

Threats and Rising Tensions: Russia's Military Options against a US Attack on Syria

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The tensions between Russia and the USA have reached an unprecedented level. I fully agree with the participants of [this CrossTalk show](#) – the situation is even worse and more dangerous than during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Both sides are now [going to the so-called “Plan B”](#) which, simply put, stand for, at best, no negotiations and, at worst, a war between Russia and the USA.

The key thing to understand in the Russian stance in this, and other, recent conflicts with the USA is that *Russia is still much weaker than the USA* and that she therefore does not want war. That does not, however, mean that she is not actively preparing for war. In fact, [she very much and actively does](#). All this means is that should a conflict occur, Russia you try, as best can be, to keep it as limited as possible.

In theory, these are, very roughly, the possible levels of confrontation:

1. A military standoff à la [Berlin in 1961](#). One could argue that this is what is already taking place right now, albeit in a more long-distance and less visible way.
2. A single military incident, such as what happened recently when Turkey shot down a Russian SU-24 and Russia chose not to retaliate.
3. A series of localized clashes similar to [what is currently happening between India and Pakistan](#).
4. A conflict limited to the Syrian theater of war (say like the war between the UK and Argentina over the Malvinas Islands).
5. A regional or global military confrontation between the USA and Russia.
6. A full scale thermonuclear war between the USA and Russia

During my years as a student of military strategy I have participated in many exercises on escalation and de-escalation and I can attest that while it is very easy to come up with escalatory scenarios, I have yet to see a credible scenario for de-escalation. What is possible, however, is the so-called “horizontal escalation” or “asymmetrical escalation” in which one side chooses not to up the ante or directly escalate, but instead chooses a different target for retaliation, not necessarily a more valuable one, just a different one on the same level of conceptual importance (in the USA [Joshua M. Epstein](#) and [Spencer D. Bakich](#) did most of the groundbreaking work on this topic).

The main reason why we can expect the Kremlin to try to find asymmetrical options to respond to a US attack is that in the Syrian context Russia is hopelessly outgunned by the

US/NATO, at least in quantitative terms. The logical solutions for the Russians is to use their qualitative advantage or to seek “horizontal targets” as possible retaliatory options. This week, something very interesting and highly uncharacteristic happened: Major General Igor Konashenkov, the Chief of the Directorate of Media service and Information of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, openly mentioned one such option. Here is what he said:

“As for Kirby’s threats about possible Russian aircraft losses and the sending of Russian servicemen back to Russia in body bags, I would say that we know exactly where and how many “unofficial specialists” operate in Syria and in the Aleppo province and we know that they are involved in the operational planning and that they supervise the operations of the militants. Of course, one can continue to insist that they are unsuccessfully involved in trying to separate the al-Nusra terrorists from the “opposition” forces. But if somebody tries to implement these threats, it is by no means certain that these militants will have to time to get the hell out of there.”

Nice, no? Konashenkov appears to be threatening the “militants” but he is sure to mention that there are plenty of “unofficial specialists” amongst these militants and that Russia knows exactly where they are and how many of them there are. Of course, officially, Obama has declared that there are a few hundred such US special advisors in Syria. A well-informed Russian source suggests that there are up to 5’000 foreign ‘advisors’ to the Takfiris including about 4’000 Americans. I suppose that the truth is somewhere between these two figures.

So the Russian threat is simple: you attack us and we will attack US forces in Syria. Of course, Russia will vehemently deny targeting US servicemen and insist that the strike was only against terrorists, but both sides understand what is happening here. Interestingly, just last week the Iranian Fars news agency reported that such a Russian attack had already happened:

30 Israeli, Foreign Intelligence Officers Killed in Russia’s Caliber Missile Attack in Aleppo: “The Russian warships fired three Caliber missiles at the foreign officers’ coordination operations room in Dar Ezza region in the Western part of Aleppo near Sam’an mountain, killing 30 Israeli and western officers,” the Arabic-language service of Russia’s [Sputnik](#) news agency quoted battlefield source in Aleppo as saying on Wednesday. The operations room was located in the Western part of Aleppo province in the middle of sky-high Sam’an mountain and old caves. The region is deep into a chain of mountains. Several US, Turkish, Saudi, Qatari and British officers were also killed along with the Israeli officers. The foreign officers who were killed in the Aleppo operations room were directing the terrorists’ attacks in Aleppo and Idlib.”

Whether this really happened or whether the Russians are leaking such stories to indicate that this could happen, the fact remains that US forces in Syria could become an obvious target for Russian retaliation, whether by cruise missile, gravity bombs or direct action operation by Russian special forces. The US also has several covert military installations in Syria, including at least one airfield with V-22 Osprey multi-mission tiltrotor aircraft.

Another interesting recent development has been the Fox News report that Russians are deploying S-300V (aka “SA-23 Gladiator anti-missile and anti-aircraft system”) in Syria. Check out [this excellent article](#) for a detailed discussion of the capabilities of this missile

system. I will summarize it by saying that the S-300V can engage ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, very low RCS (“stealth”) aircraft and AWACS aircraft. This is an Army/Army Corps - level air defense system, well capable of defending most of the Syrian airspace, but also reach well into Turkey, Cyprus, the eastern Mediterranean and Lebanon.

The powerful radars of this system could not only detect and engage US aircraft (including “stealth”) at a long distance, but they could also provide a tremendous help for the few Russian air superiority fighters by giving them a clear pictures of the skies and enemy aircraft by using encrypted datalinks. Finally, US air doctrine is extremely dependent on the use of AWACS aircraft to guide and support US fighters. The S-300V will forces US/NATO AWACS to operate at a most uncomfortable distance. Between the longer-range radars of the Russian Sukhois, the radars on the Russian cruisers off the Syrian coast, and the S-300 and S-300V radars on the ground, the Russians will have a much better situational awareness than their US counterparts.

It appears that the Russians are trying hard to compensate for their numerical inferiority by deploying high-end systems for which the US has no real equivalent or good counter-measures.

There are basically two options of deterrence: denial, when you prevent your enemy from hitting his targets and retaliation, when you make the costs of an enemy attack unacceptably high for him. The Russians appear to be pursuing both tracks at the same time. We can thus summarize the Russian approach as such

1. Delay a confrontation as much as possible (buy time).
2. Try to keep any confrontation at the lowest possible escalatory level.
3. If possible, reply with asymmetrical/horizontal escalations.
4. Rather than “prevail” against the US/NATO – make the costs of attack too high.
5. Try to put pressure on US “allies” in order to create tensions inside the Empire.
6. Try to paralyze the USA on a political level by making the political costs of an attack too high-end.
7. Try to gradually create the conditions on the ground (Aleppo) to make a US attack futile

To those raised on Hollywood movies and who still watch TV, this kind of strategy will elicit only frustration and condemnation. There are millions of armchair strategists who are sure that they could do a much better job than Putin to counter the US Empire. These folks have now been telling us for *years* that Putin “sold out” the Syrians (and the Novorussians) and that the Russians ought to do X, Y and Z to defeat the AngloZionist Empire. The good news is that none of these armchair strategists sit in the Kremlin and that the Russians have stuck to their strategy over the past years, one day at a time, even when criticized by those who want quick and “easy” solutions. But the main good news is that the Russian strategy is working. Not only is the Nazi-occupied Ukraine quite literally falling apart, but the US has basically run out of options in Syria (see [this excellent analysis](#) by my friend Alexander Mercouris in the Duran).

The only remaining logical steps left for the USA in Syria is to accept Russia’s terms or leave. The problem is that I am not at all convinced that the Neocons, who run the White House, Congress and the US corporate media, are “rational” at all. This is why the Russians employed so many delaying tactics and why they have acted with such utmost caution: they are dealing with professional incompetent ideologues who simply do not play by the

unwritten but clear rules of civilized international relations. This is what makes the current crisis so much worse than even the Cuban Missile Crisis: one superpower has clearly gone insane.

Are the Americans crazy enough to risk WWII over Aleppo?

Maybe, maybe not. But what if we rephrase that question and ask

Are the Americans crazy enough to risk WWII to maintain their status as the “world’s indispensable nation”, the “leader of the free world”, the “city on the hill” and all the rest of this imperialistic nonsense?

Here I would submit that yes, they potentially are.

After all, the Neocons are correct when they sense that if Russia gets away with openly defying and defeating the USA in Syria, nobody will take the AngloZionists very seriously any more.

How do you think the Neocons think when they see the President of the Philippines publicly calling Obama a “[son of a whore](#)” and then tells the EU to go and “[f*ck itself](#)”?

Of course, the Neocons can still find some solace in the abject subservience of the European political elites, but still – they know that the writing is on the wall and that their Empire is rapidly crumbling, not only in Syria, the Ukraine or Asia, but even inside the USA. The biggest danger here is that the Neocons might try to rally the nation around the flag, either by staging yet another false flag or by triggering a real international crisis.

At this point in time all we can do is wait and hope that there is enough resistance inside the US government to prevent a US attack on Syria before the next Administration comes in. And while I am no supporter of Trump, I would agree that Hillary and her evil cabal of russophobic Neocons is so bad that Trump does give me some hope, at least in comparison to Hillary.

So if Trump wins, then Russia’s strategy will be basically justified. Once Trump is on the White House, there is at least the possibility of a comprehensive redefinition of US-Russian relations which would, of course, begin with a de-escalation in Syria: while Obama/Hillary categorically refuse to get rid of Daesh (by that I mean al-Nusra, al-Qaeda, and all their various denominations), Trump appears to be determined to seriously fight them, even if that means that Assad stays in power. There is most definitely a basis for dialog here. If Hillary comes in, then the Russians will have to make an absolutely crucial call: how important is Syria in the context of their goal to re-sovereignize Russia and to bring down the AngloZionist Empire? Another way of formulating the same question is “would Russia prefer a confrontation with the Empire in Syria or in the Ukraine?”.

One way to gauge the mood in Russia is to look at the language of a recent law proposed by President Putin and adopted by the Duma which dealt with the issue of the [Russia-US Plutonium Management and Disposition Agreement \(PMDA\)](#) which, yet again, saw the US yet again fail to deliver on their obligations and which Russia has now suspended. What is interesting, is the language chosen by the Russians to [list the conditions](#) under which they would resume their participation in this agreement and, basically, agree to resume any kind of arms negotiations:

1. A reduction of military infrastructure and the number of the US troops stationed on the territory of NATO member states that joined the alliance after September 1, 2000, to the levels at which they were when the original agreement first entered into force.
2. The abandonment of the hostile policy of the US towards Russia, which should be carried out with the abolition of the Magnitsky Act of 2012 and the conditions of the Ukraine Freedom Support Act of 2014, which were directed against Russia.
3. The abolition of all sanctions imposed by the US on certain subjects of the Russian Federation, Russian individuals and legal entities.
4. The compensation for all the damages suffered by Russia as a result of the imposition of sanctions.
5. The US is also required to submit a clear plan for irreversible plutonium disposition covered by the PMDA.

Now the Russians are not delusional. They know full well that the USA will never accept such terms. So what is this really all about? It is a diplomatic but unambiguous way to tell the USA the exact same thing which Philippine President Duterte (and Victoria Nuland) told the EU.

The Americans better start paying attention.

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