

The US Military-Industrial Complex's Worst Nightmare: The Deployment of Russia's S-300 Air Defense System In Syria May Destroy and Expose the F-35

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Global Research, October 01, 2018

[Strategic Culture Foundation](#) 30 September 2018

Region: [Middle East & North Africa, Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD, US NATO War Agenda](#)

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The [tragic episode](#) that caused the death of 15 Russian air force personnel has had [immediate repercussions](#) on the situation in Syria and the Middle East. On September 24, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu informed allies and opponents that the delivery of the S-300 air-defense systems to the Syrian Arab Republic had been approved by President Vladimir Putin. The delivery had been delayed and then suspended as a result of Israeli pressure back in [2013](#).

In one sense, the delivery of S-300 batteries to Syria is cause for concern more for Washington than for Tel Aviv. Israel [has](#) several F-35 and has claimed to have [used](#) them in Syria to strike alleged Iranian weapons transfers to Hezbollah. With the S-300 systems deployed in an updated version and incorporated into the Russian command, control and communications (C3) system, there is a serious risk (for Washington) that Israel, now incapable of changing the course of events in Syria, could attempt a desperate maneuver.

It is no secret that Greece [purchased S-300s](#) from Russia years ago, and that NATO and Israel have trained numerous times against the Russian air-defense system. Senior IDF officials have often insisted that they are [capable](#) taking out the S-300s, having apparently discovered their weaknesses.

Tel Aviv's warning that it will attack and destroy the S-300 battery should not be taken as an idle threat. It is enough to look at the recent downing of Russia's Il-20 surveillance aircraft to understand how reckless a desperate Israel is prepared to be. Moreover, more than one IDF commander has [over the years](#) reiterated that a Syrian S-300 would be considered a legitimate target if threatening Israeli aircraft.

At this point, it is necessary to add some additional information and clarify some points. Greece's S-300s are old, out of maintenance, and have not had their electronics updated. Such modern and complex systems as the S-300s and S-400s require maintenance, upgrades, and often replacement of parts to improve hardware. All this is missing from the Greek batteries. Secondly, it is the operator who uses the system (using radar, targeting, aiming, locking and so forth) that often makes the difference in terms of overall effectiveness. Furthermore, the system is fully integrated into the Russian C3 system,

something that renders useless any previous experience gleaned from wargaming the Greek S-300s. No Western country knows the real capabilities and capacity of Syrian air defense when augmented and integrated with Russian systems. This is a secret that Damascus and Moscow will continue to keep well guarded. Yet two years ago, during the operations to free Aleppo, a senior Russian military officer [warned](#) (presumably alluding to fifth-generation stealth aircraft like the F-35 and F-22) that the range and effectiveness of the Russian systems may come as a surprise.

The following are the words of Russian defense minister Sergei Shoigu concerning the deployment of the S-300 to Syria and its integration with other Russian systems:

“Russia will jam satellite navigation, onboard radars and communication systems of combat aircraft, which attack targets in the Syrian territory, in the Mediterranean Sea bordering with Syria. We are convinced that the implementation of these measures will cool hotheads and prevent ill-considered actions threatening our servicemen. Otherwise, we will respond in line with the current situation. Syrian troops and military air defense units will be equipped with automatic control systems, which have been supplied to the Russian Armed Forces. This will ensure the centralized management of the Syrian air defense forces and facilities, monitoring the situation in the airspace and prompt target designation. Most importantly, it will be used to identify the Russian aircraft by the Syrian air defense forces.”

If the Israelis will follow through with their reckless attempts to eliminate the S-300 (if they can find them in the first place, given that they are mobile), they will risk their F-35s being brought down. The US military-industrial complex would suffer irreparable damage. This would also explain why Israel (and probably the US) has for more than five years put enormous pressure on Moscow not to deliver the S-300 to Syria and Iran. The US State Department’s reaction over the future purchase by Turkey and India of the S-400 confirms the anxiety that US senior officials as well as generals are experiencing over the prospect of allies opting for the Russian systems. This would allow for a comparison with weapons these allies purchased from the US, leading to the discovery of vulnerabilities and the realization of the US weapons’ relative inferiority.

Given Tel Aviv’s tendency to place its own interests above all others, it would not be surprising to find them using the possibility of attacking the S-300 with their F-35s as a weapon to blackmail Washington into getting more involved in the conflict. For the United States, there are two scenarios to avoid. The first is a direct involvement in the conflict with Russia in Syria, which is now unthinkable and impractical. The second – much more worrying for military planners – concerns the possibility of the F-35’s capabilities and secrets being compromised or even being shown not to be a match against air-defense systems nearly half a century old.

An illuminating example of how the United States operates its most advanced aircraft in the region was given in eastern Syria around Deir ez-Zor. In this part of Syria, there is no threat from any advanced air-defense systems, so the US is often free to employ its F-22 in certain circumstances. The Russian military has repeatedly shown radar evidence that unequivocally shows that when Russian Su-35s appear in the same skies as the F-22, the US Air Force simply avoids any confrontation and quickly [withdraws](#) such fifth-generation assets as the F-22. The F-35 [is not even](#) ready in its naval variant, and has yet to be deployed on a US aircraft carrier near the Middle Eastern theater or the Persian Gulf; nor is it present

in [any US military base](#) in the region. The US simply does not even consider using the F-35 in Syria, nor would it risk its use against Russian air defenses. Israel is the only country that so far may have already [used](#) these aircraft in Syria; but this was before the S-300 came onto the scene.

The F-35 program has already cost [hundreds of billions of dollars](#) and will soon reach the exorbitant and surreal figure of over 1 trillion dollars. It has already been sold to dozens of countries bound by decades-long agreements. The F-35 has been developed as a multi-role fighter and is expected to be the [future backbone](#) of [NATO](#) and her allies. Its development began more than 10 years ago and, despite the countless problems that still exist, it is already airborne and combat-ready, as the Israelis insist. From the US point of view, its employment in operations is played down and otherwise concealed. The less data available to opponents, the better; though the real reason may lie in a strong fear of any revelation of potential weaknesses of the aircraft damaging future sales. At this time, the Pentagon's marketing of the F-35 is based on the evaluations provided by Lockheed Martin, the manufacturer, and on the tests carried out by the military who commissioned it to Lockheed Martin. Obviously, both Lockheed Martin and the US Air Force have no interest in revealing any weaknesses or shortcomings, especially publicly. Corruption is a big thing in Washington, [contrary to common assumptions](#).

The combination of Israel's ego, its inability to change the course of events in Syria, coupled with the loss of its ability to fly throughout the Middle East with impunity due to Syria now being equipped with a superior air defense – all these factors could push Israel into acting desperately by using the F-35 to take out the S-300 battery. Washington finds itself in the unenviable position of probably having no leverage with Israel over the matter ever since losing any ability to steer events in Syria.

With the Russian air-defense systems potentially being spread out to the four corners of the world, including China, India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and who knows how many other countries waiting in the queue, Russia continues to increase its export capacity and military prestige as it demonstrates its control of most of the Syria's skies. With the introduction of the the S-500 pending, one can imagine the sleepless nights being spent by those in the Pentagon and Lockheed Martin's headquarters worrying about the possibility of an F-35 being taken down by an S-300 system manufactured in 1969.

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