

U.S. Continues to Draw Lines in Eastern Mediterranean

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From November 3 to November 14, Israeli, U.S., German, Italian and Greek war jets participated in the “Blue Flag 2019” military exercises out of the Ovda Air Base in Israel’s Negev Desert. The timing of these exercises corresponds with Turkey and a whole host of other countries conducting their own naval exercises in the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas.

Lines are certainly [being drawn](#) in the Eastern Mediterranean between pro-U.S. forces and states seeking their own sovereignty away from U.S. hegemony, especially Turkey. Greece proves to be a curious country at the moment, since one of its warships participated in the Turkish-led naval exercises, even though [Pakistan twice](#) violated Greek airspace during these exercises and a war of words continues to ensue between Turkish and Greek political leaders over the maritime waters of Cyprus and the Eastern Aegean.

Although Greece was involved in both exercises, there can be no doubt that the Blue Flag 2019 exercises were aimed against Russia, Turkey and Iran. Part of the Blue Flag 2019 was the process and execution of aerial scripts to neutralize Russia’s S-400 Triumph missile defense system. However, since none of the participating countries have an S-400, the Israeli military had deployed U.S.-made Patriot missiles in specific locations to try to simulate the capabilities of the Russian-made systems during the military exercises that occurred near the Gaza Strip.

The simulation of the S-400 rocket launcher demonstrates for the first time that Israel is actively preparing to deal with such a system that exists only in Syrian and Turkish territory. In Syria, the powerful Russian defense system was deployed to protect Russian forces exactly four years ago, ironically because Turkey blew out a Russian jet from Syrian airspace in November 2015.

Meanwhile, the S-300V4 missiles will also be deployed in Egypt. The S-300V4 uses almost similar technology to the S-400 and has great capabilities in handling stealth aircraft. The S-400 has recently been shipped to Turkey, but is not yet operational, while Iran and Saudi Arabia have also shown interest in these systems.

The oldest and least capable S-300PMU-2 was deployed by the Syrian armed forces in late 2018, reducing the frequency of Israeli attacks in the country, but not stopping them. It is unclear what exact development led to Israel’s implementation of the S-400 neutralization training, however it is likely that these systems will also begin appearing elsewhere in the Middle East, putting Israel in a compromised military position.

Whatever the case, a big game is being played in the area with the possession and potential

use of strategic weapons, such as Russian missiles and 5th generation American fighter jets.

Turkey, Greece, Israel, the U.S. and Syria have been embroiled in a meltdown of developments over who will eventually have the upper hand in the Eastern Mediterranean, but it is also seen that alliances are forming in the region. Although Greece was involved in both exercises taking place in the Eastern Mediterranean, its warship participating in the Turkish-led exercises took a more observatory position ensuring that its maritime waters were not violated, while it took a very active role in Israel, even [winning the war games](#) against the other participants of the exercises, which is unsurprising since Greece has the [best pilots in NATO](#).

While Greece also participated in the Turkish-led naval exercises, it was actively training its pilots alongside the U.S. and conducting drills with Patriot missile batteries modified to imitate the Russian-made systems. However, the Russian systems hit targets [twice as fast](#) as the Patriots, and at a longer distance and higher altitude - essentially, attempting to use Patriots to simulate the S-400 would not have been very accurate.

It cannot be forgotten that Saudi Arabia, the world's largest exporter and producer of oil in the world, on September 14 had its daily supply cut by nearly 50 percent because of drone and missile attacks against state-owned oil company by the Yemeni Houthi-led Ansarullah resistance movement. With Saudi Arabia investing billions of dollars into the Patriot system, it would have been expected that they would have a near 100% success rate in hitting all the missiles launched by the Ansarullah Movement.

It is for this reason that Russian Senate Security and Defense Committee member Franz Klintsevich, in a comedic manner, [stated that](#) "if Saudi Arabia had installed the Russian anti-aircraft systems, this would not have happened. The S-300 and S-400 missile systems, supported by the Pantsir S-1 would not have allowed any of the drones and missiles to hit their target. The Saudis should think about it." Therefore, there is a huge doubt that the modified Patriots could successfully mimic the S-400.

Whether the training against "the S-400" in Israel was successful for the participating countries, it more importantly demonstrates an intent by these countries to be able to overcome the Russian missile defense system. For Israel, it is crucial so that it knows how to respond to any hypothetical war with Iran or Turkey, while for the U.S. it would also be against Russia.

With Russia selling the S-400 system, announcing its intent to also sell fighter jets, and conducting patrols with Turkey in Syria, their ties are becoming much more integrated. It also appears that the U.S., Greece and Israel are strengthening their military coordination in the Eastern Mediterranean. Although Israel is not against Russia, it certainly has an adversarial political and military relationship with Turkey despite their close economic ties, just as Greece does with Turkey. And although Greece might not be against Russia, they certainly are against Turkey. The U.S. intentions for the Blue Flag 2019 exercise is to coordinate an alliance against Russia, and potentially Turkey, while training against the S-400.

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