

## **THE SILENCE TO IDLIB**

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While in Germany we are dealing with national problems, in the province of Idlib, in northwestern Syria, the greatest humanitarian catastrophe of the 21st century is brewing up.

According to UN estimates, almost three million people live in this province; half of them have fled from other parts of the country to escape the Assad regime. It was Assad's inhuman plan to pick them up there in a targeted manner. But this time there will be no evacuation buses available to save people from the bombing. The plan Assad is to destroy the approximately 70,000 fighters and opposition members with the complete conquest regardless of civilians. The pictures of shredded corpses, destroyed hospitals, screaming children are still in memory. This time it will be more cruel than we could ever imagine. Over a million children are said to live in Idlib. It is no longer about collateral damage, but about the targeted destruction of a city from the air and then on the ground. The city will lie on the ground like Berlin once did. At that time it was a comprehensible war against the Hitler regime. This time it was a power-obsessed proxy war of Russia, Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia. The mass murderer Bashar al-Assad is only the official instrument.

### **Russia**

Putin is almost there. Only through his support was the Assad regime able to hold its own, and he made himself a global player at eye level with the greats of the world. Putin and nobody else now has all the strings in his hand. He alone is the master of war and peace. Not the UN, whose Security Council this week will deal with the "tragic situation" (US Ambassador Nikki Haley). Also not the experienced UN-Syria mediator Staffan de Mistura, who despite all diplomatic experience failed so far on all line. Mission impossible.

But is it really Putin's goal to help Assad achieve its military breakthrough? Putin still has the chance to go down in world history as a humanitarian savior. The plan would be simple. One bombs a region together, in order to then stick to it shortly before the exodus and invite the world to a reconstruction. He has already promoted it.

But it is more complicated. All Putin does is covert combat, distraction from the real goal. We know that from Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. And of course he also plays with Turkey's problems.

### **Turkey**

Turkey fears that the approximately 1.5 million displaced persons from other parts of Syria could flee to Turkey, which is only 30 kilometers away, due to a lack of alternative options. Among the presumably more than 70,000 fighters are also many who belong to the National Liberation Front (NFL) and are equipped by Turkey, financed by Qatar. It is inconceivable that Erdogan would drop these fighters. Neither does it mean that he gives in to the Kremlin's demand that the terrorist organization HTS, with 10,000 fighters after all the second strongest force in the province, be crushed. He absolutely needs these forces as an outsourced task force for the fight against the Kurds in Northern Syria. Because that is his only concern: to

prevent a Kurdish state. That is why his soldiers on the other side of the Turkish border have almost buried themselves in Syrian territory.

But Erdogan has long since become a toothless tiger due to the quarrel with his neighbors. His only pound is now his membership of NATO and the refugee deal with the EU. Economically, the country is almost on the ground. Like never before he needs his opponents in order to survive.

And that is why a deal under Russia's leadership is indeed possible in this political situation. The Turks guarantee that their rebels will no longer attack Assad's regime and coordinate with the Russians and the Syrian regime to secure the traffic arteries. Everyone could keep his "cupcake" in this way.

But the experience in the Syrian war shows that Putin, in case of doubt, bombs Assad's troops the way freely. And the fight has long since begun. Russian fighter planes have bombed targets in Idlib for the first time in 22 days. Official version from Moscow, no populated areas were attacked, but weapons and ammunition depots of the Nusra front. This group, a former offshoot of Al Qaida, has renamed itself Tahrir al Sham and is the most powerful rebel unit in Idlib. The United Nations classifies it as a terrorist organization. So everything as before. Assad and Russia are fighting only terrorists and one country is bleeding to death.

### **The West**

Trump, like Obama, does not want a decisive battle, even though the coalition of air forces against the so-called "Islamic state" that has been in place since 2014 proved successful in the end. But the Assad regime was tolerated. The protective shield of the Kremlin was too strong, more or less openly supported by the ground troops of Iran. Putin has, so to speak, solved the Syrian problem. And one can be sure that in the capitals of the western world, despite all the indignation, a certain amount of breathing will take place, because own losses could be avoided.

It belongs to the perversion of warfare that the bombardment of innocent civilians is accepted and a "red line" is drawn only with the use of chemical weapons. Now the time has come again. If the Syrian troops were to use chemical weapons again, and Russia expects this, the United States and its allies would react quickly and "in an appropriate manner", said the White House spokeswoman. Not only the Pentagon is working around the clock, but also London, Paris and, more recently, Berlin.

In the event of Syrian chemical weapons attacks in the province of Idlib, the Ministry of Defense is investigating how the German Armed Forces can get involved in possible military retaliatory actions against the army of President Bashar al Assad. Bild" reported in advance that the possibility of participating in the alliance of the United States, Great Britain and France is being considered. The prerequisite for German participation, however, is a renewed proven poison gas attack by the Syrian regime on its own population. And that is the problem. Because the proof can take place only on the ground by the employment of experts of the OPCW, and this action requires the agreement of Syria. Thus the use of German air force Tornados is unlikely it is in the Recce version or as fighter bombers.

In addition, the Air Force would face another huge logistical challenge in the shortest possible time. Our Tornados stationed at the Jordanian military airport Al-Azraq would not fly over

Syrian territory and would have to be air refueled on their way to the northwest of Syria by the Airbus A310 MRTT or alternatively stationed in Cyprus. The deployment of German Eurofighters is unrealistic in view of the poor operational readiness and the new air-to-ground operational role.

And above all there is the danger of the far-reaching Russian S-300 air defense system, one of the best air defense missile systems in the world, now also being sold to Syria and Iran. Western aircraft have not yet been shot down because they have adhered to the Rules of Engagement. Air war at Putin's mercy.

#### Forecast

The Battle of Idlib will come these days. Russia and Iran will continue to give decisive support to the Assad regime and will continue to attack civilian institutions in a targeted manner. The people are to be chased away. While Moscow will propagate that terrorists will be attacked without exception, Idlib, like Mosul and Rakka before him, will be razed to the ground. Those who survive will surrender to the Assad regime, but most will flee to nearby Turkey. The West will stay out of this witch's cauldron. The mass exodus to Turkey will be accepted as a concession, as will Assad's final victory.

The war in Syria may end with the capture of the last province, but a covert civil war will keep the region on its toes. Former commanders of the terrorist militias and theirs will disappear and build new structures. Just as Sunni commanders built up the Islamic state after the Iraq war. Saudi Arabia, but also Yemen, Turkey, Iran and Israel, are the first countries to ensure this. And the Assad regime will begin with the too brutal clean-up actions.

The West will remain silent, prove afterwards that chemical weapons have been used and hope to receive orders for reconstruction. So let's continue to take care of our national problems as the diesel affair until then.

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