

Moscow Advances Military and Economic Ties with Tehran

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Washington and Tel-Aviv apply more and more pressure to Tehran. In fact, their actions against Iran leave the impression that something like a joint military operation might be undertaken soon.

Lieutenant General Henry Obering of the US Missile Defense Agency recently said that Tehran was actively working on Ashura (a modified Shakhab-3 missile) with the range of 2,000 kilometers and that it had a satellite in orbit. According to Obering, it is a clear indication of Tehran's determination to design missiles with larger and larger ranges until at last it comes up with something capable of reaching the US territory (by 2017 or so). Obering concluded that America needed mobile defense systems near the Russian western borders right now.

Moscow in the meantime keeps telling whoever will listen that the American ABM defense framework threatens Russia and that the hypothetical Iranian menace is but an invention of the Pentagon. In any event, there are certain circles in Washington that will be happy to make their move against Iran. Intermediaries (United States, Russia, Great Britain, France, China, and Germany) offer close economic cooperation to Tehran in return for dismantlement of its nuclear weapons programs. Iran in its turn categorically refuses to stop enrichment of uranium which it claims is an element of peaceful programs. Official Washington nevertheless suspects that Iran is but stalling for time.

Israel, one of the countries that view Iran as definitely an enemy, is playing its part in all this decision-making. Iran meanwhile arranges field tests of its new weapons and vigorously exercises its army.

Military exercises of the Iranian regular army take place against the background of media speculations that the United States and Israel will strike at Iranian nuclear sites before the year is over.

Iranian missile tests stirred criticism throughout the West and particularly in the United States that demanded an end to all work on ballistic missiles fearing that they might be put to use as delivery means for nuclear weapons. Washington and Tel-Aviv issued their traditional warnings to Iran.

Afraid of economic risks, Western businesses sever their ties with Iran. Russia appears to be the only country to keep advancing its military and economic contacts with Tehran.

Gazprom made an agreement with the Iranians last week to establish a joint venture to develop oil and gas projects (including the ones countries of the West abandoned). The matter concerns development of the Southern Pars gas field and construction of a gas pipeline from Iran to Pakistan and India. Russian companies will also participate in the Northern Azadegan oil field development and construction of a refinery in Iran.

Military-technical cooperation between Moscow and Tehran continues as well. Two years ago, Moscow sold the Iranians intermediate-range antiaircraft complexes good for engaging the enemy at the distances of between 30 and 50 kilometers. Other weapons of defense that may end up in Iran include S-300s, high-precision weapons, and antiship missiles. Experts say that Tehran might also be willing to buy Tochka-U and Iskander-E antiaircraft complexes, Kornet-E antitank weapons, and mobile antiaircraft guns used for defense of troops and strategic objects.

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