
INTRODUCTION

The Syrian city of Aleppo and the Iraqi city of Mosul became a symbol of the tragedy of hundreds of thousands of people and the barbarism of the 21st century. For several years, the names of these cities have been intrenching their positions in the global information space.



Aleppo before the war. By Peter Ushakov

Aleppo is the second largest city in Syria. Before the civil war, its population was about 2.3 million people (more than 10% of Syria's population). The city is considered one of the most ancient inhabited places on the planet. Before the war, it was the largest infrastructure, economic and logistics center, one of the key tourist attractions of the country. Numerous guests of the city admired its main symbol – the citadel of Aleppo, built in the 13th century, the Umayyad Mosque built between the 7th and 13th centuries, the church and school of Al-Shibani, which was completed in the 12th century, the baths of Hammam al-Nahhasin built in the 13th century. Now these and many other monuments of history and culture of Syria, enrolled on the UNESCO World Heritage List, have been plundered and destroyed.

During the civil war, a little more than a half of Aleppo was occupied by militants of various terrorist groups – followers of the Al-Qaeda ideology – and assimilated with them so-called 'moderate opposition' detachments and criminal gangs who looted, robbed and exacted the population. The longer this part of the city was in the hands of bandits, the

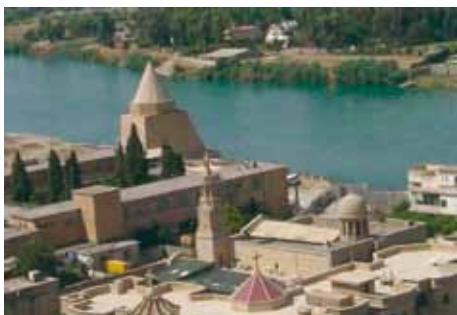


Aleppo in 2016. Source: BBC

more it plunged into the Middle Ages time, where lawlessness and arbitrariness were dominating.

The operation for the city liberation began in the summer of 2016. The government forces and their allies from Russia, Iran and Lebanon managed to dislodge the militants from the northern districts of Aleppo after furious fighting, take control of Castello road and to box the remainder of terrorists in the city's eastern districts. This part of Aleppo was of strategic importance for them, becoming a kind of a capital.

The liberation of the eastern Aleppo took a protracted nature. The proximity of Turkey enabled constant supply of the militants with weapons, ammunition and food. Nevertheless, on December 15, 2016, Aleppo, after the furious battles, was completely liberated from terrorists.



Mosul before the war

Photo of <https://www.webturizm.ru>

Coincidentally, Mosul is also the second most populous city in Iraq, just like Aleppo in Syria. Archaeological researches indicate that the surroundings of Mosul were inhabited 8,000 years ago.

Before the seizure by the DAESH (ISIS) detachments (a terrorist organization banned in the Russian Federation) in 2014, approximately 1.5 million people lived in the city. It was also an im-

portant economic and trade center of Iraq. It is located next to the most important oil fields of the country and near the pipeline exporting oil to Turkey.

Before being captured by the DAESH forces, Mosul was considered the center of the Assyrian Church of the East. Several ancient Assyrian churches and the graves of a number of Old Testament Prophets, including Jonah, were located in the city. Now, jihadists have destroyed these and many other historical sites, including the world-famous archaeological museum in Mosul with the famous collection of Assyrian and Parthian antiquities, the tomb of the prophet Jonah, the ancient Mar Behnam Monastery built in the 4th century, and historical Shiite mosques.

Both in Aleppo and Mosul thousands of people were harmed by the present-day barbarians. Mass demonstrational executions took place almost every day. As in the Middle Ages, the slave trade returned to the city. People were starving. The city was sorely lacking potable water. Epidemic broke out. Due to the lack of qualified medical personnel and medicaments, the mortality among the civilian population increased dramatically, especially among

children. The population was under the reign of bandits, who raised either green or black flags of renegades and who used to kill massively and mercilessly not only Christians, Yazidis, Jews, but even faithful Muslims. In fact, everyday life turned into a battle for survival for the ordinary residents of Aleppo and Mosul.

These are, perhaps, some similarities of the cities' tragedies.



Mosul before the war

Photo of <https://www.webturizm.ru>

The difference between them lies in the methods of liberating the cities, in the actions of the Russian military in Aleppo and armed formations of so-called international coalition in Mosul, in attitude towards the people suffering from the fratricidal war.



Photo: Reuters

The review was made on the basis of personal observations of the staff of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences during duty travels to the Middle East in 2014–2017 (including employees who many times worked in other “hot spots” of the planet), conversations with representatives of the Iraqi army, the Peshmerga of Iraqi Kurdistan, the Syrian government army, the moderate Syrian opposition, Syrian Kurds from the People's Self-Defense Forces.

The official reports of the Russian Ministry of Defense were also used while making the review along with the reports of various international organizations, media publications and blogs, as well as information from foreign partners of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, who care for the tragedy of the people of Syria and Iraq, and who are capable of soberly assessing facts, unlike politicians.

The review does not pretend to be the ultimate truth in its content. The employees of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences are human beings, who are not immune to the mistakes. Over the time, when the confidential documents become available to the public, the events

that have occurred in Aleppo and Mosul will be assessed in more detail, precisely and objectively.

RUSSIA COMES TO HELP

Russia in the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR) acts on the consent of the legitimate authorities. It is the fundamental difference between the presence on the territory of the country of the Russian military and the military of the US-led international coalition.

If the Russian army had not interfered in the country's events in September 2015, the days of Syria as a state would be numbered. By that time, the government forces had considerably lost their combat capability. Most of the best-trained officers of the Syrian government army died in battles. The impoverished and exhausted units, under the terrorists' strikes, left one area after another with no resistance.

Russian military specialists made a substantial contribution in reversing the situation on the front line. They were sent almost to all troops of the government army, down to battalions. Without substituting Syrian commanders, Russian military specialists assisted them in organizing reconnaissance, operations command and control, and comprehensive force sustainment. Even the first surgical airstrikes of the Russian Aerospace Forces improved the combativity of the Syrian military, allowed them to switch from passive defensive fighting to offensive in several directions at once. Almost all operations conducted by government forces in Aleppo, Palmira, Latakia mountains, Daraa and Damascus provinces were planned, prepared and implemented under the guidance of the Russian military advisers.



Su-25 attack planes of the Russian Aerospace Forces on combat mission

The great contribution was made by the Russian technical specialists. They organized the repair and restoration of weapons, military and special equipment damaged by militants. Hundreds of tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, armored personnel carriers, artillery weapons, missile systems and thousands of small arms were repaired. Thanks to the Russian military specialists, the combat capability of the artillery and missile forces of the Syrian army was restored.



Source:
twitter.com / @MauriceSchleepe

the country. For example, in June 2016 UN trucks were able to deliver a humanitarian cargo to Syrian opposition to the suburb of Damascus – Darayya, exclusively with the help of the Russian military.



Source: <https://mediarepost.ru>

ing that the most important is that the people in the Russian military uniform became a symbol of hope for the ordinary Syrians and made them believe that there was the force capable of stopping the lawlessness and the terror that lasted for many years. When talking to the representatives of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the residents of the eastern quarters of Aleppo and the Sheikh Maqsood district, mainly populated by Kurds, often spoke warmly of Russian military police patrolling the streets of the city.

The Russian military, at the risk of their own lives, sometimes incurring losses from the terrorist fire, starting from the first day of their presence in Syria provide humanitarian aid to the local population not dividing them by nationality and religion. They ensure the passage of UN humanitarian convoys to the occupied areas of

At present, the humanitarian element of the Russian forces activity in Syria has come to the fore. The Center for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides (CROS) of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, established on February 22, 2016, as of early May 2017 conducted 1,152 humanitarian actions, in which nearly 2,000 tons of food, medicines and essentials were delivered to civilians.

What is behind these, at first glance, small figures? First of all, the saved lives of children, women and the elderly. Without derogating the merits of representatives of other countries that also came to the aid to Syria, it's worth noting

On a regular basis, the CROS provides passage of UN humanitarian convoys to areas held by the opposition. With the assistance of the Russian Center for Reconciliation of Opposing Sites, humanitarian aid from Belarus, Serbia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan (hundreds of tons of cargo) was successfully delivered and distributed. The humanitarian activities of the Russian military are transparent, open to public and targeted. The entire process of humanitarian assistance is photo- and video-recorded, reports are published daily on the website of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation.



Source: syriahr.com

Humanitarian aid (including that within the UN World Food Program – from April 10, 2016) is regularly delivered and parachuted by a Russian company's lift aircraft with technical and logistic assistance of the Russian Aerospace Forces to the city of Deir ez-Zor besieged by the Islamic State groups.

With the help of the Russian military, 1,470 Syrian settlements joined the armistice process, and 207 opposition militant groups declared their readiness to fulfill the conditions for the cessation of hostilities. In addition, as a result of the painstaking work of the Russian military, more than 3,700 militants laid down their arms¹. It means that at least this number of arms stopped carrying death to people.

Currently, the Center's efforts are focused on ensuring the observance of the hostilities cessation regime introduced in Syria under the guarantees of Russia, Turkey and Iran.

In general, thanks to the efforts of the Russian side, not only single settlements, but entire districts join the process of reconciliation in Syria. Under the guarantees of the Russian side, it became possible to organize the interaction between the government units and several moderate opposition groups in fighting terrorists of the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda structures.



Source: Gazeta.ru

¹ Data as of April 2017



Source: <https://mediarepost.ru>

In terms of returning peace to Syria, a significant role is played by Russian sappers and the sappers of the Syrian army trained by them. Moreover, among the neutralized munitions – starting from small arms, hand grenades, rockets, mines – there are many items manufactured in the US and NATO countries¹.

The architectural and historical complex, the city and the airport of Palmyra were successfully demined for the second time. As of May 1, 2017, Russian sappers cleared 5,311 hectares of the territory, 15,720 buildings and constructions, 1,166 kilometers of roads. There are tens of thousands of defused explosive objects.

¹ American and German Munitions Found in Aleppo by Russian Sappers. 21st Century Wire. 2016. December 28. - <http://21stcenturywire.com>.

LIBERATION OF ALEPPO

The main difference between the liberation of Aleppo and the liberation of Mosul is that it took place against the background of the Western hysteria about war crimes allegedly committed by Russia and the Bashar al-Assad regime, and the need to put an end to it. It suffices to look at the headlines of most of American and European newspapers, full of breathtaking catchy words: “The ‘rain’ of bombs to break Aleppo” (Le Monde); “Putin is playing by Grozny rules in Aleppo” (Foreign Policy), “Surrender and you can eat again: Aleppo on the brink” (The Washington Post), “Putin and Assad could face justice for war crimes in Syria” (The Washington Post).

The major Western TV channels – BBC (UK), CNN (USA), France 24 (France) – were virtually all day long showing the stories devoted to Aleppo. The consequences of the battles were the main topic for the ‘talking heads’. Obligatory for demonstration were the city ruins along with killed and wounded civilians, but nobody mentioned that the most of the destruction and casualties were caused by terrorists, who fired from improvised “hellfire” mounts.



“Hellfire” mount
Source: <http://1smiru.ru>

The reason for this hysteria lies on the surface: the beginning of the process of national reconciliation in Syria and the culmination of the battle for Aleppo – the most important economic and political center of Syria, the crossroads of the key trade routes – turned out to be interconnected. The reconciliation could put an end to the hopes of forces that were looking to turn this country into a ‘second’ Libya or Iraq, an oasis for international terrorism. Their plans did not include the liberation of Aleppo, as the return of control over the city was to become the key to resolving the Syrian confrontation and launching a political dialogue.



middle East in general and in Syria in particular. All its attributes were obvious: the influence targets (world public opinion, individual state and political figures in various countries of the world, diplomatic corps representatives, militaries, special service agents, scientists and political analysts) were clearly defined, a broad framework of psychological warfare was formed, which comprised prominent and iconic figures, including leaders of some states was created. To discredit the policies of Russia and its leadership, all methods and techniques of psychological warfare were used: blatant disinformation of the world community, manipulation of public opinion, substitution of concepts and direct forgery, dissemination of rumors. It is worth noting that certain officials from international organizations, public politicians and employees of diplomatic and military agencies of several countries actively participated in it, completely unashamed¹.

The main theses actively pushed into the information space from the tribunes of international organizations, from the pages of newspapers, from TV screens, discussed in the blogosphere and distributed in social media, did not vary too much. There was no clear-cut evidence. Instead, there were references to some impersonalized eyewitnesses called “human rights activists” in the West². Experts who have experienced many “flashpoints” have the impression that all these theses were developed in one center and sent out around the world as the ultimate truth.

To name but a few, the statements that Russian air force bombs Aleppo with obsolete weapons causing “so many casualties” among the civilian population. Unlike the Americans who use “only high-precision missiles” in Mosul. The Russians doom civilians to starvation by bombarding Syrian cities and obstructing access of humanitarian aid, while in Mosul they allege everything is vice versa³.

¹ Russia offers brief pause in Aleppo bombing. The Guardian. 2016. October 17. - <http://www.theguardian.com>

² Bommentapijt op Mosoel. 2016. October 24. - <http://www.standaard.be>

³ Emma Lake. Guy Birchall. Vlad's Battle Why is Russia bombing Aleppo and which side is winning the battle for the Syrian city? The Sun. 2016. December 20. - <http://www.thesun.co.uk>

Western propagandists put particular emphasis on the alleged mass death of civilians in Aleppo as a result of bombing and assault strikes of Syrian and Russian air forces and random fire from heavy weapons. It was not mentioned at all that Syrian and Russian commanders had refused to employ aviation and heavy weapons in the city. Assault teams had to rely only on their own strengths, which explains the lingering nature of the warfare in dense urban area.

A lot of examples of bare-faced lie can be given.

At the same time, it is almost impossible to find in the Western media materials giving evidence how the Al-Qaeda and DAESH followers were deliberately and methodically destroying Aleppo for several years. Eyewitness reports and documentary evidence of extremist crimes are given in Annex 1.

The most terrible is that ‘zombifying’ the Western society sometimes was successful. Moreover, even very well-known and authoritative people fell for that lie.

Fortunately, the West turned out to have many clearheaded people feeling a sympathy for Russia, its foreign policy, international activities of the Russian President Vladimir Putin, and highly appreciating the efforts made by Russian diplomats and military personnel in Syria. Nevertheless, the employees of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences have repeatedly heard puzzled questions “Does Russia really violate human rights in Syria?” at international conferences and in conversations with foreign partners.

When the employees of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences started telling foreigners about the steps taken by Russia, both when liberating the economic capital of Syria, and settling the inter-Syrian conflict, the particular deeds of Russian diplomats and militaries, giving vivid examples, our partners admitted that they heard much of it for the first time. Recently, such case occurred in May 2017 at the informal meeting with young officers in a prestigious military educational institution of a NATO member country. Apart from the representative of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, an American journalist was taking part in the meeting. She literally climbed all over the eastern quarters of Aleppo immediately after their liberation and knows the true value of Western propaganda and its heralds working allegedly on the ground, such as the notorious “White Helmets”, and a number of other NGOs funded by the West and some Persian Gulf countries. She is a well-known expert on the Middle East. She is hard to obtrude someone else’s opinion and thus impossible to be suspected of links with the Kremlin. The interlocutors were literally shocked by her story, saying that it turned out that they were deliberately deceived by their own media.



“White Helmets”

the image of the “opposition” as fighters against the “bloody Assad regime”. Simultaneously, as follows from the leaflet of the Fastaqim Kama Umirt group (“Stay where you are told to”) affiliated with Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, the militants launched a campaign to recruit volunteers (Annex 2).

In order to retain civilians, extremists promised to provide them with humanitarian, medical and financial assistance. Those who intended to leave for safe areas were first intimidated by reprisals by the regime of Bashar al-Assad and then by the threats of physical violence. According to some information, all those who directly participated in the actions aimed at intimidating the civilian population were paid USD 200 by the leaders of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham.

Those of the civilians, who had money, could leave the eastern quarters of Aleppo after paying the terrorists. Exactions from people fleeing from war became a good source of income for extremists. According to moderate oppositionists, Muhammad Mashura, a former general of a Syrian special service, was directly involved in that.

Since the announcement of humanitarian break, the militants from Jabhat Fateh al-Sham shot to kill those who tried to escape from the eastern quarters of Aleppo. According to the representatives of the Syrian intellectuals feeling a sympathy to the moderate opposition, in Bustan al-Qasr area alone jihadists arranged eight sniper nests. On October 22, 2016, three families came under their fire, and, as a result, there were dead and wounded among them. The shooting was caught on video by the militants. There are many such examples.

According to the Syrian moderate opposition, there was a kind of coordination center with 20-30 active militants in each district. Jabhat Fateh al-Sham played the leading role among the extremist groups in eastern Aleppo. The above mentioned Fastaqim Kama Umirt group and Nour al-Din al-Zenki (Taufik Shihab al-Din was the commander; according to some sources, he was a former owner of a butcher shop, according to other sources, he was just a butcher) closely interacted with Jabhat Fateh al-Sham. According to repre-

In eastern Aleppo, the commanders of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (former Jabhat al-Nusra) and Ahrar al-Sham did everything to prevent the militants from other anti-governmental groups and civilians from escaping from the encirclement, since the latter were a ‘human shield’. Their mass escape could compromise

sentatives of the Syrian moderate opposition, Fastaqim Kama Umirt organized fanatics into a sort of retreat-blocking detachment.

Few people in the West know that the Russian militaries from the Center for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides were directly involved in arranging four humanitarian corridors for the population and two for the militants from eastern Aleppo and the online broadcast of the exit by CCTV cameras and unmanned aerial vehicles on the official website of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation. The openness was unprecedented.

According to the data confirmed by the United Nations, about 100,000 people left eastern Aleppo through the humanitarian corridors. About 30,000 of them left for Turkey and Idlib province controlled by jihadists, while the rest remained in the territory controlled by the Syrian government. As of the first ten days of May 2017, 14,949 families (65,661 people, including 38,578 children) returned to Aleppo.

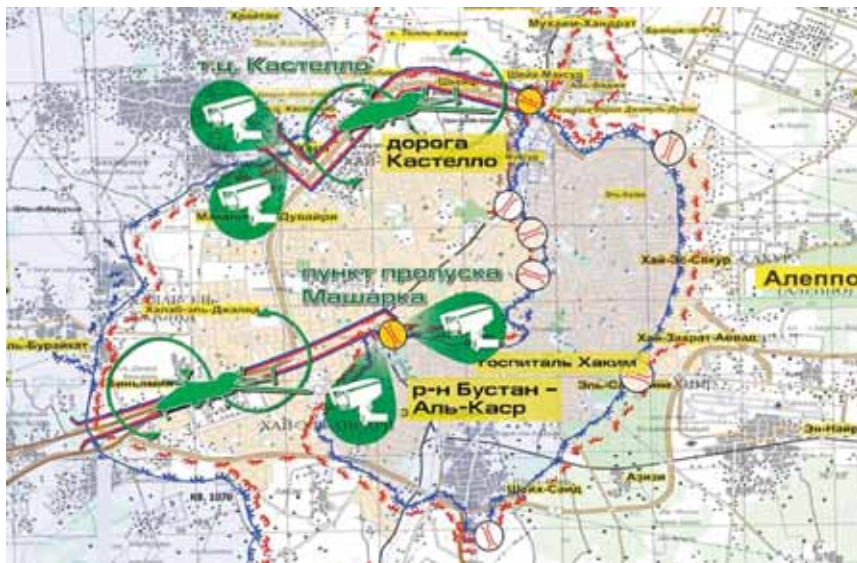


Buses near humanitarian corridors.

Source: <https://mediarepost.ru>

Russian officers escorted humanitarian convoys of the international organizations, participated in the deployment and taking care of refugees from the eastern part of Aleppo. The evacuation of militants and their supporters from the eastern part of the city was carried out under the direct control of the Russian military. It was the Russian side that had a decisive influence on a number of pro-government forces trying to delay the departure of militants from eastern Aleppo after they learned about the provocation where the buses in the towns of Fua and Kefraya were set on fire (they demanded the exchange of evacuation of eastern Aleppo for the evacuation of Fua and Kefraya).

Centers for accommodating refugees from eastern Aleppo were established in the settlements of Djibrin and Al-Mahallaj in the southeastern suburb of the city with the direct support of Russia. The Center for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides regularly delivered humanitarian aid there and, in general, facilitated the organization of its targeted delivery by international organizations to Aleppo. Prior to that, the humanitarian aid of international organizations used to fall into the militants’ hands. The rest of the population was starving. In order to survive and obtain food they had to make their relatives become terrorists.



In December-January 2016-2017, the Center for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides deployed six teams in Aleppo to provide the preconditions for a peaceful life and provide humanitarian aid to the population. Thus, their areas of responsibility covered the whole city. At that, one team operates in Sheikh Maksud district controlled by Kurdish formations.

As of May 1, 2017, the Center for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides teams conducted 406 humanitarian actions, having distributed 339.5 tons of humanitarian aid, primarily food, as well as clothing, blankets and some other essentials.



Source: <https://mediarepost.ru>

Russian military police units deployed in each of the city's sectors directly participate in the enforcement of law and order, prevention of conflicts. There is still a risk for the lives of the Russian servicemen: the western outskirts of Aleppo are constantly shelled by the Tahrir al-Sham groups (former Jabhat Fateh al-Sham / Jabhat al-Nusra, united with radical elements from other groups).

The Russian militaries played a significant role in the return of water supply to Aleppo. Its inhabitants were sorely lacking water. The pumping stations on the Euphrates River turned out to be in the hands of extremists, who used water against civilians in retaliation for defeat in combat, which was also noted by the UN and several international organizations¹.



Serviceman of Russian military police with children from Aleppo
Source: <https://mediarepost.ru>

Since December 3, 2016, a new page has been opened in the humanitarian component of the activities of the Russian military: a joint engineer detachment from the International Mine Action Center of the Russian Armed Forces assumed its mission in Aleppo. In February 2017, they were joined by Syrian sappers prepared by Russian specialists.

In the eastern part of the city, our sappers alone cleared more than three thousand hectares of land, more than a thousand kilometers of roads, about five thousand residential buildings and social facilities, including municipal institutions, schools, mosques, kindergartens and hospitals. In total, the Russian specialists in eastern Aleppo disarmed 40,000 explosive items, including more than 20,000 improvised explosive devices (Annex No. 3).



Russian sapper at work on Aleppo street.
Source: <https://mediarepost.ru>

It is worth noting that no other state or specialized international structure can boast of anything like that. The westerners do not deal with mine clearing themselves. The United States and other NATO countries send their sapper instructors to the territories out of the Syrian government's control and neighboring countries to train the Syrian opposition militants. Obvious-

¹ Daesh cuts off water supply to Syria's Aleppo. PressTV. 2016. December 31. - <http://www.presstv.ir>



Source: <https://mediarepost.ru>

training system, which involves a minimum of general knowledge and skills, focusing on standard practical exercises, the Aleppo training center provides general knowledge of the basics of demining and trains sappers to work in specific conditions, taking into account the particular approaches of terrorist



Russian military medics in Aleppo taking patients.

© RIA Novosti / Maxim Blinov



Field hospital of Ministry of Defense of Russian Federation in Aleppo

ly, the training is mainly focused on mine laying and explosive device manufacturing, since in cases when demining is required, the graduates of such 'classes' regularly die in explosions.

At the same time, in January 2017, the Russian military sponsored opening of a training center in Aleppo to train sappers of the Syrian army. Unlike the American Syrian army. Unlike the American groups to mining, techniques and types of explosive devices used by them. As of May 2017, the training center in Aleppo supervised by Russian specialists has already made two graduations of Syrian sappers.

Military medics play an important role in the humanitarian activities of the Russian army in Aleppo in particular and in Syria in general. They began to work in the city in the autumn of 2016. Over the course of their work, qualified medical care was provided to more than 23,500 patients. The Russian military medics often had to work under aimed fire of the militants.

At present, a field hospital of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation operates in Aleppo. Every day it provides help up to 300 city residents. As part of the hospital, there is a specialized

children's therapeutic department, which provides assistance to Syrian children, including the ones with injuries and wounds resulting from militants shelling.

In addition to the treatment of the wounded and sick, Russian military medics supplied the Syrian side with up-to-date medical equipment and technologies, and arranged supplies of consumables. The support is provided not only to the public health institutions. For instance, the hospital of Al-Hosn Antiochian Orthodox Church received a significant amount of medicines, dressing and medical equipment.

All those somehow contradicts the statements sounded in the West that the Russian military had deliberately created a humanitarian catastrophe by their actions in Syria. The information blockade of Russia, undisguised hypocrisy, a policy of double standards and outspoken Russophobia in certain Western circles had continued throughout the operation for Aleppo liberation.

TRAGEDY OF MOSUL



The first official statements of the official Baghdad concerning a possible operation for the liberation of Mosul emerged in January 2016. The then Minister of Defense Khaled al-Obeidi promised that the battle for the city would be a decisive stage in the fight against terrorists. The

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi had repeatedly stated that as well. However, for a long time it was not possible to agree which forces would participate in the battle for Mosul and, most importantly, how the city would be governed after its liberation. It was a key issue. The control over Mosul means control over the dams on the Tigris and, therefore, over the water reserves of this river, transport routes, pipelines, and hydrocarbon reserves around it.



US Air Forces attack plane at action course

and facilities. In other words, contrary to all canons of planning and conduct of combat operations, all plans were developed according to the principle “let’s get into the battle, and then we’ll see what happens”. That’s why in spite of expectations of the majority of Western experts a quick blitzkrieg aiming to stun the enemy did not work out.

The offensive was rather developing according to the canons of operations of the Second World War with the massive propaganda support by Western and regional media. Everyone remembers the numerous stirring reports of Western TV channels, in particular the American CNN, about the first days

of the operation filmed by laws of Hollywood movies – randomly moving combat vehicles with flags of Iraq or Kurdistan waving on almost each vehicle.

In the first few days, the governmental forces grouping of the Iraqi army and Kurdish Peshmerga occupied dozens of villages with minimal resistance – if minor clashes can be considered as such. Yet, there were no civilians in some of them. The advance was accompanied by the US Air Force air strikes. According to the eyewitness accounts, the bombs swept away the last remaining houses, under ruins of which were civilians who had not managed to leave the villages.



At that, the coalition forces grouping suffered tangible losses without entering into serious battles with jihadists. These losses mainly resulted from explosions on numerous booby-trapped mines laid on roads and roadside, as well as in abandoned houses, and suicide bombers.

On October 25, 2016, the Peshmerga detachments reached the line assigned to them, stopped and started erecting defensive structures with the use of engineering equipment. So did Shiah militia from al-Hashd al-Sha’bi. According to the arrangements, the units of the Iraqi army went further. In January, the eastern part of Mosul was liberated.

In mid-February 2017, the Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi announced the beginning of an operation to liberate the western part of the city. The battles dragged out. According to Lieutenant General Talib Shahati, commander of the anti-terror units of the Iraqi army’s Mosul grouping, the losses among his personnel alone totaled at least 50 per cent of the military personnel.



Multiple launch rocket system firing Mosul
<http://rusnext.ru>

In order to speed up the operation, Pentagon had to draw its soldiers into the battle. According to the US General Stephen Townsend, commander of the international operation against DAESH in Iraq, at least 450 militaries of the special operations troops, forward air controllers, and other specialists

were seen at the forefront in the western districts of Mosul. According to reporters working in the area of operations, artillery units of France, Canada, Turkey and the United States were sent to support the Iraqi army in Mosul. More than 60 countries were providing around-the-clock air support.



No one knows exactly how many civilians actually perished during the fight in the city. January 2017 hit the record by the number of victims resulted from the US-led coalition air strikes. According to some reports, about 200 people were killed as a result of 21 air strikes. This number is twice higher as compared to December 2016.

According to incomplete data, from March 17 to 23, over 230 civilians were killed in Mosul by coalition Air Force strikes, mainly by USAF. According to the eyewitnesses, who miraculously survived those days after mass bombings, there were dozens of aircraft at a time, mainly the US ones, in the city air waiting for their turn to drop bombs and launch missiles. 50-year-old Marwan Saleh says that after one of those attacks he lost his daughter, the son-in-law and the two-month-old grandson. He could not find an answer to the question what such inhuman bomb attacks were needed for. Was not there another way to liberate the residents of Mosul from the DAESH terrorists?



Mosul. Source: Reuters

The US military calls this “liberation” and “good progress” in the fight against the DAESH militants stating at the same time that “the coalition takes all necessary precautions to minimize the risk of accidental injury to non-combatants and damage to civilian structures”. As for the international community, it does not care about the victims of Mosul too much.

There are thousands of victims. A lot of people remained under the ruins of their houses, which were not cleared by anyone. Among those are wounded people doomed to painful death. On March 16, 2017, the Iraqi militaries saw a militants’ sniper in the window of the Abu Maada house located in western Mosul and designated the target to the artillery supporting them. One of the local residents who were hiding in the basement of the building said that over

50 civilians were hidden there and asked to cancel the strike, but it was too late. A rocket flew into the window of the house destroying it and burying everyone under its ruins.

The most fierce and bloody battles take place in the Old Town, where the buildings stand close to each other and the quarters are divided by narrow streets. The population density there is traditionally higher than in other areas of Mosul. Jihadists even descend to use civilians as a “human shield”^{1,2}.



There are a lot of facts proving it. In addition, neither of the warring parties is concerned whether civilians will come under their fire or not. Large-caliber artillery pieces and multiple launch rocket systems are employed in the urban areas to fire upon area targets rather than specific targets – as if the



battle is going on somewhere in the field and there is no information where exactly the enemy positions are. It also refers to aviation bombing urban areas. At the same time, there are facts proving the use of toxic substances by DAESH and, according to some data, the use of white phosphorus bombs by the coalition air force. The relevant request was sent to the PR department of the Combined Joint Task Force of the US Central Command. The department did not confirm or deny that the United States or their allies used such ammunition. As is known, the US military have already used white phosphorus in Iraq in 2004, when they tried to regain control over Fallujah.

Here is the chronicle (far from the complete one) of only one day – March 18, 2017, compiled by the staff of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences on the basis of the eyewitnesses’ stories:

- At about 7 am the coalition air force delivered an air strike on “July 17” district, which resulted in the death of Abu Qatada, the famous DAESH

¹ Mohamed Mostafa. Mosul’s Old City under full security forces’ siege, IS denies civilians food. Iraq News. 2017. May 25. - <http://www.iraqnews.com>

² Rescued ‘human shields’ tell of Mosul horror. 2017. May 13 - <http://www.shafaaq.com>

sniper, along with six other militants of his unit and destruction of a car with a machine gun mount. The houses of local residents were also in the area of the air strike. There is no information about the victims among them.



Streets of Mosul. Source: Reuters

- About 10 am an elderly woman was killed by a shot of a militants' sniper in the area of New Mosul. She tried to leave the area controlled by jihadists.

- The DAESH militants in the "July 17" and "Wadi Akkab" areas erect earth walls and obstruct the movement of civilians using them as a human shield. At the crossroads in the "Maash Bazaar" and Yarmuk areas, militants set fire to oil tankers with heavy oil fractions trying to hide their positions from airborne surveillance and precision air strikes.



Mosul residents fleeing from combat operations area

- At about 10.30 am the militants fired improvised 'hell rockets' equipped with chopped wire, nails and balls on the Isla-el-Zara'ai district, killing five civilians, injuring ten people, destroying several houses.

- At about 11 am the jihadists fired mortar shells upon the liberated areas of New Mosul and Mosul, killing and wounding dozens of civilians, destroying their homes.

- An unidentified plane destroyed a house near the Mosul railway station, where five families were hiding. The airstrike caught people in the basement, they could not escape, and no rescue operation was conducted.

Fathi Yasin leaving the area of operations with his family said that he had to take that step to save his family from starvation. Along the way, they repeatedly fell under fire both of the militants and the coalition forces. In one of the streets turned into ruins they saw a neighbor family with all the mem-

bers dead. One of the reasons for the death of the civilian population was that in Mosul, unlike Aleppo, there were no humanitarian corridors for them to leave the combat operations area .

The civilian population remaining in the operations area, whose number goes to hundreds of thousands of people left without food and often without water, has no choice: to stay there and die from fire of DAESH militants or "liberators", or try to escape, but anyway to die from fire of one or the other. Even if they manage to escape, in the refugee camps they will have to fight for a place in the tent, an opportunity to get essentials, food, water and medical assistance . Neither the Iraqi army nor the international coalition forces help them. The UN agencies and international organizations take care of it¹.



Source: Reuters

¹ UN: 4,000 civilians flee Mosul each day amid fighting. Aljazeera. 2017. March 2. - <http://www.aljazeera.com>

CONCLUSION



Nobody, of course, except for terrorists, doubts if it was necessary to liberate Aleppo and Mosul and to save the civilian population. Both cities sustained a great damage during the armed hostilities. Both wars entailed incredible sufferings for civilians. But there are no more similarities in these operations.

Tens of thousands of human lives were saved in Aleppo during combat operations in the city mainly due to the efforts of the Russian military, the arrangement of humanitarian corridors and regular supplies of food, water and provision of affordable medical care. This is an indisputable fact and it can hardly be refuted.

The humanitarian topic was exploited in political purposes by forces responsible for unleashing a fratricidal war in Syria. They were usually intensifying their activities prior to and during important international negotiations designed to motivate the conflict parties to find ways out of it.

The humanitarian topic makes it possible to efficiently play with people's feelings and emotions. Nobody can resist when it comes to a large number of hungry children, women and the elderly, or wounded and sick people dying due to lack of medicines and qualified medical care. Every time, the opponents' defenders first blamed solely the president of Syria, and then, after the Russian Aerospace Forces operation began in late September 2015, the Russian military were blamed too. At the same time, however, it was humbly said, and sometimes deliberately concealed, how many humanitarian actions of international organizations were disrupted by the militants, what bribes they took from the UN convoys or how weapons and ammunition were delivered under the cover of humanitarian cargo to militant-controlled areas, and also how many employees of humanitarian missions were killed by bandits.

The humanitarian issues in Syria are too much politicized. The hysteria slightly subsided only after the final liberation of the eastern quarters of Aleppo.

It is worth noting that in Aleppo, unlike Mosul, the main purpose of withdrawing the civilian population through humanitarian corridors was to clear the combat operations area from civilians as much as possible. The arrangement of humanitarian corridors and saving people's lives in Mosul were not even discussed. People were under the crossfire from the both sides.

In Aleppo, aviation and heavy artillery were not employed during the last three months of the liberation operation in the eastern quarters of the city. The soldiers of the assault teams liberated house by house, street after street, quarter after quarter, using mostly small and collective weapons.

In Mosul, the coalition fired upon area targets using aviation, large-caliber rocket and barrel artillery. Hence, there were many casualties among civilians.

In the course of the battle for Aleppo, Western media mainly took any information from militants and human rights organizations, such as the "White Helmets", at face value. Without a slightest scrutiny, it was broadcasted all over the world, although jihadists were clearly interested in exposing themselves as innocent victims of the "bloody" regime of Bashar al-Assad and blackening the Syrian government army and its allies. That information warfare was mainly aimed to attack Russia, its President and the army.

The largest Western and Persian Gulf TV channels hourly broadcasted scenes of the destroyed Aleppo, discussed the civilian casualties. The situation in the city was called the humanitarian catastrophe, and Assad with the Russian military were demanded to be held accountable for the war crimes.

The West considered the liberators of Aleppo as bad ones, without exceptions, and the radicals and Al-Qaeda adherents were good ones. They were willingly or unwillingly assisted by rather competent and well-known persons. For example, Tarja Halonen, the ex-president of Finland, said on October 27, 2016 in her speech at the meeting of the Valday international discussion club in Sochi that the Finnish church held a mass memorial bell-ringing ceremony in memory of the victims of the Syrian Aleppo "bombing", but did not name the true perpetrators of the tragedy. She urged the churches around the world to follow the example of Finland.



Mosul streets
AP

At the same time, a completely different picture was transmitted from the Mosul front. Western media and non-governmental organizations presented the information on civilian casualties quietly. Nothing was told about compassion and humanism. The bad ones were the jihadists, and the good ones (naturally) were the US-led liberators of Mosul residents. The capitals of Western states did not appeal to any bell-ringing in memory of the innocent victims of Mosul residents. The death of civilians, both from the fire of the jihadists and the liberators, was revealed only when it was no longer possible to keep silence about it.

Unlike Aleppo, during the Mosul operation, foreign journalists were given only filtered information from the relevant press services and were not allowed into the combat area. The Iraqi army and coalition forces were engaged exclusively in conducting military operations. The facts of their participation in providing humanitarian aid to the population, as the Russian military did and still do in Syria, have not been revealed yet. Unlike Aleppo, where this work was launched by the Russian military, and then continued in cooperation with the United Nations and other international humanitarian missions, in Mosul this work was and is done by the United Nations agencies and other international organizations only.



Recovery efforts in Aleppo

the price they paid for it was too high. As one Iraqi doctor who helped the wounded and sick in refugee camps admitted, he started asking himself more and more often on whose side the residents of Mosul, victims of both the fire of liberators and the outrage of jihadists, are.

At the same time, in Aleppo, where the situation is far from perfect, the reconstruction works are in full swing. According to the RIA Novosti reporter, who visited Aleppo in late April 2017, people, young and old, work like beavers. The sound of hammers and angle grinders is heard everywhere. There is almost a building boom in the city.

Roads repair goes on. Cars and venders appeared in the streets. Schools and sports sections are recovered. A football tournament was held in the city.

The figures on their humanitarian aid to the residents of Mosul, regularly published on official websites, are impressive. But this is clearly not enough. Even humanitarian missions' employees have to admit this fact.

The residents of Mosul were waiting for the liberation from the present-day barbarians, but

To sum up, the peaceful life – even if slowly – is returning. This process will not be fast. There is not only lack of manpower (most men are at war) but of money too.

As for Mosul, by May 16, 2017, according to a coalition spokesman, there were no more than 12 square kilometers in the city still under control of the DAESH. However, considering the incoming information, the violence there is unlikely to stop. The city liberators turned out to be not better than the terrorists. According to Western media, there are established facts of tortures and murders of civilians by Iraqi military. As is known, violence almost always gives rise to equal violence. Consequently, an outburst of guerilla war in the urban areas of Mosul may be expected.

Thus, the humanitarian component in Syria proves that Russia was and remains the state with responsible approach to solving the crisis in the country. Thanks to the efforts of Russian diplomats and military personnel, humanitarian aid, including that from the UN, reached all Syrian settlements.



Reconstruction works in Aleppo
© NewsTeam



Civilians leaving Mosul //UN website

TESTIMONY OF DESTRUCTIONS CAUSED BY TERRORISTS IN WESTERN AND EASTERN ALEPPO

Dabbit Hospital



On May 3, 2015, the Dabbit Hospital underwent mortar shelling presumably from the Karm al-Qasr area located in the eastern part of Aleppo (controlled by Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, Ahrar Al-Sham, Syrian Free Army). As a result, three women were killed in front of the reception and several passers-by were injured. The expensive equipment of the medical institution was destroyed, the building suffered significant damage.



Al-Zabdia district, Ahmad-bin-Musa Street. Jami-Al-Nur Mosque.



The headquarters (control point) of the Kathibat Amanna Aisha illegal armed formation from the Al-Jebha Al-Islamiya group was located in the Jami-An-Nur Mosque.

Al-Sukkari district. Al-Saura school.



On November 20, 2016, the school was shelled by militants presumably from the western suburbs of Aleppo (Ahrar Al-Sham, Jabhat Fateh al-Sham). 9 children were killed, over 60 children had wounds of varying severity, a classroom was destroyed. On November 23, 2016, several missiles successively launched by militants first killed 4 passers-by and burnt the cars in front of the school, and then killed 4 firefighters.



Azeezia district. Church of St. Francis.

On November 25, 2015, the Church of St. Francis was shelled by mortars from the areas of eastern Aleppo controlled by the armed opposition. As a result of the explosion, the roof and walls of the temple were destroyed, several people were injured, one person was heavily injured. The time for the shelling was chosen intentionally in order to cause the maximum number of casualties.



Father Ibrahim Sabbat (rector of the Church of St. Francis, the Catholic Franciscan order), said that the church was built in 1937. The terrorists had been shelling the district for four years. Projectiles and mortar shells hit the buildings of the church, museum and library. On November 25, 2015, on Sunday, at the 6 pm service, when the church accommodates the largest number of people, an improvised shell (cylinder bomb) hit the roof of the church. It failed to pierce the dome. If that had happened, then all the people who were at the service would have died.

**Al-Wafa District (Hayy), Suq Al-Mahalli Quarter, Al-Nile Str.
Mosque of Qutayba ibn Muslim Bagili.**



The Suq Al-Mahalli Quarter at the end of the Al-Nile Street, in the Al-Wafa district, had been shelled for three years by militants from the settlements of Hreitan, Kafr Hamrah, Billarmun, controlled by Jebhat al-Nusra, Ahrar Al-Sham, Nour al-Din al-Zenki and Faylak al-Sham. As a result, civilians had been killed, and the mosque was destroyed.

A local resident, Umar Hamdu, said that they had been shelled for three



years from rocket launchers, tanks and mortars. There was a mosque. Many residents were killed or wounded. He does not remember all the names of the victims. However, he remembers exactly that among them were Nabil Barmada, Abu Gani, the daughter of Abu Junda from the Barmada house (a very little girl), Muhammad Badawi, the Mahayu family (all members of that family including four children and their mother died).

**4 Nidal Str., Azeezia district
The Syro-Catholic Church of St. Virgin Mary.**

The story by father Ilyas Hannushi.



In August 2014, the Syro-Catholic Church of St. Virgin Mary located in Nidal Str. in Azeezia district was hit by a rocket fired from the districts of eastern Aleppo controlled by the armed opposition forces. As a result of the explosion, the roof and the walls of the temple were destroyed, large-scale material damage was inflicted and several people suffered minor injuries. Later on, the shelling was repeated again and again.

Father Ilyas Hannush, rector of the Syro-Catholic Church, said that he had served in the church since 1984, and it was built in 1975. The church can accommodate thousands of people.

In August 2014, at 6:15 pm, the church was hit by a missile. Thankfully, no one died, only a few people were slightly injured. All the glazing of the church was broken and the glass fell inside like rain. Since that shooting, the same happened some more times. We were shelled from the militants' locations, but the God defended us and there were no casualties despite a lot of people used to gather (in the church) during the shellings.

Presbyterian Church, 5 Kayali Str., Sabab Ahrad district



In May 2012, the Presbyterian Church of Aleppo was under rocket attacks and in June the militants stole the church property – furniture, computers and air conditioners. They also fired some shots at Reverend Ibrahim Ansar, rector of the church, and the parishioners who witnessed the theft.

In November, the church collapsed as a result of an explosion in a tunnel excavated by the fighters. After that, a congratulatory message about the destruction of the church and calls to Christians ‘to go to Beirut’ were posted on the militants’ website.



Rev. Ibrahim Ansar disclosed that, as they entered the church building in June 2012, they were amazed to see gunmen in the church courtyard. According to him, they wanted to shoot the civilians, but the latter fled from the church. Earlier, in May 2012, several missiles fell in the church courtyard.



The Reverend believes that it is a crime against humanity. (“We will restore the church again. We will be the salt and light of the world.”)

Maronite Catholic Cathedral, Farhat Square (Mitrakat), Beit Muhibb district

The cathedral construction began in 1872 and ended in 1923.

Between 2013 and 2015, the Maronite Catholic Cathedral of Aleppo was the target of numerous rocket and mortar attacks resulting in significant damage inside the religious building.



According to engineer Aboud Mardini, the cathedral warden, great damage was inflicted by mortar shells and rockets fired by militants from 2013 to 2015.



Old city. Greek Orthodox Church of the Blessed Virgin



From August 2012 to December 2016, the Greek Orthodox Church of the Blessed Virgin in the Old City of Aleppo built in the 15th century was repeatedly bombarded by the militants, which caused serious destruction of the church building. The worship services were discontinued, icons and liturgical items were removed.



The fragments of handcrafted ammunition still remaining in the church indicate that the shelling was conducted by illegal armed formations.

Rector of the Orthodox Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, Archpriest Hassan Ward said that the church had been built in the 15th century and, thank God, had survived until today. However, now it is in the worst condition (i.e. destroyed) it has ever been for the last centuries and years. "Since August 2012, we have stopped worship service in this church and had to leave it, taking all the icons and liturgical items that could be carried away. We moved all these things (for safekeeping)



to another church as this place was very often subjected to rocket and mortar fire. You can see the aftermath of this firing – the debris, holes in the ceiling and the walls. We couldn't pray (here) from 2012 until today. Now, we are going to carry out all possible repairs that we can".

We hope that the whole world will see what happened to the ancient buildings, especially the churches and mosques here – in the Old City. Our church is one of the four (ancient) churches here in the Old City. Nearby are the Armenian Church of the Forty Martyrs, the Maronite Cathedral and one more Armenian church of the Blessed Virgin. Another church located around here belongs to the Syro-Catholic Church. All these churches were badly damaged. Also, not far from this place is the building of the episcopate, which unfortunately was destroyed.

Numerous bombardments carried out from the Al-Kilyasa district in the eastern part of Aleppo (controlled by Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham, Al-Jabha al-Islamiya groups) between August 2012 and December 2016, caused a total destruction of the diocesan administration of the Antiochian Orthodox Church in Aleppo city. This building was the residence of the Metropolitan of Aleppo Paul (Yazydzhy) of the Antiochian Orthodox Church who was abducted by extremists on April 22, 2013. The fate of the priest is still unknown.

Old City. Building of the diocesan administration of the Antiochian Orthodox Church in Aleppo.



**Armenian Church of St. Vartan. Al-Deri Al-Shamari Str.,
Bustan Al-Basha district**



Between 2013 and 2016, the militants of Jabhat al-Nusra and other formations repeatedly fired upon the Armenian church, causing enormous damage. After the militants occupied the building, they established an ammunition storage there.

**The leaflet issued by the Fastaqim Kama Umirt group
("Stay where you are told to")**

(Original of the leaflet)



(Translation of the leaflet issued)

National mobilization!

Brothers who wish to bear arms to protect their faith, land and honor shall be recruited in all liberated blocks of Aleppo to join the national resistance units formed by the Revolutionary Councils of the blocks who appoint the persons in charge.

These units coordinate their work with liaison officers of the military administration headquarters of the Fastaqim Kama Umirt group. It is not necessary to join this group.

Missions of the units:

- *Protection of their neighborhoods where they are stationed, in an organized manner and under the supervision of the Revolutionary Councils;*
- *Assisting the neighboring fronts from their location areas as necessary and in coordination with the liaison officer.*

Notes:

- *Applicants shall be tested for fitness in local camps for one day.*
- *The newly-recruited combatants sign for the receipt of weapons under guarantee of the blocks' Revolutionary Councils.*
- *The time for general mobilization is announced by Fastaqim Kama Umirt upon taking the relevant decision in agreement with the blocks' Revolutionary Councils.*

Terms and conditions of recruitment:

- *Age of applicants – 17 to 50 years old;*
- *Applicant should be known for his commendable nature;*
- *Volunteer should be physically fit and ready to obey the orders of his direct commander appointed by a block's Revolutionary Council.*

Findings by Russian Sappers in Eastern Aleppo



“Garland” – pressure-activated contact wire (laid out on the floor under rubbish or carpets)



Blast mine disguised as a fire extinguisher.



Trip-wire mines disguised as children's toys.



Anti-handling blast mine activated by hand grenade fuse assembly.



Hand grenade attached to the armchair leg enhanced with improvised explosive devices.





Ammunition pack prepared for explosion in a tunnel under a street in the historic area of Aleppo city.



Combat engineer team demining a 'jihad car' in Al-Aqabah district.



Trip-wire in a residential house in the historic area of Aleppo city.



Remote-controlled improvised high-yield explosive device.



School quarters re-equipped for explosive belts manufacture.



Ammunition depot in a classroom.



Improvised explosive devices workshop.



Cylinders depot in a school basement.



“Hellfire” system in a school quarter.



Improvised high-explosive shells for various purposes
found in a grave.

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