

RUSSIA'S POLICY IN SYRIA: CHARACTERISTICS, CONFLICTS AND MECHANISMS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the features of Russia's policy in Syria, its role and contradictions of the parties in the conflict. The evolution of Russian policy since the civil war began in 2011 until today was analyzed. Special attention is paid to conducted counter-terrorist operations by Russia and the reasons for the intervention in a military conflict. Russia's policy on conflict settlement in Syria was shown involving the production of different formats of interaction between immediate parties to the confrontation, as well as external participants. The effectiveness of Russia's counter-terrorism operations to combat the terrorist threat, the subsequent resolution of the conflict, compromise and stabilization of the political regime were analyzed. For analysis of the stated problems, historical-methodological approach and institutional approach were used in this article. In result of the conducted research the author comes to the conclusion that currently it needs more cooperation of Russia and other States interested in conflict settlement, involving the fight against terrorist organizations, compliance by the parties with the terms of the ceasefire and the transition to political construction and post-conflict reconstruction.

Keywords: *Russia, Syria, Syrian conflict, opposition, terrorist organizations, counter-terrorist operation, negotiation process, national reconciliation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Consideration of the features of Russian policy towards Syria is a pressing issue of social and political processes in the Arab Republic. The relevance of this topic is confirmed by the need for security, stability and solving a set of problems that emerged in the Middle East region after the emergence of the Syrian conflict. Today we can note a positive trend in the political dialogue between the conflicting parties, which became possible mainly after military and diplomatic intervention of Russia in the conflict. Russia offers various mechanisms for the settlement of the conflict, both civilian and law enforcement, with a predominance of the first, aimed at political dialogue of parties in the format of various international meetings, conferences, involving the cessation of hostilities and the promotion of political transition.

Mechanisms for the settlement of the Syrian conflict, proposed by Russia, are well founded and constructive, but there are some obstacles in the process of implementation, as the interests of major world powers, the countries of the region are contradictory and it leaves a negative mark on the entire peacebuilding process. Only a closer interaction between States will help to reduce the threat of conflict escalation and to resolve differences.

In the scientific literature, there is almost no work with complex and involve analysis of various aspects of Russia's policy in the settlement of the Syrian conflict. This subject is relevant and the proposed recommendations can be used by public authorities, public and political organizations in making administrative decisions.

2 .MATERIALS AND METHODS

Since the inception of anti-government protests Russia has maintained peaceful resolution of disputes, preservation of unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian state, the involvement of all stakeholders in the process of political settlement. Despite considerable difficulties in the dialogue between the parties, and which took place the options of a military solution to the conflict, Russia adheres to the principle that only the Syrian people should decide the fate of the country and determine the future structure of state [1]. In the early stages of the conflict Russia has taken a position of non-interference in political developments in Syria, refusing to use its influence to put pressure on the government of Bashar al-Assad. However, as the worsening situation in the country (for example, in connection with events associated with the use of chemical weapons in 2013 or formation of the terrorist organization "Islamic state", which covered part of neighboring Iraq), Russian policy has become more proactive, and Russia has become one of the main participants of the negotiation process.

The position of Russia on settlement of the conflict based on non-violent measures [2] and assumes that the use of force can only be done under UN supervision and in accordance with international law. Russia seeks not only to defend its national interests and to maintain relations with Syria, established in Soviet time, but also to offer solutions that will suit all states involved in the conflict. Thanks largely to the diplomatic and then military intervention of Russia in the conflict, the international community managed to provide nationwide cessation of hostilities and to advance the political settlement process.

Russia's policy in Syria since the beginning of the civil war, the ways and means to resolve the Syrian conflict were studied in the works of several foreign scientists. This issues were researched by Roy Allison, Azuolas Bagdonas, Subarshan Bhutani, Ted Carpenter, John Calabrese, Danny Postel, Nader Hashemi etc. The above-mentioned aspects and prospects of interaction of Russia and other world powers in the resolution of the Syrian conflict were studied in the works of Russian scientists: A. V. Baranov, A. I. Vavilov, A. V. Demchenko, A. V. Manoylo, V. V. Naumkin, A. A. Samokhin, A. N. Shaglanov etc.

In the article historical-methodological approach and institutional approach were used as the methodology of the study. The historical approach allowed us to trace the dynamics of Russian policy in Syria, the mechanisms of conflict resolution. Application of the institutional method contributed to the study of domestic and international institutions affect the development process of the Syrian conflict, and Russia ways of building a dialogue between the parties.

3.RESULTS

Russian Federation as one of the leading participants in the negotiation process initially took a pragmatic approach. This is evidenced by the fact that since the beginning of the emergence of mass anti-government protests in 2011 and until today, Russia's position is peaceful resolution of the conflict, the exclusion of any military operations (in addition to the fight against terrorist organizations), as well as preserve the unity and territorial integrity of Syria. The conduct of military campaigns and in the general instability, the presence of extremist and terrorist groups ("Islamic state" and "Dzhebbat en-Nusra" and others) is a dangerous step not only for Syria but for other regional states and may lead to large socio-economic and political consequences for developing countries than it did in Iraq and Libya.

Not to mention that Russia's policy in Syria would be ineffective without interaction with other participants of the negotiations: the UN, USA, European countries, Gulf States (Saudi Arabia, Qatar), Arab League, Iran, Turkey etc. Work in various international formats ("Geneva-1 and Geneva-2", "Action Group" on Syria, "International Syria support group") led to the understanding of the inevitability of peaceful resolution of the conflict and to identify concrete steps to resolve it.

Russian diplomacy has become more proactive as the worsening of the Syrian conflict. Russia has sought to prevent a repetition of "Libyan scenario" [3], in which the country was plunged into chaos. Besides,

Russia has suffered a "diplomatic fiasco" on the issue of building equal partnership with the United States in resolving the Libyan crisis, relying on non-interference in the armed conflict and taking into account their views and interests. However, the U.S. soon changed its position on the Libyan conflict and provided military support to opposition groups leading to regime change. In my opinion, this is one of the reasons for the intervention of Russia in the Syrian conflict.

During 2011-2012, Russia has blocked several resolutions of the UN Security Council, which could lead to the imposition of sanctions and start the process of initiating military intervention in the situation in Syria. The Russian side was unhappy with the unilateral, insufficiently substantiated accusations against the Syrian government and fomenting unnecessary tension [4]. In contrast, Russia has taken the initiative of establishing a multilateral format of negotiations with participation of the immediate parties to the conflict. Thanks largely to such aspirations made possible the holding of the first international conference on Syria held in Geneva on June 30, 2012.

The result of this conference, named "Geneva-1", was the signing of the participants of the Geneva communiqué – a document which sets out the principles for resolving the conflict. Among the major we can include the following: the establishment of a transitional government based on mutual consent, including members of the government, the opposition and other groups; the possibility of revising the country's constitution; the creation of new public authorities; the holding of multiparty elections [5]. The Geneva communique from the moment of its adoption to the present day is the basic document on which you constantly refer, the negotiators (and mediators) in the Syrian conflict.

After the Geneva conference, the negotiation process began to experience difficulties. The serious contradictions of the parties to the conflict and supporting regional and global powers are reasons for such development. Western countries (USA, UK, France) contrary to the Geneva communique, as well as the Gulf States (Saudi Arabia, Qatar) continued to maintain the position of the need for removal of Assad from power, on the grounds that it undermines confidence in the transitional political process and continued to support the Syrian opposition. In this situation, the former UN special envoy and the Arab League for Syria, K. Annan pointed out that in Western countries often criticize the Russian position on Syria, but "very little is said about other countries which send arms, money, and even studying the situation on the ground" [6]. In the latter respect, Annan added that they claimed to be leading a peaceful settlement, but in fact their initiatives undermine the meaning of the resolutions of the UN Security Council [7].

Despite all the efforts of Russia to make the negotiation process more multilateral, involving the connection of Iran and Saudi Arabia, the second conference in Geneva ("Geneva-2"), held in January and February 2014, proved to be less effective. The participants of conference reaffirmed the previously announced principles of conflict settlement and agreed to provide humanitarian assistance covered by the fighting city of Homsu. Again affected by the contradictions of the immediate parties to the conflict, the political disengagement in the camp of the Syrian opposition and support for its most bitter part of the Arabian monarchies [8].

Discussed above the "failures" of the process of political settlement allow us to speak about the Syrian conflict as complex and multi-layered problem. Russia and the United States as key mediators exert considerable diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict and stabilize the situation in the country. For example, it can be noted an active cooperation between the two countries in resolving the problem of Syrian chemical weapons, when the unknown group was used toxic substances against civilians in the suburbs of Damascus in 2013. Russia has played a constructive role by convincing the Syrian authorities of the need for the elimination of chemical weapons and, in fact, did not allow foreign intervention in the country [9].

More active and close cooperation between Russia and the United States began after the emergence of other threats – the spread of radical Islamist groups, declared in June 2014 Sharia in large parts of Syria and Iraq. The US and its allies are beginning to revise their attitude to the conflict, as these groups represent a great danger to the peaceful settlement process, as well as the so-called "moderate opposition" than B. Assad being in power. In the ranks of the political elite of Western countries increasingly, there are opinions that the Syrian authorities are a real force, a deterrent to a terrorist threat, and the need to counter it.

In such circumstances, it would seem logical implementation of the US-led coalition air strikes on terrorist groups, launched in 2014. In contrast to the anti-terrorist operation conducted by Russia from September 30, 2015 to March 15, 2016, it proved to be not effective, as it was not supported by the Syrian army engaged in ground operations [10]. We can distinguish at least three reasons for the Russian military intervention in the conflict. Firstly, the fight against Islamist groups and the threat of their entry into the territory of the Russian Federation and CIS countries. Secondly, the danger of violent overthrow of the regime and the loss of Russian economic and political relations with Syria, established in soviet time. Thirdly, the lack of interest of Russia in the fragmentation of the country, uncontrolled situation and giving the conflict a pronounced religious character [11].

Participation in the aerospace defense forces of Russia in Syria has led to significant results: severely damaged the infrastructure of terrorist organizations, the Syrian army from defensive action went on the offensive, liberated many cities and towns of Syria. In political terms, Russia was able to resume the multilateral dialogue process and to bring parties to the negotiating table. Seeing the support of the authorities of Syria in the face of Russia, some opposition groups have softened their positions.

This applies to both "internal" and "external" opposition. In a series of high level meetings in Vienna, Munich, Zurich, Geneva in 2015-2016, the parties proceeded to the implementation of the work within three areas: providing humanitarian assistance, ensuring the cessation of hostilities, the promotion of political transition. These provisions are set out in the resolution 2254 of the UN Security Council and became possible thanks to the efforts of the international support group, Syria chaired by USA and Russia.

Despite some difficulties of the peace process, the work in these areas continues, cease-fire, the parties agreed to form a transitional government, adopt a new Constitution and hold parliamentary and presidential elections within 18 months, opposition groups join the political dialogue process. To date it is conditionally possible to allocate three groups of the opposition involved in the peace settlement: "Moscow-Cairo", "Hmeymimsky" and "Riyadh". The greatest difficulty causes the last group of the opposition, supported by the Gulf States, periodically disrupting the negotiations and insisting on regime change of B. Assad.

Positive impact on the political settlement of the Syrian conflict had inter-syrian talks in the framework of different political platforms in Moscow, Cairo, Riyadh, aimed at achieving national reconciliation. In February 2016 intensified negotiations between the conflicting parties in Geneva, however, while passing with varying degrees of success. It is impossible not to note the effectiveness of Russia's actions in the negotiation process, which in the framework of the International support group Syria contributed to the formation of task forces to provide humanitarian assistance and monitoring the cease-fire. This qualitative change in approach, involving close cooperation between diplomats, military personnel, experts in various fields, aimed at stabilizing the situation in the country and the settlement of the conflict.

4.SUMMARY

In the result of the analysis we can draw the following summary. To date, despite the efforts of the international support group Syria to resolve the conflict, brought significant results, the situation remains difficult. The actions of Russia and the United States as the leading players in the Syrian conflict intensified, however, did not lead to a concrete plan for political transition. Russia is taking various measures of diplomatic influence on the negotiating parties, but they meet obstacles some of the opposition groups, to make conditions that are contrary with regard to the principles of peaceful settlement. There remains the problem of separating terrorist organizations from the moderate opposition. In this regard, our vision for the future continuation of the conflict parties and intermediaries in the framework of the aforementioned three areas, aimed at stabilizing the situation in the country.

5.CONCLUSION

In the settlement of the Syrian conflict, it is important to reduce the risks and negative consequences, which may lead taken by the parties. It is important to deepen the dialogue of the authorities of Syria and the opposition by mutual concessions aimed at achieving national reconciliation. Promotion of the peace process will be determined by the political will and desire of the parties to resolve the existing contradictions and conflicts. Building a dialogue on this basis will make the negotiation process more pluralistic, the relationship of the parties is transparent and will create prerequisites to develop a mutual agreement for a political settlement.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author confirms that the submitted data does not contain conflict of interests.

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