

DANGEROUS CROSSROADS: NATO launches radar in Turkey to target Russia, Iran and Syria

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Turkey has recently launched the early warning radar station, a part of NATO's missile system, which the USA has been building near Russia's borders. The radar station will be controlled from Germany. The station is located in the town of Malatya, which is 500 kilometers to the south-east of Ankara and some 700 kilometers from the border with Iran. Turkish and US servicemen will serve at the station.

Turkey agreed to deploy the radar station on its territory in September 2011. Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan stated back then that the deployment of the radar in Turkey would be an important step for the whole region.

Data from the station will be transferred to command posts in the United States and to the ships equipped with the AEGIS system (a sea-based missile defense system). NATO officials stated that the radar station was deployed in Turkey in connection with the growing threat for Iran to use small and medium range missiles in the Middle East.

Several local politicians stood up against the deployment of the elements of NATO's missile defense system in Turkey. They believe that the West would thus get Turkey involved in a possible conflict with Teheran.

Needless to say, Iran was strongly against the deployment of the missile defense system in Turkey. Iranian officials claimed that such a move could only exacerbate tension in the region. Turkish officials responded with saying that the deployment of the missile defense system elements was not aimed against any other country.

The deployment of the radar station raised concerns among other countries of the region indeed. The distance from the station to Syria, for example, is a bit more than 200 kilometers. Syrian President Bashar Assad pays a lot of attention to his missile potential. His generals are certain that hundreds of Syrian short-range missiles would guarantee no aggression against Syria. Syrian officials earlier stated that their country would shower Turkey and Israel with missiles in the case of aggression.

Moreover, many Syrian analysts say that the deployment of the radar station in Turkey proves the preservation of the military alliance between Ankara and Tel Aviv. Israel will also be receiving data from the Turkish radar.

Russia was not thrilled with the news either. NATO invited Russia to take part in the project, but the talks came to a standstill. Russia also tried to obtain legal guarantees saying that

the system would not be aimed against her, but the US refused to do it.

NATO's Secretary General Rasmussen set out a hope that an adequate political agreement with Moscow could be achieved before the Russia-NATO summit, which is to take place in Chicago in the spring of the current year. However, chances for that are slim, because Russia will only be able to play the role of a silent observer. NATO can only offer Russia to sit and watch its strength growing.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev stated in November 2011 that Russia would take a complex of measures in response to the deployment of the missile defense system in Europe. However, Konstantin Sivkov, the first vice president of the Academy of Geopolitical Problems, told Pravda.Ru that Russia had practically nothing to respond to the threat from NATO.

"As for Iskander systems, they can be used against the objects of missile defense in Poland. Iskanders would have to be deployed either in Russia's Kaliningrad region or in Belarus. However, it will be impossible to hit the targets in Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey. The radius of Iskander complexes is 280 kilometers. In addition, the Americans believe that they will be able to neutralize this virtual threat with the help of ATACMS missile complexes.

"Russia will not be able to use nuclear weapons in this situation. We have our aviation, but I seriously doubt that Russian combat aviation will be able to win a battle just because of the enemy's considerable superiority in the air.

"We can use cruise missiles. However, Russia does not have enough vessels to patrol NATO's coasts. There are also strategic aircraft that can launch cruise missiles and remain invulnerable to the enemy. However, the Russian arsenal of cruise missiles is not enough either. Our missiles can not be compared to the Tomahawks that can strike targets at distances of up to 2,500 kilometers," the expert said.

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