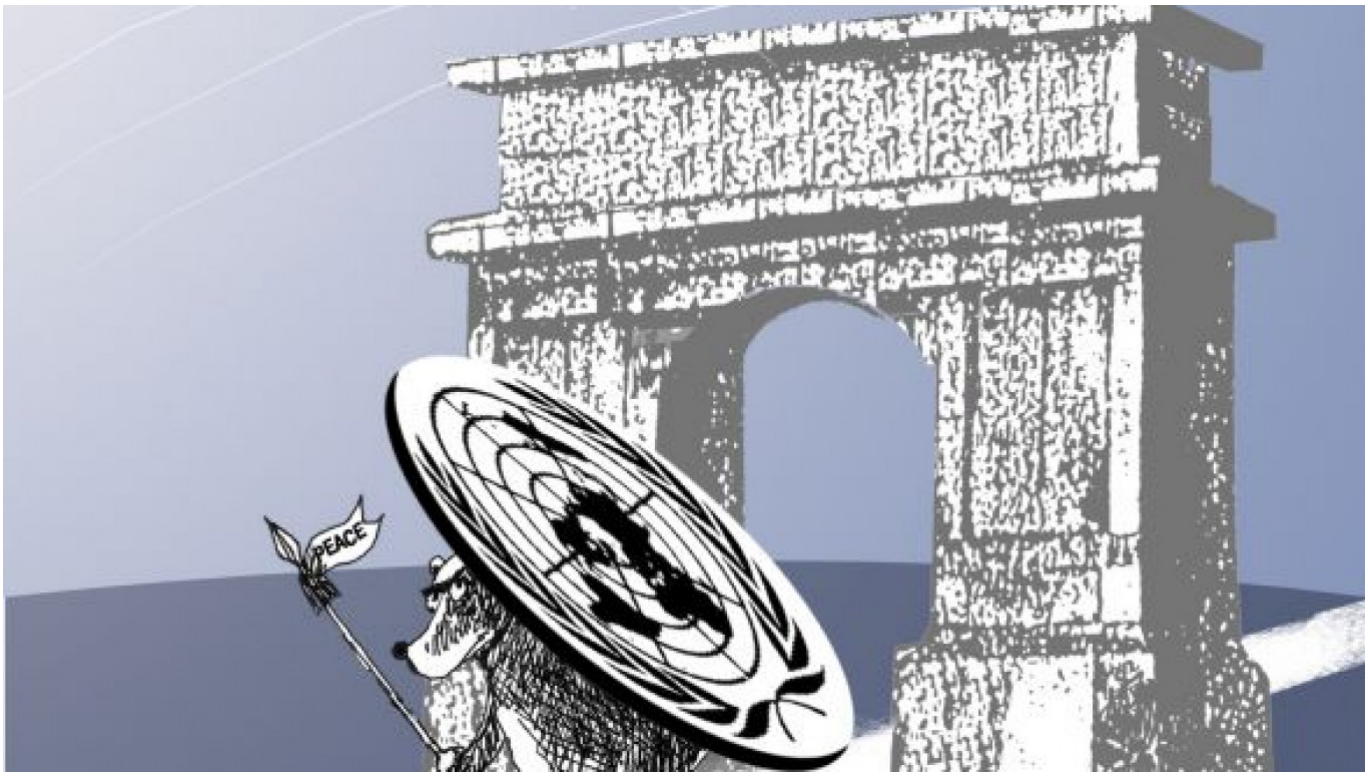
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Russia Must Stop U.S. Aggression

By Sergei Markov

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Russia's dream is coming true: The peace-loving people of the world support Moscow's plan for resolving the Syrian crisis. What's more, Group of 20 member states have split into two camps. The majority, headed by President Vladimir Putin, favor a peaceful resolution and the minority, led by U.S. President Barack Obama, advocate military intervention. The Russian plan has the advantage of thwarting the West from bombing Syria, reducing the number of chemical weapons in the world and preventing Islamic extremists from coming to power in Damascus. Russia has no vested interests in Syria, but it does have principles that it is upholding with firm determination. And amidst the growing chaos in the world, this turns out to be a winning strategy.

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Most important, everything must conform to the framework of international law. This is not only a matter of respecting the law, but also a means of curbing the ambitions of NATO and the U.S. In this way, a temporarily weakened world power appeals to the law to contain the actions of a rival that is, at least for now, more powerful. And that is achieved by strengthening the authority of the United Nations. All foreign actions against Syria must be approved by the UN Security Council.

Above all, we must avoid war at all costs, a conviction born of Russia's suffering through the terrible war with Adolf Hitler. But Moscow has become especially firm on its anti-war principle during the last 10 years after seeing how readily the U.S. and NATO resort to military force. All U.S. military interventions over the past decade have led to negative results. These bombings deliver blows against not only the targeted countries but against the entire world order, as well.

Another principle is that the world community must respect the sovereignty of states. We must give each state the right to decide its own destiny. And the Syrians should be given the chance to negotiate peace and compromise. Russia defends its own sovereignty in the same way.

Another important principle is that the U.S. lied to Russia concerning Libya. Russia supported a no-fly zone, but not a massive bombing campaign and the overthrow of the regime. Our Western partners lied to Russian diplomats and then-President Dmitry Medvedev, an idealist who sincerely wanted Russia to be part of a united front with Western states. But in place of a united front, Russia was lied to and made party to an unauthorized use of force.

Moscow wants to avoid creating the military and political conditions in which jihadi can thrive, and which would prompt them to send militants from Iraq, Libya or Syria into Russia to continue their jihad. Confrontations with radical jihadi only tend to strengthen them. Russian analysts are convinced that Islamic extremists have become the dominant force among the Syrian rebels and that destabilizing actions by the West may let them seize power.

Russia is also opposed to the overthrow of governments. By contrast, the West works deliberately toward that goal, using a combination of soft power, like color revolutions, and hard power in the form of direct or threatened military intervention. This has been the case in Serbia, Georgia, Lebanon, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. Who will be next? Belarus? Russia? That is why it is important that those advocating the overthrow of foreign governments pay the highest possible price for their actions and become mired down far away from Russia's borders.

The West has lost its moral legitimacy in the eyes of Russian leaders and public opinion. Its lies concerning Iraq, South Ossetia and Syria make it impossible for Russia to expect that

the West's actions will be bound by any moral constraints or common sense. After all, they are strengthening their enemy, the jihadi, with their own hands. Many believe that the West is on a suicidal path toward the end of its civilization.

Chemical weapons were used in Syria, but by whom? Given the fact that the Syrian army is vanquishing the rebels, why would Syrian President Bashar Assad use chemical weapons? To do so on the very day that international inspectors arrived in Syria would make no political sense. Yet Russia is expected to take the word of the West that this is what happened, despite the fact that ample evidence indicates anti-government forces staged a provocation on Aug. 21. The West is unwilling to even discuss that, and it continues to block discussion of clear evidence that rebels used chemical weapons back in March.

That is why many observers believe that the U.S. and NATO are deliberately falsifying the facts, just as they did on the eve of the invasion of Iraq, intent on pressuring the international community and crushing Syria without regard to anyone or anything else. Why is Washington so persistent in its anti-Syria policy? Why is Obama willing to commit political suicide over Syria? A possible explanation is that he has become a hostage to his previous mistake of supporting the Syrian rebels and now cannot admit that they used chemical weapons. He spoke of a red line and fell hostage to his promises. What's more, any war against Syria means war against Iran, a regime that Washington has long dreamed of overthrowing.

Many observers also believe that Washington has fallen too heavily under the influence of Saudi Arabia, a regime that wants to depose Assad as a secular military dictator that the Wahhabist monarchy has feared for decades. In Syria, Sunni-dominated Riyadh is waging battle against the Shiites and a proxy war against Shiite Iran. The problem is that the war between the Sunnis and the Shiites has the potential to destabilize the entire region for decades, even possibly spreading to Europe and Russia.

Could Washington bomb Syria even after the fiasco with the Iraqi invasion? Yes, because the U.S. has not stopped talking of intervention even after the Russian peace initiative and its proven incapability of garnering support for its policies from Congress, public opinion or its NATO allies. The U.S. will coerce others into lending support, just as it did when it was discovered that Baghdad did not possess chemical weapons.

The Russian response to a U.S. missile strike against Syria would be asymmetrical. The Russian army would not go anywhere. Moscow would deploy its best air defense systems to the likely targets of any future U.S. strikes, starting with Iran. Moscow would also take the opportunity to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, an agreement that many consider disadvantageous for Russia and one that it was pressured into signing in 1987.

In addition, Russia will move to rapidly upgrade its army with the latest weapons systems and reconstruct its military-industrial complex because such policies by the U.S. and its NATO allies will inevitably lead to a new war that is likely to expand in scope.

At the very least, Russia must have a strong army to avoid getting drawn into such a major new war. Ideally, Russia would work to prevent any actions that could undermine the current situation and set the world into a downward slide toward such a large-scale war. This is

primarily what Putin is seeking to accomplish in the Syrian crisis, and he has the support of public opinion not only in Russia but in most countries of the world — including NATO member states.

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