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Al-Sisi's Egypt Is More Involved with the Russian Axis

BY: NOURA ALI

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Egypt has sent an official request from the Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation for the procurement of Buk-M3 Surface -to-Air Missiles(SAM) from Russia., according to Defense World.

The parties still need to agree on volumes, terms of performance and cost of the contract.

Defense world reported that “the first Division SAM Buk-M3 has already entered service with the Russian army.”

In fact, this system didn’t enter the Russian military except during the fall of 2016.

Izvestia, a Russian newspaper, quoted an unnamed source in the military sayings that” Cairo has requested Buk-M2E missiles from Moscow.

Egypt has a modification of BukM2E missile system and is interested in increased combat capabilities of the new Buk, demonstrated in a closed part of the forum, Army 2016.”

The difference is a new modification increases the range of the set-up to 70 km and height of hitting the target -up to 35 km. Buk-M3 is equipped with a new anti-aircraft missile 9M317M capable of acting on a “fire and forget.” In this case the missile is now in the transport and launch container and start vertically (as C-300), instead of the target as old model “Bukov”. With the new range of radar can simultaneously track and direct missiles at 36 targets.

According to experts, Buk-M3 in its combat capabilities comparable with earlier versions of the much more complex set, S-300. The new “Buk” can protect the ground troops as the enemy attacks from tactical aircraft and missile strikes from short and medium range.

Military experts Mikhail Khodarenok was quoted as saying by the news daily that “When creating a Buk-M3 going capacity building for shelling targets at extremely low altitudes, such as tactical and ballistic missiles as well as to work in conditions of intense.”

The new modification was a transition to new components, which led to an increase in capacity computing system. Independent military expert Yury Ljamin said that,” Buk-M3 is a highly mobile system designed for operation as part of army units.”

Ljamin said that Egypt is currently in large-scale modernization of the armed forces to be able to fight against a powerful enemy. After the purchase from Russia complex, Antey-2500, Buk-M3 and Thor in Egypt will complete layered defense system, Ljamin said.

Head of the program “The military balance in the Middle East” in the Tel-Aviv Institute for the Study of National Security (INSS) Yiftah Shapir told Izvestia that currently large-scale purchases of modern weapons Egypt dictated by considerations of prestige and claims in Cairo for leadership in the Arab World.

Egypt Widening its Military Armament

Egypt of Sisi is now trying to widen its military armament sources through importing weapons from Russia, marking a likely shift in Egypt's arms imports as the United States of America has always been the major arms supplier for the Egyptian military since Camp David Accords.

However, since the military coup in 2013, the relation between Russia and Egypt has flourished in an unprecedented way.

Egypt's Armed Forces have previously signed an arm deal with the Russian Rosoboronexport armaments company for the sale and delivery of 46 attack helicopters.

Russian state arms exporter Rosoboronexport Deputy Director General Igor Sevastyanov previously stated that Russia will most probably provide equipment for Egypt's Mistral-class helicopter carriers delivered from France.

In the same context, the Kremlin chief of staff said at an earlier time that Russia is expected to provide Egypt with more than \$1 billion in equipment and helicopters for the two Mistral carriers.

Moreover, the Russian ambassador in Cairo Sergey Kerpichenko stated last June that he holds much information on the deadly arms deals between Egypt and Russia. He also pointed that the Egyptian minister of defense refuses to declare the military deals and contracts as they are considered special information. He added that Egypt and Russia are moving on the right path as Russia is ready to increase Egypt's defense capabilities.

Furthermore, a high-ranking Egyptian military delegation headed to Russia for meetings and discussions on bilateral military cooperation between the two countries last September. Egypt's military delegation to Russia included Minister of Defense Sedky Sobhy and Minister of Military Production Mohamed Al-Assar.

This is the third meeting held by the Egyptian-Russian military committee. The first meeting took place in February when a Russian military delegation visited Cairo, and the second meeting was in Russia headed by Al-Assar.

The Russian Industry and Trade Minister Denis Manturov said on the sidelines of the Army 2016 international military-technical forum, "Russia is considering an opportunity to start servicing military hardware in Egypt as well as localize military production in that country."

Manturov added, "We have had long-term relations. We hope military-industrial production specimens that they can look at here will interest them,"

He said, "We said that besides direct supplies, we are ready to interact also in organization of service maintenance with the use of the potential and capacity of Egyptian defense industry sector enterprises."

Manturov noted that Russian enterprises studied manufacturing capabilities of the Egyptian side. He said, "The plants are in a good condition, of course they require additional modernization, but

they are capable of also ensuring assembly if the talk is about local production of some components and organization of joint production.”

Manturov explained that the talk could be about the joint assembly, production and servicing of hardware; enterprises could be upgraded for the start of that process. “Russia and Egypt plan to hold joint research and development work in the sphere of military aviation, “according to Manturov.

The Russian industry and trade minister met with Egyptian Defense Minister Sedky Sobhy and Military Production Minister Mohamed al-Assar at the Army 2016 forum.

“Army 2016” -which is a large-scale military exhibition has opened outside Moscow-bringing together Russian defense industry and research representatives, and delegates from 80 countries. The Army-2016 military and technical forum will showcase the latest developments in weapons, military vehicles and technology for five days.

Moreover, Russia and Egypt have reached an agreement under which Egyptian pilots will be trained to fly the Kamov Ka-52K Katran (the naval version of the Ka-52 Alligator) attack helicopter, the Russian newspaper Izvestia reported on 6 September, citing a source in military and diplomatic circles as reported by IHS Janes (the British publishing company specialized in military information).

“The ministers agreed on specific measures for the preparation of the Egyptian pilots for flying the ship-based Ka-52K,” it quoted the source as saying.

The Egyptian side has until the end of the year to send the necessary documents to Moscow, and then Russia will develop a training program, the source added.

In October, Russian Airborne units have been sent to Egypt to take part in joint military drills, the first such bilateral exercise in Africa.

Armored personnel vehicles and quadbikes are among the hardware being taken by the Russian side. “International [military] exercises of the Russian and Egyptian Airborne forces on the African continent are being conducted for the first time,” as announced by the Russian Defense Ministry.

The drill, codenamed “Defenders of Friendship 2016” was aiming to practice joint anti-terrorist actions. Last year Russia and Egypt conducted a joint naval training exercise codenamed “Friendship Brigade 2015.”

The media sources following the warming relations between Egypt and Russia pointed that the training would include 500 infantrymen, 15 warplanes and 10 combat vehicles.

The training will take place amid recent media reports pointing that Egypt will allow Russia to use its military bases as well as its air force for launching military strikes in the Middle East and Africa. But Egypt rejects these reports.

What Egypt will give in return?

There is no doubt that these steps, which have been taken by the Egyptian regime will get it closer to the Russian axis the coming period of time, but there is nothing given for free.

On the other hand, Russia will try to expand its power in the Middle East at time the United States of America is busy preparing for the presidential elections.

With the Arab Spring and the United States of America's hesitant policy towards the revolutions and the overthrown Arab leaders (once supported by US), Russia has diffused in this political vacuum by enhancing the military and diplomatic relations with the old-new regimes in these Arab countries (The old autocratic regimes have restored themselves once again after the Arab Spring revolutions through military coups as the case was in Egypt)

The war in Syria has paved the road for Putin to fulfil his dreams: Russian military forces, air force system, warplanes and warships have poured to Syria to defend the Syrian regime despite the US rejection.

In addition, Russia has succeeded in enhancing its relation with Egypt – the most major Arab country taking advantage of Egypt's need to more military support in its fighting against terrorism in Sinai.

According to Russia Beyond the Headlines, a Russian news website, experts believe that training in preparation for an anti-terrorist operation “in a desert environment” is a demonstration of the capabilities of Russia's rapid-response forces amid the ongoing conflict in Syria, as well as evidence that Cairo, in case of the deterioration of the situation, is counting not only on Washington, but would also like to enlist the support of Moscow.

In this context, Vladimir Isayev -a professor of the Institute of Asia and Africa at Moscow State University- said that this scenario is more than relevant to Egypt, as part of the territory of Egypt -in the north of the Sinai Peninsula- is no longer controlled by government forces, and Cairo is no longer able to count on Washington's support in this matter, he pointed out.

According to Isayev, if the terrorist organizations that are operating in Sinai will try to expand the territory under their control, the army would like to count on Moscow's support.

“It is unlikely that it is paratroopers that will participate, but as for the Russian Aerospace Forces, it is quite likely,” he said.

But what would Egypt offer to Russia by joining the Russian axis rather than its consensus on the Russian presence as a main player in the Middle East as well as the joint military cooperation between both countries?

In fact, the observer to the Egyptian political, diplomatic and military movements infers that Cairo has already started to take a part in the Russian axis favor and policies.

On the political level, Egypt voted in favor of a Russian-backed draft resolution in the UN Security Council on Syria, which was opposed by Saudi Arabia. As a result, Egypt's stance has angered Egypt's major Gulf backer which condemned Egypt's vote and described it as a "painful" stance.

On the diplomatic level, the lobbying for Egyptian officials to attend the talks on the Syrian crisis in Lausanne which was mainly based by a request from Iran.

The Guardian newspaper said that it has seen emails indicating that the Iranian foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, asked Kerry for Cairo's team to attend the Lausanne talks. When the US secretary of state proposed six-nation talks to "see if a new reasonableness can manifest itself" in Syria, Zarif replied: "Why not Egypt too?"

Iran agreed to attend the talks only once it had secured places for the foreign ministers of Egypt and Iraq at the discussions, according to The Guardian.

The Guardian also cited a tweet posted by Sadegh Ghorbani, a journalist at Fars – the "semi-official" news agency of the government of Iran, saying that it was "interesting how Sisi's Egypt is gradually shifting from US-Saudi axis towards Russia-Iran. Tehran-Cairo relations revival maybe question of when not if."

On the military level, the Syrian National Security Bureau chief Ali Mamlouk made an official visit to Cairo in October 2016 where he met with General Khaled Fawzy, the head of Egypt's General Intelligence Service, as well as other senior security officials.

Syria's state news agency SANA had reported that "The two sides agreed to coordinate political stances," adding that they also decided to "strengthen coordination in the fight against terrorism."

In addition, Egypt has recently announced that it would assist the Syrian regime in the siege of Aleppo by helping to deliver aid, as reported by al-Arabi al-Jadeed.

Moreover, an unconfirmed news has been cited Al-Masdar News (AMN), a news website concerned with the Syrian issue, claiming that a group of officers from the Egyptian Army traveled to the port-city of Tartous, Syria on Tuesday to train with Russia's military advisors near the Islamic State's front-lines.

Al-Masdar News claimed it quoted some local activists saying that the Egyptian officers were accompanied by Russian military personnel upon their arrival to Tartous on Tuesday.

In fact, the Egyptian, Russian and Syrian militaries have not confirmed these reports; however, if true, it would definitely ensure the Egypt's joining to the Russian axis which will intensify the dispute between Egypt and its financial backer Saudi Arabia whose relations have undergone a major blow in the light of the Egyptian Russian rapprochement.

