

Russian Diplomat's Bombshell Disclosure

by Alexander Mercouris via claire - RI *Tuesday, Feb 16 2016, 8:04pm*

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Alexander Yakovenko, Russia's ambassador to Britain, dropped something of a bombshell on Monday, though one that has gone completely unnoticed.

In a piece in the print edition of the London Evening Standard defending Russian policy in Syria he made the following extraordinary disclosure:

"Last summer we were told by our Western partners that in October Damascus would fall to IS (ie. the Islamic State - AM).

What they were planning to do next we don't know. Probably, they would have ended up painting the extremists white and accepting them as a Sunni state straddling Iraq and Syria".

The summer - when these conversations between the Western powers and the Russians allegedly took place - was the time when the US was in discussions with Turkey and Jordan about setting up a no-fly zone and safe havens in Syria.

I discussed in this article how "no-fly zone" is today simply a euphemism for a US bombing campaign.

What Yakovenko is therefore in effect saying is that the US was planning in the summer to start a bombing campaign to overthrow the government of Syria in the knowledge that this would result by October in the victory of the Islamic State and its capture of Damascus.

Russia Insider has previously explained that it was to stop the US proclaiming a no-fly zone - i.e. commencing a bombing campaign aimed at overthrowing the Syrian government - that Russia intervened in Syria.

The fact Yakovenko says the US told the Russians this would result in the Islamic State capturing Damascus by October explains why the Russians felt they had to act as they did.

Is Yakovenko however telling the truth?

The first thing to say is that the British and US governments have not denied what he is saying.

That however is not conclusive. It is not difficult to see why the British and US governments might think that in light of the incendiary nature of what Yakovenko is saying denying it would simply give his comments more publicity if they denied them and that the better approach is silence.

If so, then the fact Yakovenko's comments have been almost entirely ignored shows this approach has worked.

Is Yakovenko however senior enough to know the details of the discussions that took place in the

summer between the Russians and the Western powers as he says?

The answer to that question is almost certainly yes.

Though London is no longer the most important diplomatic posting for a Russian ambassador in Western Europe, it remains an important posting, and any official appointed to be Russia's ambassador to Britain is by definition a senior official whom Moscow will ensure is kept well-informed.

If there were discussions of the sort Yakovenko says, he would almost certainly have been fully briefed about them.

What Yakovenko says is also consistent with things we know.

In the summer - having just captured Palmyra - the Islamic State was on a roll, making it not implausible that it might reach Damascus by the autumn.

The Syrian army in the meantime had suffered a succession of heavy defeats, and had been forced to withdraw from Idlib province.

In light of all this, in the context of a US bombing campaign, it is not implausible the US was telling the Russians in the summer that the Islamic State would seize Damascus by October.

As for the US's discussions about setting up a no-fly zone and safe havens, there was nothing secret about those, and they were openly acknowledged.

Why however would the US tell the Russians that they expected the Islamic State to seize Damascus by October?

That is not a difficult question to answer.

No-one in the early summer thought there was any likelihood the Russians would intervene militarily in Syria. The US probably thought it was not risking anything by telling Moscow its military plans and what their likely consequences would be.

Probably what the US expected was that the threat of a bombing campaign leading to the seizure of Damascus by the Islamic State would terrify Moscow and persuade the Russians to force Assad to stand down, which has been the US objective all along.

In that case the US seriously underestimated the Russians' resolve and their willingness to act to prevent what the US was threatening from coming to pass.

Overall Yakovenko's disclosure makes sense, and is therefore probably true.

What it shows is how reckless the US's Syrian policy had become.

At the very time the US was pretending to fight the Islamic State it was in fact preparing steps that it knew would facilitate its victory.

Even if this was intended as a diplomatic play it was an extraordinary thing to do.

The families of US victims of jihadi terror would surely feel betrayed if they were ever find out about it, whilst it is not difficult to imagine the consternation and recriminations in Washington when the Russians unexpectedly pre-empted the US strategy by intervening in the way they did.

As for the people of Damascus - spared not just US bombing but rule by the Islamic State - and the people of Europe - who would have faced a far bigger refugee flood if what Washington was telling the Russians had come to pass - they both have reason to be grateful to the Russians for making sure that things turned out otherwise.

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