

Moscow's "Military Diplomacy" in the Middle East: A Major Headache for the US

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The success of Moscow's "military diplomacy" in the Mideast is proving to be a major headache for the US because of the strategic inroads that Russia is poised to make with many of America's traditional partners in the region.

Last weekend's delivery of S-400 anti-air missiles to Turkey was an epochal moment for Moscow's "[military diplomacy](#)" in the Mideast and stands to pose a serious challenge to the US' interests there. The sale of military equipment to any country isn't anything new at all, but the manner in which Russia does it contrasts with the US'. Moscow is interested in maintaining the balance of power, which is why it oftentimes sells arms to rival states (e.g. Armenia & Azerbaijan, China & India, China & Vietnam) in order to promote political solutions to their disputes, whereas Washington wants to upset the said balance in favor of its preferred regional partner in order to increase the chances that its patron can resort to force or the threat thereof to resolve relevant disputes (e.g. selling [advanced anti-sub air units](#) to India for use against China in the Indian Ocean).

In the Mideast context, Russia's sale of S-400s to Turkey will enable the notional NATO country to defend itself from the American air assets wielded by Cyprus and Greece in the event that Ankara ever goes to war with them [over the offshore energy deposits](#) in the Eastern Mediterranean and/or the Aegean Sea islands, respectively. In fact, the S-400s themselves are game-changers in more ways than one because the receiving country will naturally enter into a close military partnership with Moscow for reasons of long-term maintenance and supply, thereby enabling Russia to make important strategic inroads in expanding its multipolar influence in their "deep states". Of relevance, chairman of the Russian State Duma's foreign affairs committee Leonid Slutsky [told RT](#) that "Turkey is a forerunner of this cooperation. The region will certainly have S-400s and other more advanced defence systems from Russia", suggesting that more sales elsewhere have yet to come.

Saudi Arabia, long thought of as an American puppet, has been [rapidly changing](#) its geostrategic reorientation in recent years since the rise of Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS), with [the Wahhabi Kingdom expressing serious interest](#) in purchasing the S-400s too. Reports circulated last month that President Putin will [visit the country](#) in October, during which time the two parties might sign an official agreement on the aforementioned defensive system. Riyadh's GCC allies of the [UAE](#) and [Kuwait](#) have also indicated that they'd like to buy Russian arms as well, while the bloc's Egyptian partner will [buy \\$2 billion worth](#) of Su-35 warplanes to most likely protect its offshore energy deposits in

the Eastern Mediterranean. Considering these deals and Moscow's motivation to maintain regional balances of power, a certain strategic picture is beginning to emerge.

Russia's S-400 sales to Turkey are designed to help it defend itself against its American "partner" after Washington began to concentrate its own version of "military diplomacy" on Cyprus and Greece following the failed pro-American coup attempt against President Erdogan in summer 2016. Likewise, the sale of Su-35s to Egypt is designed to give Cairo an offensive advantage in defending its offshore energy deposits in the region, though this is balanced out by Turkey's S-400s. As for the Gulf, Iran is universally regarded to have a massive missile stockpile that it plans to unleash against the GCC in the event of hostilities, so it makes sense for Russia to boost Saudi Arabia and its allies' defensive capabilities to restore the balance of power there, which could position Moscow as the mediator of their disputes and therefore entrench its regional influence.

None of this would have been possible had it not been for Russia's decisive 2015 anti-terrorist intervention in Syria that changed the course of Mideast history, which Moscow exploited to advance its 21st-century grand strategy of becoming the [supreme "balancing" force](#) in Afro-Eurasia after proving that it's more than capable of shaping events in this tri-continental pivot space. The US' so-called "Pivot to Asia" and the relative neglect of the region during the twilight years of Obama's presidency (especially after the signing of the Iranian nuclear deal that riled the GCC and "[Israel](#)" to no end) created the demand for a new extra-regional hegemon to enter the Mideast and restore the balance of power that was being upset through Iran's rapid rise, ergo the extremely positive reception that Russia has had ever since it decided to fulfill this role.

In other words, President Putin's "geopolitical judo" was masterly applied in such a way as to take full advantage of the US' shortcomings with minimal investment but maximum strategic returns. Russia's "military diplomacy" is a clever means to the end of replacing America's fading unipolar influence with Moscow's rising multipolar one instead, though carefully ensuring that the balance of power is maintained at all times so as to enhance the attractiveness of Russian-mediated political solutions to regional disputes. The irony of it all is that American strategists spent decades trying to craft what some have called the so-called "New Middle East", but the actual form that it's eventually taking is a lot different than what Washington wanted and is turning out to be more powerfully influenced by Moscow's vision instead, even if a common overlap veritably exists between the two Great Powers when it comes to ensuring the security of "[Putinyahu's Rusael](#)".

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Featured image: The S-400 Triumph, previously known as the S-300 PMU-3, is an anti-aircraft weapon system developed in the 1990s by Russia's Almaz Central Design Bureau as an upgrade of the S-300

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