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Military Escalation, Dangerous Crossroads: Russia-US Confrontation in Syria?

By Prof Michel Chossudovsky
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On December 14, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta signed a Pentagon order to deploy 400 US missile troops to Turkey. According to Washington, the security of Turkey, NATO's heavyweight, is threatened. US military personnel will to be deployed to Turkey in the coming weeks to operate two US Patriot missile batteries.

According to the Pentagon's spokesman, George Little:

"The United States has been supporting Turkey in its efforts to defend itself,... [against Syria]

"I'm not going to go into precise locations at this time, he added, "but I wanted to let you...know that we signed that order and that we are prepared in the context of NATO to support the defense of Turkey for an unspecified period of time."

"The purpose of this deployment is to signal very strongly that the United States, working closely with our NATO allies, is going to support the defense of Turkey, especially with potential threats emanating from Syria," US Air Force News, December 14, 2012)

The Patriot surface-to-air interceptors are deployed to deal "with threats that come out of Syria" According to U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta. these threats "include Syrian strikes inside Turkey and fighting between the government and rebels that extends into Turkey" (CNN, December 14, 2012):

“We can’t spend a lot of time worrying about **whether that pisses off Syria,**” said Panetta [sic] after signing the order Friday. (Ibid, emphasis added)

In addition to the US missile deployment, Germany and the Netherlands have confirmed that they will also deploy Patriot missiles in Turkey directed against Syria.

Not mentioned in the official Pentagon statement, this buildup of patriot missile batteries is not only directed against Syria, **it is intended to confront Russia’s military presence in Syria as well as its support to the development of Syria’s air defense system.**

The US-NATO Led Insurgency

The Pentagon’s initiative in Turkey is part of the US-NATO-Israeli led insurgency against Syria. In recent months, this insurgency has evolved towards an unofficial (yet *de facto*) allied invasion characterized by the presence inside Syria of French, British, Turkish and Qatari Special Forces.

These Special Forces are “embedded” within rebel ranks. They are not only participating in the training of rebel forces, they are also involved in *de facto* paramilitary command and coordination, in liaison with NATO.



In other words, member states of the Atlantic Alliance through their Special Forces and intelligence operatives on the ground largely determines the nature and thrust of rebel activities. Of significance, the main fighting force directly recruited and trained by US-NATO, Saudi Arabia and Qatar is the **Al Nusra Front**, (see image right) an Al Qaeda affiliated militia involved in countless terrorist acts against civilians.

The Broader Middle East War

The US Patriot missile deployment in Turkey is part of a regional process of militarization which includes the establishment of US command posts and the stationing of American troops in Jordan and Israel. This regional military deployment also threatens Iran.

Moreover, US-NATO-Israeli war preparations with regard to Syria are coordinated with those pertaining to Iran. The command posts in Israel, which oversee some 1000 US troops, in coordination with Israel’s IDF, are under the jurisdiction of US European Command (EUCOM).

In a recent statement Iran’s chief of staff warned that the stationing of Patriot anti-missile batteries on Turkey’s border with Syria “was setting the stage for world war”

It is worth noting that in addition to the Patriot missiles in Turkey, Patriot batteries targeted at Iran have also been deployed to Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE and Bahrain (2010).



US Patriot Missile

Russia's Air Defense Systems in Syria

In response to the US-allied missile deployment, Russia delivered advanced Iskander missiles to Syria, which are now fully operational, not to mention the ground to air Russian defense system Pechora 2M.

The Iskander is described as a surface-to-surface missile system “that no missile defense system can trace or destroy”:

The superior Iskander can travel at hypersonic speed of over 1.3 miles per second (Mach 6-7) and has a range of over 280 miles with pinpoint accuracy of destroying targets with its 1,500-pound warhead, a nightmare for any missile defense system.

Iskander Mach 6-7

Moreover, Syria is equipped with the modern Pechora-2M air defense system, which US military sources admit would constitute “a threat”, namely an obstacle, in the case “a no fly zone” were implemented in relation to Syria.

The Pechora-2M is a sophisticated multiple target system which can also be used against cruise missiles.



The Pechora-2M is a surface-to-air anti-aircraft short-range missile system designed for destruction of aircraft, cruise missiles, assault helicopters and other air targets at ground, low and medium altitudes.

Ground to air defense Russian Pechora 2M deployed to Syria (above)

Russia Stands Firmly in Support of Syria

Contrary to recent reports, Russia is supporting the government of Bashar al Assad.

On December 14, the Russian Foreign Ministry dismissed rumors, largely instrumented by Western press agencies and the New York Times, that Moscow had changed its position with regard to Syria. The media hype plastered on news headlines was based on an unofficial off-the-cuff statement by Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Mikhail Bogdanov;

“We must face the facts: the current tendency shows that the government is progressively losing control over an increasing part of the territory,” Bogdanov told the Public Chamber. “An opposition victory can’t be ruled out.”

The statement had nothing to do with Russia’s stance with regard to Syria. In fact quite the opposite, Moscow has increased its military cooperation with Damascus in response to Western threats.

“...We never changed our position, and will not do so in the future,” said Foreign Affairs spokesperson Lukashevich at a press briefing in Moscow.

It is worth noting that on December 5, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov accused Western countries of violating the arms embargo by transferring “extensive supplies of weapons to the Syrian “opposition” which is in large part composed of Al Qaeda affiliated militia,

Dangerous Crossroads in Russia-US Relations

Washington and its allies have consistently supported the various terrorist entities which are part of the “opposition” rebel forces.

In recent developments, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) is threatening to execute a Ukrainian journalist (see photo Below) and has also announced that they will “kill Russians and Ukrainians nationals” in Syria.



The Free Syria Army (FSA) are the foot-soldiers of the Western military alliance. Without Western support they would not be able to confront Syrian government forces.

The decision to threaten and target Russian nationals did not emanate from the “opposition” rebel forces, but directly from Washington.

These threats constitute a deliberate act of provocation against the Russian government which is providing military support to Syria. “Opposition” forces in consultation with US-NATO are now threatening Russia, which is an ally of Syria.

We are at a dangerous crossroads: while Patriot missiles are installed in Turkey, Russian Iskander missiles are deployed in Syria.

French, British, Turkish and Qatari special forces are involved in the recruitment and training of FSA rebels, which are in large part mercenaries. The FSA is now targeting Russian citizens in Syria on the orders of Washington, leading to a potential breakdown in international diplomacy.

Moscow considers these threats as “akin to a declaration of war” stating that “the armed insurgents in Syria [supported by the West] have been emboldened to a point that they have stepped into an area where they are beyond the law.”

Is the threat directed against Russian nationals in Syria the prelude towards a broader process of confrontation between US-NATO and Russia?