

Russia to defend its principal Middle East ally: Moscow takes Syria under its protection

By [Ivan Safronov](#)

Global Research, July 28, 2006

Kommerzant, Moscow (original Russian) 2
June 2006

Region: [Middle East & North Africa, Russia
and FSU](#)

In-depth Report: [THE WAR ON LEBANON](#)

The following report was published in the Russian daily Kommerzant in early June. It points to Russian military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as support in the modernization of Syria's air defense system, the modernization of Syrian tanks and ground forces. The question is whether in the current context, this military build-up of Syrian capabilities, supported by Russia, will act as a deterrent to an attack on Syria by Israel.

Global Research, 28 July 2006

According to our sources, Russia is deepening the port of Tartus (Syria) where it has a naval materiel and technical supplies center. This may be regarded as evidence of Russia's determination to make Syria a bridgehead for boosting its influence with Middle East.

Russia has had a naval materiel and technical supplies center in Tartus since the 1970s. Vladimir Zimin, advisor on the staff of the Russian Embassy in Syria, says that the port is being made deeper at present. Similar work is under way in the port of Latakia. All this may be regarded as evidence of Russia's determination to make Syria a bridgehead for boosting its influence with Middle East. The materiel and technical supplies center may eventually gain the status of a base of the Black Sea Fleet.

Defense Ministry sources, speaking anonymously, hint that Moscow has some far-reaching plans indeed. A group of ships under the missile cruiser Moskva (Black Sea Fleet flagship) is to be formed within the next three years. The group will be stationed in the Mediterranean Sea on the permanent basis. Among other tasks, it will participate in counter-terrorism operation Active Endeavor with NATO forces. Hence the necessity to make the Tartus and Latakia facilities ready for the Russian surface warships – ships of the Black Sea Fleet and eventually the Northern Fleet as well. (The latter will be used to reinforce the Russian Mediterranean naval group whenever necessary.)

But a source in the Naval Main Command said that establishment of a fully-fledged base in Tartus could help Russia with warships and tenders withdrawn from Sevastopol in the Crimea. In fact, once the bottom of the Tartus port is deepened, the port will be able to receive all ships of the Black Sea Fleet without exception.

Defense Ministry sources point out that a naval base in Tartus will enable Russia to solidify its positions in the Middle East and ensure security of Syria. Moscow intends to deploy an air defense system around the base – to provide air cover for the base itself and a substantial part of Syrian territory. (S-300PMU-2 Favorit systems will not be turned over to the Syrians.

They will be manned and serviced by Russian personnel.)

According to our sources, Russia and Damascus reached an agreement on modernizing Syria's air defenses. Its medium-range S-125 air defense systems will be upgraded to the Pechora-2A level. The upgrade will certainly improve Syrian air defense, which uses hardware supplied to Syria back in the 1980s. Moscow is prepared to offer Syria more sophisticated medium-range Buk-M1s as well. Close-range Strelts systems sold to Damascus last year are all the Syrian air defense system has to show by way of sophisticated gear at this point (these systems use Igla SAMs).

Syria wants more than that. A contract for modernization of 1,000 T-72 tanks was drawn and signed. Yesterday, Arms-TASS news agency reported successful tests of T-90C tanks "in a certain Middle East country" and Rosoboroneksport's negotiations over their sale. Other Russian-Syrian arms talks under way concern two Amurs (Project 1650 diesel submarines), some SU-30MKI fighters along with YAK-130s, and modernization of MIG-29 frontal fighters. Damascus also aspires for a consignment of the latest Pantsir-C1 air defense systems designed in Tula.

Establishment of a base in Tartus and rapid advancement of military technology cooperation with Damascus make Syria Russia's instrumental bridgehead and bulwark in the Middle East. Damascus is an important ally of Iran and irreconcilable enemy of Israel. It goes without saying that appearance of the Russian military base in the region will certainly introduce corrections into the existing correlation of forces. Russia is taking the Syrian regime under its protection. It will almost certainly sour Moscow's relations with Israel. It may even encourage the Iranian regime nearby and make it even less tractable in the nuclear program talks.

The original source of this article is Kommerzant, Moscow (original Russian)
Copyright © [Ivan Safronov](#), Kommerzant, Moscow (original Russian), 2006

[**Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page**](#)

[**Become a Member of Global Research**](#)

Articles by: [Ivan Safronov](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca