

Supplement

GEOSTRATEGIC PULSE

at No 257,258 - 20 April 2018



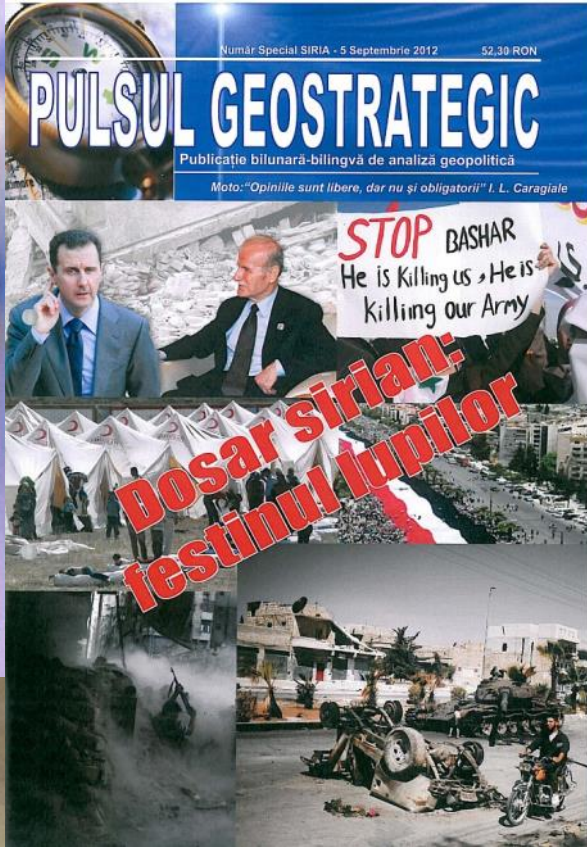
**THE USA AND THE SYRIAN CRISIS
SANCTIONS, WARNING, SMART MISSILES. AND THEN?**



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la Nr. 112, 20 Decembrie 2011

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THE USA AND THE SYRIAN CRISIS
SANCTIONS, WARNING, SMART MISSILES. AND THEN?

GEOSTRATEGIC PULSE
For compliance
Ambassador prof. Dumitru CHICAN

An ashen "war diary"

In the seven years that elapsed since the turbulences and the Syrian civil war broke out, the United States of America's position witnessed a long series of changes, adjustments and reconfigurations towards the developments of the crisis in this country – ruled both during Barack Obama's mandate and Donald Trump Administration – by the sinuous American interests in the Middle East area, its relations with the Russian Federation and the political and military developments on the Syrian domestic front especially after September 30th, 2015 when Moscow inaugurated its direct armed intervention in this conflict with sub-regional geopolitical dimensions yet with geostrategic stakes of international amplitude.

For the historical and documentary interest, we register in what follows a chronological retrospect of the main moments that marked the interlinking between the United States and the Syrian crisis since 2011 up to now.

Sanctions and delegitimations

- **April 29th, 2011:** A month after the beginning of the peaceful protest manifestations that were met by force by the Syrian regime, Washington announced economic and other types of sanctions against a number of high officials, dignitaries and people close to the hierarchy of power in Damascus;

- **May 11th, 2011:** President Barack Obama requests Bashar Al-Assad to accept the setting up of a Provisional Council of Transition for reforms and for preparing new elections or, otherwise leaves the power. New economic and financial sanctions aimed directly at president Bashar Al-Assad are imposed;

- **July 1st, 2011:** By ignoring the diplomatic law, customs and norms, the American ambassador to Damascus, Robert Ford, met the demonstrators in Hama district, encouraged them and assured them of the United States' support;

- **August 18th, 2011:** The Barack Obama Administration together with the leaders of the European allied countries declared that president Bashar Al-Assad "lost his legitimacy" as head of state and demanded him to give up all his prerogatives;

- **October 24th, 2011:** The American ambassador to Damascus leaves Syria "for security reasons". Damascus recalls its ambassador accredited to Washington. Ambassador Robert Ford will pay numerous visits to Ankara where he had permanent meetings with the leaders of the Syrian opposition'

- **August 2013:** President Barack Obama renounces his intention of ordering military reprisal actions against the Syrian regime after the latter was accused of using chemical weapons against the civilian protesters in the town of Daraa, south of the country. Before that, Barack Obama warned repeatedly that the USA reserves its right to bomb Syria in case the Damascus regime crossed the "red line" of using chemical weapons against civilians. Barack Obama's decision of renouncing the reprisals intervened following the mediation offices carried out by the Russian Federation that resulted in the announcement of the Syrian government whereby it declared the readiness to destroy all chemical weapons in its possession.



"Bashar Al-Assad's leaving power is not any longer a priority"

- **March 2017:** Rex Tillerson, the new American Secretary of State in Donald Trump Administration, declared publicly that "it is the people of Syria only who decide Bashar Al-Assad's fate". In parallel, the USA's ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, declared that "her country changed its priorities in Syria and is not any longer interested in Bashar Al-Assad's leaving power". Four days later, ambassador Haley retracted on the previous declaration and stated at the UN that "the Syrian people do not want any longer Bashar Al-Assad's staying in power and do not accept his candidature for a new presidential mandate";

- **April 4th, 2017:** The White House accuses the Syrian regime of carrying out, the same day, a new attack with lethal gas against the locality Khan Sheykhoun, north-west of the country, killing 86 people. "Such abominable acts of Bashar Al-Assad's regime cannot be overlooked any longer", president Donald Trump declared;

- **April 7th, 2017:** Two American war navies in the Mediterranean launched 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles on the Shayrat military airfield, south of Homs. It was the first direct military attack carried out by the American army against bases of the Syrian regime;

- **February 2018:** A drone coming from Syria but under Iranian control was shot at the border area of the Israeli air space of the Golan Heights. In retaliation, the Israeli air forces bombarded several military locations on the Syrian territory. An Israeli F-16 jet was downed during that raid;

- **April 10th, 2018:** The United States accuses, once more, the Syrian regime of using chemical weapons in the Douma town area, east of Damascus, and Donald Trump vowed tough reprisals. It was the beginning of a new dramatic episode of the Syrian war.

The tempest preceding the cyclone

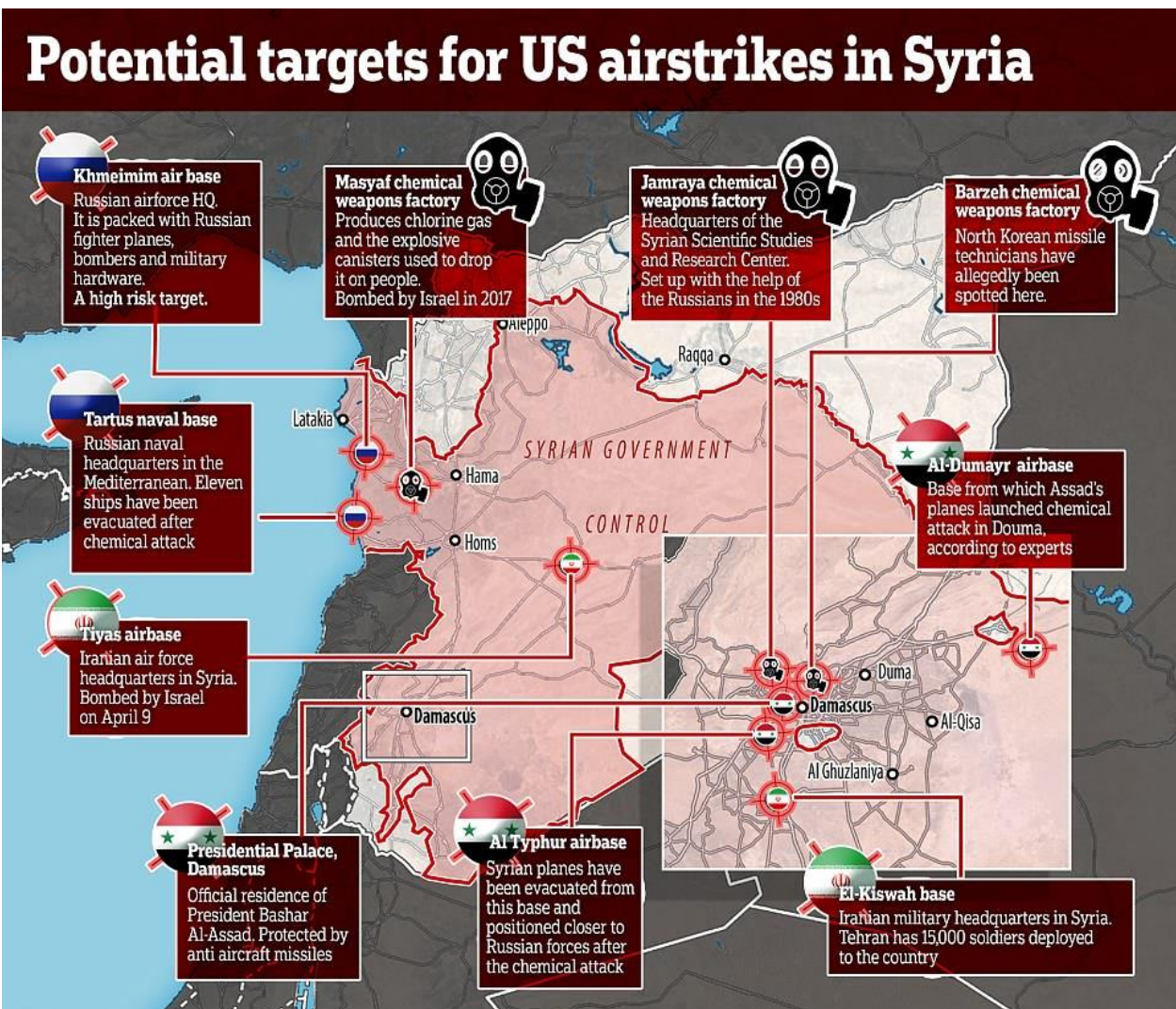
The first decade of April may be called one of the "war of resolutions" under the dome of the Security Council and of the feverish preparations for a war of the "smart missiles" between the United States, enthusiastically supported by Great Britain and France, on the one hand, and the Russian Federation, on the other. Once again, the world followed with mistrust and breathless the threatening noise of the ghost of a large-scale war with a duration and consequences difficult to foresee and easy to imagine.

On the night of April 10th, at the UN Security Council, the Russian Federation vetoed a draft resolution submitted by the USA in connection with the accusation brought to the Syrian regime of having used the chemical weapons and the international steps to be adopted after that. In retaliation, Washington and its western allies permanent members of the Council vetoed in their turn the adoption of two Russian drafts of resolutions proposing setting up of a neutral mechanism of investigating the case yet eluding any reference to sanctioning or condemning the Syrian regime. So, once the diplomatic instruments were paralyzed, the only possible and rational question both for the analysts and for the anonymous "public opinion" was not related to if the American military strike against the Syrian regime takes place or not, but when it will take place and what aptitude it will have. The so far tense climate entered an effervescent "dynamics of war" and the signals in this sense were as numerous as they were uneasy. Here there are some of them:

- The cancellation, by president Donald Trump, of the scheduled tour to the Latin-American continent as the leader of the White House preferred to stay with his advisors and generals for discussing... Syria;

- The cancellation, by Secretary of Defense James Mattis, of a long tour of information and documentation to several states south of the US border;

- The "militarization" of the conference rooms in the White House by bringing together high commanders, planners and military decision makers who, during marathon sessions,



discussed the actions options for punishing the Syrian regime, the nature and dimensions of the intervention, the targets which must be hit, the necessary forces etc.;

- Issuing the order that two destroyers with Tomahawk cruise missiles on board sail to Eastern Mediterranean, namely "Donald Cook" and "USS Porter", and the aircraft carrier "Harry Truman";

- The expeditious manner in which the French president Emmanuel Macron and the British prime minister Theresa May announced their readiness of participating to the anti-Syrian action planed by Donald Trump;

- As in all likelihood there was not much to do in Yemen, the Saudi monarchy didn't miss the beat and the roaming Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman offered their participation, the same "disciplinary" participation to Donald Trump's, his generals' and of his belicose adviser on National Security John Bolton's "anti-chemical" project. Nevertheless, the offer received promptly a less expected replica: the regime in Tehran announced that Saudi Arabia's joining the "triple alliance" directed by Donald Trump will be met by intense salvo of Iranian ballistic missiles on the Saudi territory!

- Israel either didn't miss the opportunity of being taken into consideration. If the anti-

Syrian operation takes place and if, in this context, Syria and Iran will carry out attacks aimed at the Jewish state, the latter will "crush the regime in Damascus" and will "apply a devastating blow to Iran".

"To be, or not to be"

The enumeration could continue and would make up a long inventory of ingredients necessary for triggering a war with inestimable dimensions and consequences.

Unfortunately, all this game with the world nations' nerves and fears suggests, in spite of its real dramatism, an inexcusable atmosphere of slapstick comedy whereby the heroes-Counts and mistresses, soubrettes, butlers and barbers with the sense of humour – are staging hyperbolic conspirations, revenges from behind the smoke screens and counterfeited letters of tardy love. President Donald Trump practices diplomacy on Tweeter and speaks of "nice, new and smart missiles" while showing his readiness of keeping in sylos the smart missiles if he is offered a "substantial compromise". He doesn't tell us what, how much or who is all about yet that doesn't hide the smell of blackmail of his messages sent on Twiter since the phone, be it the red one, has fallen into disuse. On the other side, Vladimir Putin resorts to a blonde's charms, Maria Zaharova, for conveying *urbi et orbi* his wise meditations and maxims on the world's peace – of a world the existing arsenald could turn it instantaneously and at any time in ashes.

Why do not the endlessly discontented Putin and Trump, the impetuous Macron, the elegant Theresa May and the custodian of the two holly mosques resort to reason they never cease to praise and to the simple initiative of asking the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), that has 192 member states, to proceed with a neutral, professional investigation on the ground so that, based on it, the decision makers on the Atlantic shore and on the Moscow River banks have at least their consciences reconciled before pushing the red buttons that trigerr the Apocalypse of the post-modern civilization?



To be, or not to be, that's the question.

From "very soon" to "not so soon", going through "there is no evidence"

After mysteriously threatening that an attack on Syria will take place "very soon", president Trump took a pause and used, like any American, the services provided by Twitter and offered himself an entertainment *break* with his partner of leading together a bicephalous world, Vladimir Putin, to whom he wrote verbatim on April 11th:

Russia vows to shoot down any and all missiles fired at Syria. Get ready, Russia, because they will be coming, nice and new and „smart“! You shouldn't partner with a Gas Killing Animal who kills his people and enjoys it.

April 11th, 2018 (Donald J.Trump @realDonaldTrump)

After "very soon", "48-72 hours" followed whereas the modern armadas and the world's chanceries moved on a war footing ready for the assault. And the Americans and other insomniac earthlings who woke up next day when the rooster crows wishing to know "how the war goes", they opened the Twitter oracle where they found another message from their president who, yes, he was there, smiling like a happy Mephistopheles as he shouted once more "the wolf, the wolf!" and the wolf didn't come. Here there is how the presidential Twitter spoke:

(I) never said when an attack on Syria would take place. Could be very soon or not so soon at all!! In any event, the United States under my Administration has done a great job of ridding the region of ISIS. Where is our „Thank you, America?“

12 of April 2018 (Donald J.Trump@realDonaldTrump)

A mere bluff? Pinocchio reloaded? Tactically maintaining the mystery so that the surprise of the outcome be as efficient as possible? As the present lines are written in parallel and in line with the events developments and the decision that sooner or later president Trump will have to make, a common sense prognosis is risky. However, let's note that general James Mattis, in his position of Secretary of Defense, was summoned by the Committee on Military Affairs of the American Senate and declared, the same day the "supreme commander" Donald Trump tweeted the above message that "*I don't have evidence* (o.n.) on the use of lethal gas in the April 1st attack on Douma, although there are numerous indications *in the mass-media and on social media* (s.n.) concerning the use of chlorine or sarin".

Face with president Donald Trump's surprising hesitations and when the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) decided to activate and send to Syria an investigating and inquiry team, general James Mattis's deposition (who could have spoken earlier for not leaving room to the alert atmosphere the entire world has been thrown in) is an embarrassing reminder of the circus of the Iraqi arsenals of WMD which inexistent... existence was used by George W. Bush Administration for invading Iraq exactly 15 years ago, on April 3rd. An inconvenient and telling coincidence!

If using (proven with irrefutable and neutral evidence) lethal gas is unacceptable and en-



tirely despicable, yet only through means authorized by the international law, the irresponsible war game and the egomaniac pride which brings an entire world on the brink of the apocalyptic precipice of extinction are as reprehensible acts as the acts of contempt and of agressing the tranquility and stability of all those living on planet earth.

Diplomatic reactions

With a few days delay after the "chemical event" of April 7th, the first diplomatic reactions emerged to the prospect of a military retaliation of the United States against the Syrian regime and among the first voices heard was that of the UN Genral Secretary, António Guterres, who addressed to the great players of the contemporary geopolicy, particularly to the United States of America and to the Russian Federation, a plea to restraint, caution and reason in approaching the complex Syrian file.

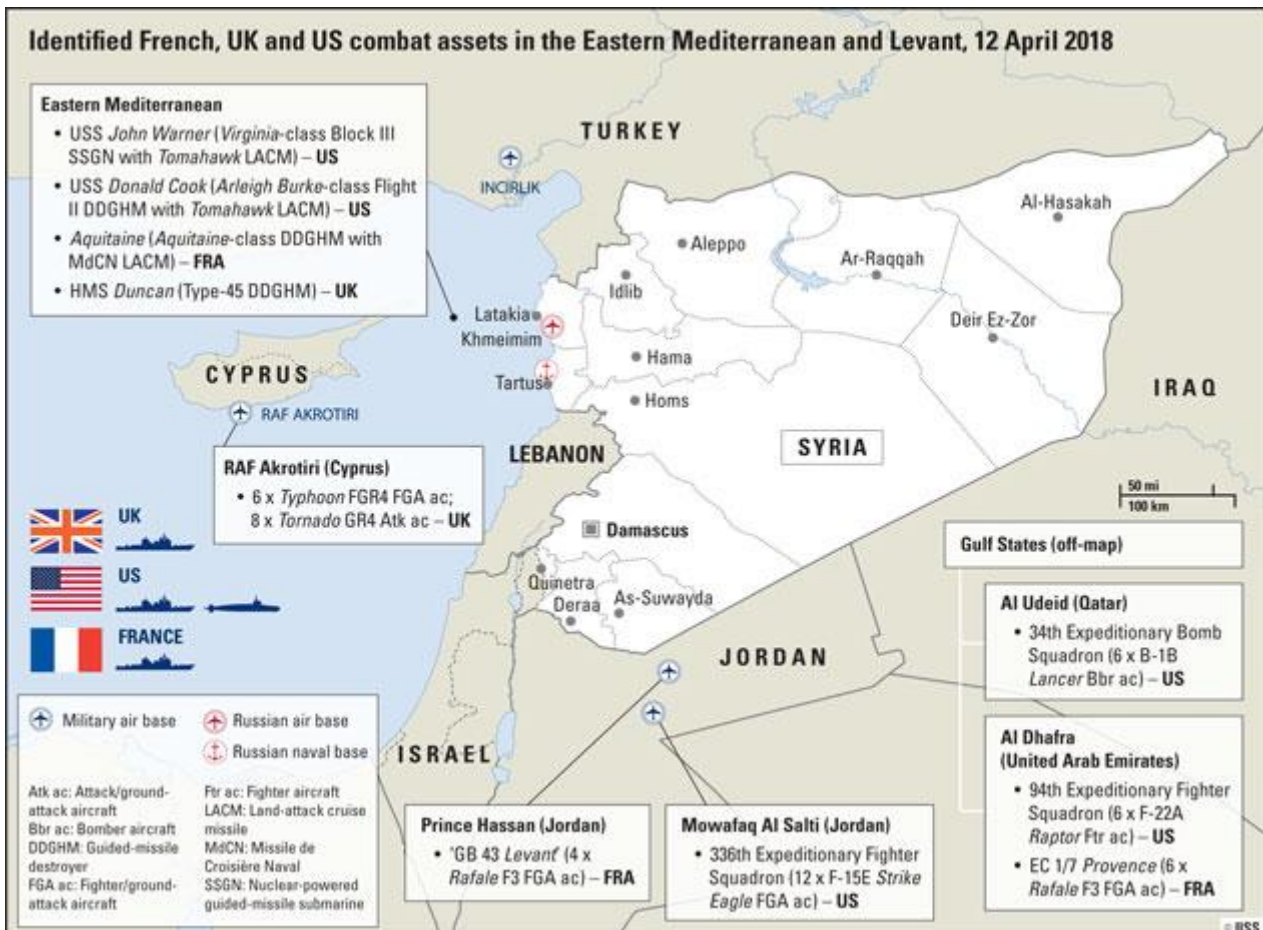
In Berlin, the chancellor Angela Merkel declared that Germany will not be involved in any form in the attack against Syria while in Paris, the president Emmanuel Macron made a step back and declared that France didn't made yet a firm decision concerning its possible participation to an anti-Syrian attack. On the other side of the English Channel, prime minister Theresa May still had difficult consultations within her cabinet with the nuance that, in a phone conversation on April 13th with president Donald Trump, she advanced the idea of the necessity of achieving an international framework to which the entire package of sanctions and punitive measures to be applied against Bashar Al-Assad's regime be circumscribed. On the other hand, Syria's ambassador to the United Nations, Bashar Al-Jaafari, gave assurances that his country will allow and facilitate the access of the investigation team of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to any location in Douma area, east of Damascus. On the other hand, Sweden submitted to the UN General Secretariat a draft resolution for sending to Syria of an international mission with the purpose of identifying the needed steps for doing away "once and for all" with all the mass destruction arsenals Syria might have.

No reaction from the League of Arab States was registeres as the League was bussy preparing its 28th summit scheduled to take place on April 15th in the Saudi town od Dhahran.

Will Donald Trump cross the rubicon?

For the time being, the Syrians are taking hectic and usual protection steps under such circumstances. Some Arab dailies disseminated already the news, unconfirmed by other sources, that president Bashar Al-Assad left the presidential palace on Mount Qasyoun and placed himself under the protection of the Russian allies in the region under their control, probably in the port town of Lattakia. Syrian opposition sources declared for "Al-Jazeera" that, under heavy joint Syrian-Russian protection, intense evacuations of military technique – aircrafts, helicopters, air surveillance equipment etc. towards the Russian air base in Hmeimin, south of Lattakia, or towards other places in the Russian controlled area such as the litoral strip or towards Aleppo and Palmyra towns etc. are taking place. Other strategic locations such as the headquarters of the National Defense Ministry, the Central Command, the Aviation Commandment, the Directorate of State Security etc. have been also evacuated. Several Syrian and Russian military vessels usually moored in Lattakia, Banias and Tartous ports were seen sailing off the ports towards high seas.

As far as the American operation in itself is concerned, if we quote president Donald Trump and his ambassador, Nikky Haley, "all options are open", both in what regard the duration of the attack and the objectives that will be selected as targets or the tactics the American attackers and their allies will resort to. What seems to be a certitude is the fact that once launched, the operation will have among its objectives the Syrian regime "de-chemization" and that of finally consecrating the separation of Donald Trump's political and strategic thinking from his predecessor Barack Obama's with regard to not only the approaches of the internal Syrian war, but also to other present or future America's mili-



tary involvements. It is what Donald Trump did.

The die has been cast and the rubicon crossed

This complicated and capricious foreplay of the conflict ended Saturday at dawn, April 14th, when the United States', Great Britain's and France's missiles and aircrafts attacked for an hour objectives considered to be linked to the chemical weapons field – installations, research centers, storage facilities situated in the areas of the capital or in Homs area. According to Syrian and Russian military sources, 105 missiles have been launched. It is estimated that the fire power engaged was twice as powerful as the one carried out by the USA in 2017 against the Shayrat military air base. At the end of the operation, the Pentagon announced it does not intend to carry out other attacks in Syria. The Russian Ministry of Defense announced that the salvos were not aimed in anyway at the military zones and infrastructures in the areas controlled by the Russian army on the litoral strip or around the perimeter of the Russian operated Hmeimim air base south east of Lattakia port.

In a first (unofficial) Russian reaction to the tripartite attack in Syria, the ambassador of the Russian Federation to Washington, Anatoli Antonov, assessed on social media that the "United States-led attack against Syria is an unacceptable offense to the address of the Russian president Vladimir Putin (!? – D.C.) and it will have serious consequences". "The United States, that have the biggest chemical arsenal in the world has no right to blame other states (of having such arms)", the Russian diplomat added.

Undoubtedly, there will be plenty of comments, analyses and evaluations in the coming days on the "tempest" that did not turn into a cyclone. Equally certain, the Syrian adventure of the "triple entente" Donald Trump – Theresa May - Emmanuel Macron will leave



behind quite important questions. To what extent was this attack generated by political calculations and to what extent can it be circumscribed to the personal vainglory impulses and to the malicious temptations of the accuse, denouncements and the insult invoked by ambassador Antonov? Has this attack succeeded in bringing to an end "once and for all" the Syrian complex of "red lines" that smells like sarin or chlorine? How will be the inter-linking between the Russian Federation and the United States (plus states pretending to be the support pillars of the European Union) from now on? During all the "foreplay" period of this episode, the Russian officials from Vladimir Putin to Serghei Lavrov and the Russian ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia warned that an American attack against Syria will have definite reprisals from Russia. From this perspective, should we expect a policy of reprisals between Trump Administration and Putin? How far, with what costs and with what results? And, not the least, did this episode open any path hidden or ignored so far for the return "for once and for ever" of peace to Syria and of Syrians to their homes and to the lost normality?

These are questions that should be answered not only through credible deeds but also "very soon".

What will follow?

It may be said that the western tripartite raid was a limited tactical operation both militarily and politically, with no connection with a strategic approach of the "Syrian issue" in the integrality of its political and moral meanings. We appreciate it was about a message addressed not so to president Bashar Al-Assad (accomodated otherwise in the former Syrian base Hmeimim which became a Russian dominion), neither to the Syrian people, but rather to Vladimir Putin – a message which, in the final analysis, did nothing but proved once more, if such were needed, that after seven years of war and devastating sufferings, Syria is but a testing ground of a new paradigm of the war between the powerful ones, on the one hand, and among the former and the small and helpless ones, on the other hand. A war in which the Syrians and Bashar Al-Assad's regime had and have no other role but of mere chess pieces and instruments used in others' horse-trading and interests.

The real sense of the attack was otherwise publicly defined by president Donald Trump himself as when announcing the decision of launching his "new and smart" missiles didn't say either "Bashar Al-Assad, be ready" or "Syria, be ready" but "Russia, be ready"!

And Russia got prepared. As a result, the public opinion was able to know the inventory of the missiles launched towards targets in "serviceable Syria" and carefully avoiding the territory of the "Russian Syria".



What will Vladimir Putin do? And what "serious steps" will he take? It is difficult to imagine that his generals will come with plans of armed retaliations against the American-British-French "conspiracy", yet as the revenge against the personal "insult" the ambassador Anatoli Antonov was speaking about is imperative, the "feuds" will presumably move onto the diplomacy perimeter. Namely, where there can be no winners and no defeated and where the war in Syria will have no prospect of coming soon to an end either.

*

ANNEX

Types of missiles used in the attack And the places they were launched from

On April 15th, immediately after the attack on certain targets in Syria stopped, The Pentagon went public with a communique offering details concerning the number of missiles, their types, the launching places and their geographical location, as follows.

1. From the Red Sea

- Battlecruiser and missiles carrier "USS Monterey": 30 Tomahawk missiles;
- Destroyer "USS Laboon" : 7 Tomahawk missiles.

2. From the north of the Arab Gulf

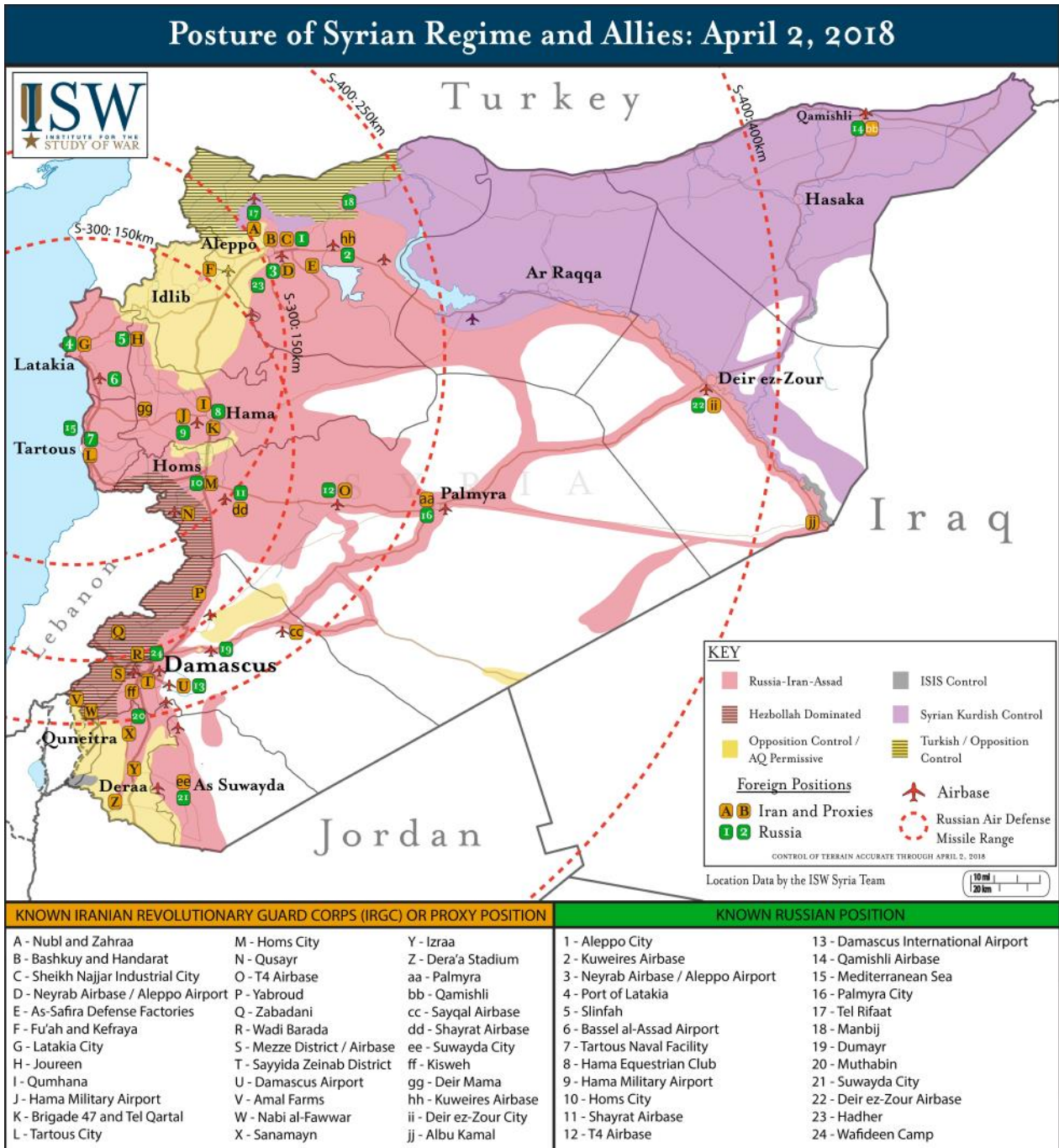
- Destroyer "USS Higgins": 23 Tomahawk missiles.

3. From Eastern Mediterranean

- Sumbarine "USS John Warner": 6 Tomahawk missiles;
- A french frigate: 3 "Scalp" missiles.

4. From the air:

- 2 American bombers B-1: 19 air-to-ground missiles of different types;
- Tornado and Typhoon British aircrafts: 8 air-to-groud „Storm Shadow" missiles;
- Mirage and Rafale: 9 "Scalp" missiles.





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“GEOSTRATEGIC PULSE” - founded by Corneliu PIVARIU in 2007

Bilingual monthly bulletin published by
INGEPO Consulting - Braşov
www.ingepo.ro; Ph: +4-0268 47 00 70

J08/2898/2006, CUI RO19298677/2006

Director and Editor-in-Chief: Corneliu PIVARIU
- member of IISS- London

Editorial, Considerations: Corneliu PIVARIU

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Translation from/in English: Prof. Mădălina GHEORGHECI;
Prof. Constanţa COSTESCU

Computer Editing: Ionuţ PARASCHIV

Printed at: S.C. YOLANS S.R.L.. Braşov

ISSN: 1843-701X

Cover: military technique©Getty Images

SUBSCRIPTIONS (one year - 12 issues)

PDF version by e-mail = 1.198,00 RON/ 239,50 Euro/ 299,50 USD

Print edition = 1.255,20 RON/314,00 Euro/ 390,00 USD

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