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The NATO-Russia Face Off in Syria

By Pepe Escobar
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So a Su-30 enters a few hundred meters into Turkish airspace for only two minutes over Hatay province, and returns to Syrian airspace after being warned by a couple of Turkish F-16s.

Then all hell breaks loose as if this was the ultimate pretext for a NATO-Russia war.

NATO, predictably, went out all rhetorical guns blazing. Russia is causing “extreme danger” and should immediately stop bombing those cute “moderate rebels” the coalition of the dodgy opportunists refuses to bomb.

But wait; NATO is actually too busy to go to war. The priority, until at least November, is the epic Trident Juncture 2015; 36,000 troops from 30 states, more than 60 warships, around 200 aircraft, all are seriously practicing how to defend from the proverbial “The Russians are Coming!”

Still, Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu – he of the former “zero problems with our neighbors” doctrine – actually “warned” Moscow that next time Ankara would respond “militarily”.

Until, of course, he backed down; “What we have received from Russia ...is that this was a mistake and that they respect Turkey’s borders and this will not happen again.”

The incident could have been easily defused – via military to military communication – without the posturing.

But Ankara – NATO’s eastern flank – is under immense pressure from ‘Exceptionalistan’. It’s no accident Pentagon supremo and notorious neocon Ash Carter “conferred” with Ankara about the incident. Carter of course is the most stellar practitioner of the official Beltway diktat; “By taking military action in Syria against moderate groups’ targets, Russia has escalated the civil war.”

‘Sultan’ Erdogan, right on cue, and straight from Strasbourg (no, he was not campaigning for the European Parliament) doubled down: “Assad has committed state terrorism, and unfortunately you find Russia and Iran defending (him).”

And yet ‘Sultan’ Erdogan won’t go down in history as the catalyst for the much-awaited NATO-Russia Hot War 2.0. At least not yet.

Only bomb if we say so

Enter Dr. Zbigniew “Grand Chessboard” Brzezinski, growling in a FT Op-Ed that Washington should “retaliate” if Moscow does not stop attacking US assets in Syria. “US assets” means CIA-trained “moderate rebels”. And after all, “American credibility” is at stake.

Dr. Zbig – Obama’s prime foreign policy mentor – insists bombing CIA-trained “rebels” accounts for “Russian military incompetence”. And the American counter-attack should be to “disarm” the “Russian naval and air presence.” Now that’s how you go for a NATO-Russia Hot War 2.0.

Dr. Zbig admitted though that “regional chaos could easily spread northeastward,” and then “both Russia and then China could be adversely affected.” Who cares? What matters is that “American interests and America’s friends...would also suffer.”

This is what passes for prime geopolitical analysis in the ‘Empire of Chaos’.

‘Sultan’ Erdogan, for his part, remains restless. Moscow has already evaporated his so cherished three-year-old dream of a no-fly zone over northern Syria. There is an actual no-fly zone all over Syria now in effect. But it’s managed by Russia.

And that explains why there’s already full spectrum hysteria for more US Congress sanctions on Russia. How can a no-fly zone be imposed over Syria when Russia got there first?

And it was all going so swimmingly for the ‘Sultan’. Ankara – at the insistence of Washington – had finally thrown open its air bases to fight ISIS/ISIL/Daesh, but as long as this was part of a regime change operation in Damascus. And for that, Ankara would get its no-fly zone.

Enter ‘The Sultan’s’ recurrent nightmare; the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its sister organization, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

‘The Sultan’ simply cannot accept the PYD advancing to the western bank of the Euphrates to help in the fight against ISIS/ISIL/Daesh. ‘The Sultan’ wants to “contain” the PYD in Kobani.

The problem is the PYD – supported by the PKK – is the only reliable ‘Empire of Chaos’ ally in Syria. Yet ‘the Sultan’ could not help himself; he got into a war – again – against the PKK. Washington was not exactly amused.

And then there’s the key corridor from the Bab al-Salam border crossing down to Aleppo – controlled by Ankara-supported goon squads. That’s Ankara’s bridge to Aleppo; without it, not the slightest chance of regime change, ever. The fake “Caliphate” was threatening to take over the corridor. So action was imperative.

Russia’s spectacular entry into the war theatre threw all these elaborate plans into disarray. Imagine a complete liberation of northeast Syria as soon as the PYD – with help from PKK fighters – is weaponized enough to smash the ISIS/ISIL/Daesh goons. And imagine the Russian Air Force providing air cover for such an operation, with extra coordination by the Russia-Syria-Iraq-Iran central in Baghdad.

‘The Sultan’, in desperation, would have to maneuver his F-16s against such an offensive. And then we might really have a NATO-Russia five seconds to midnight scenario – with terrifying consequences. ‘The Sultan’ would blink first. And NATO would collapse into the ignominy it never left – back to its elaborate “Russia is invading” drills.