

FOREWORD

Egyptian-born Nobel Prize winner Ahmed Zewail said: “Syria may appear to be a small country, but it is just the type of entangled conflict that can lead to a world catastrophe. It does not take much imagination to see Syria as the Sarajevo of the 21st century, leading to a world war.” While thankfully this has not happened yet, there is little doubt that the Syrian civil war has been one the most difficult knots to untie in the 21st century geopolitical world. More than any other conflict since the end of the cold war, it has pitted the US against a resurgent Russia, and the implications of the struggle have often gone way beyond the borders of the actual carnage.

The coverage of the war that most people in Europe and North America have been exposed to has been decidedly Western in slant, with Google searches on Syria generating hits primarily from English-speaking nations. Meanwhile, the public in the West is mostly unaware of the variety of political views and opinions reflected in the Russian mass media, aside from state-sponsored English-language sources such as Russia Today (RT) and Sputnik. Hence, there is often a lack of understanding among English speakers of how things look in Syria from the Russian perspective. This book attempts to rectify that imbalance.

Much like our previous volume *Countdown to War in Georgia* (2008), *War in Syria: Russian Press Coverage, 2015-2017* utilizes primary sources from the Russian press, including some of the most widely read newspapers in the country, to show what the Syrian civil war looks like from the Russian point of view. The book provides voices from a broad spectrum of viewpoints, ranging from the government daily Rossiiskaya gazeta and the business-oriented papers Kommersant and Vedomosti to the liberal-leaning Novaya gazeta and Republic.ru (formerly Slon.ru).

East View Press has produced this volume by translating and selecting the most informative and interesting articles and opinions from the above primary sources. Most of the articles are taken directly from the *Current Digest of the Russian Press* (CDRP) and are exclusive to that publication – most of

these materials cannot be found in English on the Internet or anywhere else. They provide a unique view into the mindset of Russian leaders, scholars, commentators and others about the Syrian catastrophe.

This volume covers events from Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to send troops into Syria to US President Donald Trump's decision to launch cruise missiles into Syria as payback for the alleged use of chemical weapons by Syrian President Bashar Assad. In between, it highlights such well-known events as the shooting down of a Russian fighter jet by a Turkish plane, which almost led to war between the two countries, and the horrific and long battle between the government and rebels over the Syrian city of Aleppo.

We hope that this book is a useful tool for anyone who would like to know more about the Syrian conflict, or who wishes to teach about it. The articles and opinions have been selected both for their readability and their potential to educate and elucidate discussion of the various aspects of the war. An introduction at the beginning of each section serves to sum up the content of the subsequent articles to help make the book easier to follow.

I would like to thank all the people who were involved in the production of this book, including: Laurence Bogoslaw, Xenia Grushetsky, Matthew Larson and Ana K. Niedermaier. In addition, I'd like to thank our partners in Russia for their permission to translate and publish their articles in this book (a complete listing of those partners can be found in the Preface).

Former CIA Director David Petraeus has said: "Like a nuclear disaster, the fallout from the meltdown in Syria threatens to be with us for decades." It is our hope that this book serves as a tool to understand the Syrian situation in a different way that creates a better understanding for how the conflict came about and how conflicts like it may be avoided in the future.

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