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Russian troops in Syria: What are they doing there?

9/7/2015



The rumors about Russia's participation in the Syrian conflict appeared in the press and social media several days ago. According to Ukrainian media outlets, Russia has already lost more than a hundred soldiers in Syria.

Needless to say that the Ukrainian media today are an endless source of fakes, especially when it goes about Russia. However, where did the rumor of the Russian troops in Syria come from?

The rumor started with a few "anonymous Israeli sources." "According to unconfirmed reports that leaked to Israeli press, under the pretext of resuming suspended supplies of Russian aircraft to Syria, a squadron of Russian aircraft was deployed at an air base near Damascus."

"Unconfirmed leaked reports in the Israeli press" is, of course, a new genre, and maybe even a new kind of journalism.

The supplies of Russian military hardware to Syria is an "open secret." That is, Russia has never made a secret of those supplies, and the Russian Foreign Ministry has made quite a number of statements about it. Russia supplies weapons to Syria to assist the country in the struggle against terrorism. Everything is being done by mutual agreement legally, within the framework of international agreements.

The British media took up the rumor of the Russian troops in Syria. British publications distributed a video of alleged Russian troops taking part in combat actions on BTR-82a armored vehicles. The video was of very dubious quality, along with the Russian-language audio track.

Russian bloggers swallowed the bait from British tabloids. Some of them (Ruslan Leviev, for example) published an investigation report complete with photos and screenshots from military social networks, finally concluding that there were Russian troops in Syria.

Well, there are Russian troops in Syria, because someone has to maintain Russian military hardware and teach Syrian military men how to use and handle the equipment.

The blogger concluded his report with the following: "Based on the above, our team believes that the group of Russian naval infantry in Syria is protecting and reinforcing a base in Tartus and defending an air base near Latakia. We believe that the group does not take part in combat actions, although we believe that Russian military equipment does take part in the fighting."

Deploying hardware in Syria is legal. The presence of operating personnel for this hardware is legal and required as well. All that is called "international efforts to combat terrorism."

All of a sudden, Ukrainian media came up with a report about 103 Russian military men who were killed in the fighting in Syria. Freelance adviser to the Minister of Information Policy of Ukraine, Alexander Briginets, making references to "anonymous sources," stated that there are recruiters among terrorists, who recruit people for army service in Syria.

At the same time, as it turns out, a little more than a hundred soldiers were indeed killed in the fighting in Syria, but they were Syrian, not Russian military men. Interestingly, the information about the Syrian military can be found on Press TV following the link from Ukrainian publications.

What was the point of the campaign? Quite possibly, the "Russians in Syria" rumor was started to give US Secretary of State John Kerry a reason to speak about the threat of the escalation of the Syrian conflict in a telephone conversation with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov. The buildup, if real, "could further escalate the conflict, lead to greater loss of innocent life, increase refugee flows and risk confrontation with the anti-ISIS Coalition operating in Syria," Kerry told Lavrov in a phone conversation.

This is another attempt to accuse Russia of aggression and war-flaming. Is the West going to blame Russia now for NATO's failure in the regulation of the Syrian conflict? Noteworthy, the weapons of ISIS fighters came straight from the United States.

Still, the reaction from the US State Department in the form of one phone call from Mr. Kerry does not seem resolute. This may suggest that US officials realize their defeat in the region. At the same time, they will do everything possible to avoid responsibility for the bloodbath in Syria.