown "so much".

...Nevertheless, even such a war is better than the most remarkable teachings and the best training grounds. Only on it is a weapon really tested. And the main thing, of course, is not advertising for the sale thereof, but the identification of its real flaws. No training ground and no training will ever reveal these shortcomings like war.

...In addition, even a "facilitated" war gives such a level of combat and moral-psychological training for personnel that, again, no exercises and training grounds will provide....

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