

Russia Draws a “Red Line”: S-300, MiG 29s and MiG 31s for Syria

Toward a Strategic Balance in the Middle East?

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The recent commitment by Russia to honor a contract with Syria for the delivery of S-300 Surface to Air defense systems, considered to be one of the best, if not the best in the world, is followed up by a Syrian request for the delivery of MiG 29 M/M2 fighter jets.

In 2012 NATO stationed Patriot Missile Defense Systems along the 900 km long Syrian – Turkish border; Saudi-Arabia and the USA signed a deal for a significant upgrade of Saudi-Arabia’s air force. Russia is drawing a red line in the Syrian sand. With the words of Russian President Vladimir Putin, a direct military intervention against Syria would be futile. The Middle East is being prepared for a stand-off. 

At a press conference on the opening day of the Russia – E.U. Summit in Yekaterinburg on Tuesday 4 June, Russia’s President Vladimir Putin confirmed again, that Russia will honor its contract with Syria and deliver S-300 SAM Systems. Putin stressed Russia’s disappointment over the E.U.’s failure to prolong the arms embargo against Syria which effectively permits each E.U. member state to decide whether it will arm the terrorist and mercenary corps which have destabilized Syria since 2011.

[The S-300 SAMs will, according to Putin bring stability to the region.](#) Putin made a point of stating, that the S-300 SAMs are among the best, if they are not the best Air Defense System, which, so Putin, every military expert can confirm. At the same occasion, the Russian President issued a thinly-veiled warning to NATO, Israel and the GCC member states when he stated, that any attempted direct military intervention against Syria would be futile.

Syrian Military forces are becoming increasingly successful at combating the insurgency. After the military strategy has been adapted to asymmetric warfare and counter insurgency tactics, which include popular militia which defend villages and towns against renewed attacks by insurgents after the Syrian Arab Army has cleared and secured an area, the insurgents continue losing ground and begin using ever more desperate psychological warfare tactics, chemical weapons and the eating of organs of slain Syrian soldiers, on camera, included. The insurgents show signs of desperation.

 The involvement of Hezbollah at securing the Lebanese – Syrian border, making it less porous for infiltration of weapons and fighters, and the commitment of the Iraqi government to do the same at the Syrian – Iraqi border is limiting the supply routes for the insurgents.

The remaining open fronts are limited to Turkey, Jordan, Israel and the Kurdish administrated region of Northern Iraq.

The popular uprising in Turkey is likely to, at the very least, result in a severely weakened Erdogan administration which could be forced to adjust its policy toward Syria. Turkey could cease being the primary logistic front for the insurgents.

Russia has also drawn a red line in the Syrian sand, or waters, when it decided to create a Mediterranean Fleet. The first deployments have arrived and Tartous is slowly transformed from an auxiliary to an operative naval base. The move stabilizes the region to some degree and could become the foundation for countering the establishment of a NATO base on Cyprus.

In 2012 Saudi-Arabia and the USA agreed on a deal for a major update of Saudi-Arabia's air force. Besides delivery of the latest, most advanced version of the F-16 fighter jet, which normally is reserved for a select club of only six nations, the older Saudi stock of F-16s received considerable upgrades. After completion of the deliveries, upgrades and training, Saudi-Arabia will have approximately 300 F-16 fighter jets in its fleet, making Saudi-Arabia's airpower comparable to that of Israel.

After Russia initially halted a Russian - Syrian contract for an upgrade of Syria's air force, it looks as if Russia is reconsidering, in response to the western unwillingness to settle the dispute about Syria peacefully. In principle, the Syria war is caused by a lack of convergence in the energy and energy-security requirements of respectively Qatar, Saudi -Arabia, Israel - of the USA and the two competing EU blocks led by respectively France and the UK and Germany, Czech Republic; as well as Iran and Russia. Even a successful Geneva 2 conference would address the core issues. The statements of Vladimir Putin that the S-300 SAMs introduction creates stability may be followed up by also creating a strategic balance with regard to regional air forces. It is also a clear signal that NATO and E.U. cannot count on being able to solve energy, energy-security and geo-political problems by illegal wars without having to consider the possibility of having to pay a price that may be too high.

The Syrian governments authorities have reactivated contacts regarding the activation of Russian - Syrian contracts for the Syrian purchase of MiG-29M/M2 fighter jets after the expiration of the E.U. arms embargo on Syria. The information has been confirmed by the Russian aircraft producer.

A Syrian delegation has recently arrived in Moscow to discuss details and a time frame, stated the head of the Mikoyan Design Bureau Sergei Korotkov. The contract was initially signed in 2007 but the outbreak of civil unrest in Syria in 2011 initially caused Russia to halt the deal to deliver 24 MiG-29MM fighter jets and 5 MiG-31 interceptors.

Finding a peaceful resolution to the Syria crisis becomes increasingly unlikely. While the foreign backed opposition a.k.a. al-Qaeda creates one Public Relations disaster after the other and fails at creating a coherent political front, the national dialog among parties, mass organizations, ethnic and religious communities, special interest organizations and the government in Syria continue making progress.

A decisive victory of the insurgency against the Syrian military also becomes increasingly unlikely, and the E.U., US, Saudi and Qatari continuation to finance and arm terrorist and mercenary corps of the likes of Jabhat al-Nusra will, even though they can destabilize Syria,

not lead to a decisive victory without direct military intervention or direct military support of the subversion.

The introduction of the Russian MiG 29s and MiG 31s, along with the introduction of the S-300 SAM's and other Russian missile technology, as well as an increased Russian naval presence, will readjust the strategic balance between the western axis and the Iranian, Syrian, Russian axis. They cannot compensate for the massive firepower amassed by NATO and NATO allies in the region, but will guaranty that any military aggression against Syria will be more costly than western or Arab political leaders are willing or able to survive politically.

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