

Western Media Hype: “Russian Aggression” in Syria

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Global Research, September 12, 2015
[New Eastern Outlook](#) 11 September 2015

Region: [Middle East & North Africa, USA](#)
Theme: [Media Disinformation, Militarization and WMD](#)

From Washington to the western media, everyone has been talking about reports of potential Russian ‘intervention’ in Syria. On the one hand, the proliferation of this meme is a case study in the western propaganda system, as one report is then repeated ad nauseam from thousands of sources, then built upon by subsequent reports, thereby manufacturing the irrefutable truth from the perspective of media pundits and western mouthpieces. On the other hand, the new reports also raise some interesting questions about the motives of both the US and Russia, as well as the other interested parties to the conflict in Syria.

In examining this new chapter of the ongoing war in Syria, two critical and interrelated points seem to rise above all others in importance: Why is the western media hyping this narrative of Russian intervention? And why is direct Russian involvement, limited though it may be, seen as such a threat by the US?

Dissecting the Propaganda

✘ An Israeli publication [reported](#) that Russian air power would be increasing in Syria with “Russian jets in Syrian skies,” as the headline read. While all the information came from unnamed “western diplomatic sources,” and was accompanied by little more than assertions of fact without any tangible evidence, the media outcry began almost immediately, with literally hundreds of news outlets reporting the same information. Within 24 hours however, a Russian military source [denied](#) the allegations, saying, “*There has been no redeployment of Russian combat aircraft to the Syrian Arab Republic...The Russian Air Force is at its permanent bases and carrying out normal troop training and combat duty.*”

Almost as if on cue, the next day The Daily Beast [published](#) a story claiming that there were Russian boots on the ground in Syria, as well as large shipments of military materiel en route to Syria, including trucks and BTR infantry fighting vehicles. The article cited [Turkish navy photos](#) showing a Russian ship purportedly carrying the cargo, quite openly it must be said (more on this later).

Naturally, the conversation in Washington instantly became about Russian intervention and the danger of Russia “destabilizing” the situation in Syria, an assertion that would be laughable if it weren’t so deeply cynical and hypocritical considering four and a half years of US-NATO-GCC-Israel intervention in Syria.

Official denials of escalation from Moscow did nothing to calm tensions on the issue as US Secretary of State Kerry [called](#) Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov to voice concerns that Russian involvement could escalate the conflict. After the call, the State Department released a [statement](#) explaining that the US had:

...concerns about reports suggesting an imminent enhanced Russian buildup [in Syria]. The secretary made clear that if such reports were accurate, these actions could further escalate the conflict, lead to greater loss of innocent life, increase refugee flows and risk confrontation with the anti-ISIL coalition operating in Syria... The two agreed that discussions on the Syrian conflict would continue in New York later this month.

A careful reading of this short, but important, statement should raise one obvious question: what does the State Department mean by “reports”? Specifically, the initial Israeli report was allegedly based on intelligence from key Western (presumably US) sources that would obviously have access to classified information. Were that true, then surely the State Department would be alarmed by the intelligence, and not the reports.

In other words, the US military and government, with its vast surveillance and intelligence apparatus, knows perfectly well if a true Russian military buildup in Syria is really happening. Instead, the State Department focuses on the media reports, indicating that, rather than responding to intelligence, it is responding to a media story, one which is based entirely on information the US itself supplied.

So, the dramatic reaction to the reports is essentially a reaction to a story they themselves planted. Translation: Washington is hyping the story in order to further its political position, and to weaken Russia’s, by framing the debate as one of ‘Russian interventionism.’

And, in true western corporate propaganda fashion, the reports have been built upon since then. There are now [allegations](#) that Russia is building “a huge 1,000 personnel compound,” and even a report from the decidedly dubious [DebkaFile](#)– an outlet notoriously close to Israeli intelligence which has published as much disinformation as credible information – alleging that the Russians have deployed a submarine loaded with 20 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and 200 nuclear warheads to Syria. All of this is an attempt to further bolster the narrative that Russia is the aggressor, attempting to escalate the conflict in Syria for its own purposes.

Returning to the information on the trucks being supplied through the Bosphorous, as reported in international press, there is a painfully obvious question that must be asked; namely why Moscow would choose to initiate a covert military buildup but would transport the equipment openly, in plain sight of any naval intelligence or satellite imagery. Obviously, it is because Russia is not doing this covertly, but is merely continuing to supply the Syrian government as it has done since 2011.

And that is precisely the point that Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova made in a recent [interview](#). She noted that, “We have always supplied equipment to them for their struggle against terrorists...We are supporting them, we were supporting them and we will be supporting them.” In other words, there is nothing secret about what Russia is providing to the Syrian government under its existing contracts.

This is also in keeping with comments from Russian President Putin who [confirmed](#) what all serious analysts following the conflict in Syria already knew, that Russian advisers have been providing training and logistical support to the Syrian military. Of course, based on the hype in western media, one could be forgiven for thinking that Russia’s military had moved in and taken command of the war effort in Syria. In reality, Russia’s participation from a logistical and advisory perspective has been rather limited.

It is becoming increasingly clear that Moscow is stepping up its aid and engagement in Syria, but it obviously has not fundamentally changed its policy. As one source confirmed to [Reuters](#) this week, *“The Russians are no longer just advisors...The Russians have decided to join the war against terrorism.”* Indeed, another of the sources noted that, *“[The Russians] have started in small numbers, but the bigger force did not yet take part ... Russians [are] taking part in Syria but they did not yet join the fight against terrorism strongly.”*

These statements are particularly interesting if set against the media narrative being portrayed in the West, as well as the language employed by the State Department and White House which was quoted as saying *“We would welcome constructive Russian contributions to the counter-ISIL effort, but we’ve been clear that it would be unconscionable for any party, including the Russians, to provide any support to the Assad regime.”*

Analysts with knowledge of the situation seem convinced that Russian participation is geared towards helping the Syrian government in the fight against terror groups such as ISIS/ISIL and Al Qaeda’s al-Nusra Front, and that the increased presence is clear evidence of Moscow’s commitment to anti-terrorism. This presents a complex quandary for Washington which pays lip service to counter-terrorism while simultaneously describing as “unconscionable” any effective counter-terrorism aid in the war.

What is perhaps most interesting about the media coverage and comments from US officials about Russian moves being “destabilizing,” is the fact that since 2011 the western media has published literally thousands upon thousands of articles documenting openly the role of US military and intelligence, and its counterparts in NATO (including Turkey), Israel, and the Gulf monarchies, in arming and training fighters to wage war against the Syrian government (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) for just a tiny sample). Somehow these actions are not considered “meddling” or “destabilizing” to the conflict in Syria, while Russia’s alleged involvement is cause for international outcry.

The Real Agenda

The obvious conclusion is that Russia’s aid to Syria has been critical in stymieing Washington’s regime change agenda, thereby necessitating an active propaganda assault to demonize Moscow’s moves both in regard to supplying and aiding Damascus, and its calls to form a coalition against the Islamic State and international terrorism. In effect, the media is working to caricature Russia as an aggressor in Syria in order to deflect attention from the fact that US efforts in Syria have failed, and that the US has no intention of effectively fighting the terrorism it continues to promote.

The US-NATO-GCC-Israel axis seeks to continue the war on Syria using any means necessary, including continued support for terrorist factions such as the so called “Army of Conquest,” al Qaeda linked groups like al Nusra Front, and ISIS/ISIL. The ultimate goal is the collapse of the Syrian state and the breaking of the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah alliance, which would mean the final and permanent ejection of Russian influence from the region.

Russia fully understands this strategic imperative for Washington, just as it knows that terrorism is the principal weapon being employed in the ongoing war. As such, Moscow has moved to bolster the Syrian government (Russia knows that the Syrian Arab Army is the most effective counter-terrorism fighting force) in order to provide it with the necessary aid

to continue to destroy terrorist groups. Moreover, any additional Russian support in terms of advisers, increased shipments of materiel, and/or limited numbers of combat troops, provide Damascus with the physical resources necessary to wage the war.

At the largest level however, Moscow is moving to call Washington's bluff regarding the fight against the Islamic State, and terrorism generally. Putin knows that the US does not want to destroy ISIS/ISIL, but rather to manage its development in an attempt to steer it toward US strategic objectives.

This strategy was outlined in the declassified 2012 US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) [document](#) obtained by Judicial Watch, which revealed that the US has knowingly promoted the spread of the Islamic State since at least 2012 in order to use it as a weapon against the Assad government. The document noted that, "...there is the possibility of establishing a declared or undeclared Salafist Principality in eastern Syria...and this is exactly what the supporting powers to the opposition want, in order to isolate the Syrian regime, which is considered the strategic depth of the Shia expansion (Iraq and Iran)."

So, by proposing an international coalition to defeat ISIS/ISIL, Putin is essentially forcing the US either to admit that it is not serious about destroying the terrorist network, or that it will only do so under its own aegis, thereby exposing Washington's motives as entirely self-serving, and rooted in the US hegemonic agenda for the region.

But Washington will not simply allow Putin to outmaneuver it in terms of public relations. Instead, it reverts to the tried and true, and still remarkably effective, meme of Russian aggression. By portraying Russia as the villain bent on arming the "brutal dictator," the US hopes to transform the discourse on Syria, moving from its own ghastly record of arming terrorists and seeking the destruction of the state, to Russia "meddling" in the conflict.

Keen political observers shouldn't be fooled by this sort of sleight of hand propaganda. But don't tell the corporate media. They're busy working overtime, parroting US-NATO talking points, rather than asking questions and seeking answers.

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