

## Video: Escalation in Syria - How Far Can the Russians be Pushed?

This video is based on the analysis of the Saker “Escalation in Syria – how far can the Russians be pushed?”. Separately, SouthFront is working on own critical documentary on modern Russia. This documentary will be ready in middle March.

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Global Research, March 01, 2018

[South Front](#) 28 February 2018

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Terrorism](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

*Events in Syria have recently clearly taken a turn for the worse and there is an increasing amount of evidence that the Russian task force in Syria is being targeted by a systematic campaign of “harassing attacks”.*

The recent incident, like drone and mortar attack on the Russian Aerospace Forces base in Khmeimin, the shooting down of a Russian SU-25, so-called Russian casualties in US airstrikes in Deir Ezzor, likely indicate on starting of implementation of a new US strategy in Syria: to punish the Russians as much as possible short of an overt US attack on Russian forces. This hypothesis is based on the following reasons:

First, the USA and Israel are still reeling in humiliation and impotent rage over their defeat in Syria: Assad is still in power, ISIS is more or less defeated, the Russians were successful not only their military operations against ISIS but also in their campaign to bring as many “good terrorists” to the negotiating table as possible. With the completion of a successful conference on Syria in Russia and the general agreement of all parties to begin working on a new constitution, there was a real danger of peace breaking out, something the US and Israeli-led block is absolutely determined to oppose.

Second, both Trump and Netanyahu have promised to bring in lots of “victories” to prove how manly and strong they are. Starting an overt war against Russian would definitely be a “proof of manhood”, but a much too dangerous one. Killing Russians “on the margins”, so to speak, either with plausible deniability or, alternatively, killing Russians private contractors is much safer and thus far more tempting option.

Third, there are presidential elections coming up in Russia and the US Americans are still desperately holding on to their sophomoric notion that if they create trouble for Putin they can somehow negatively impact his popularity in Russia.

Last but not least, since the US and Israeli-led block has long lost the ability to actually getting anything done, their logical fall-back position is not let anybody else succeed either. This is the main purpose of the entire US deployment in northern Syria: to create trouble for Turkey, Iran, Syria and, of course, Russia.

The bottom line is this: since the US Americans have declared that they will (illegally) stay in Syria until the situation “stabilizes” they now must do everything their power to destabilize Syria. Yes, there is a kind of a perverse logic to all that...

Step one: encouraging the Turks

There is a counter-intuitive but in many ways an ideal solution for Russia to counter the US invasion of Syria: involve the Turks. And do it not by attacking the US forces directly, but by attacking the Kurdish militias the US Americans are currently “hiding” behind. While the US and Israel will have no second thoughts whatsoever before striking Syrian or Iranian forces, actually striking Turkish forces would carry an immense political risk: following the US-backed coup attempt against Erdogan and, just to add insult to injury, the US backing for the creation of a “mini-Kurdistan” both in Iraq and in Syria, US-Turkish relations are at an all-time low and it would not take much to push the Turks over the edge with potentially cataclysmic consequences for the US, EU, NATO, CENTCOM and Israel interests in the region. Truly, there is no overstating the strategic importance of Turkey for Europe, the Mediterranean and the Middle-East, and the US Americans know that. From this flows a very real if little understood consequence: the Turkish armed forces in Syria basically enjoy what one would call a “political immunity” from any US attacks, that is to say that no matter what the Turks do, the US would never consider actually openly using force against them simply because the consequence of, say, a USAF strike on a Turkish army column would be too serious to contemplate.

In fact, the US-Turkish relationship is so bad and so one-sided that one would see a Turkish attack on a Kurdish column/position with embedded US Special Forces far more likely than a US attack on a Turkish army column. This might sound counter-intuitive, but let’s say the Turks did attack a Kurdish column/position with US personnel and that US servicemen would die as the result. What could the US do? Not only is the notion of the US attacking a fellow NATO country member is quite unthinkable, it would most likely be followed by a Turkish demand that the US/NATO completely withdraw from Turkey’s territory and airspace. In theory, the US could ask the Israelis to do their dirty job for them, but the Israelis are not stupid and they won’t have much interest in starting a shooting war with Turkey over what is a US-created problem in a “mini-Kurdistan”.

No, if the Turks actually killed US servicemen there would be protests and a flurry of “consultations” and other symbolic actions, but beyond that, the US would take the losses and do nothing about it. As for Erdogan, his popularity at home would only soar even higher. What all this means in practical terms is that if there is one actor which can seriously disrupt the US operations in northern Syria, or even force the US to withdraw, it is Turkey. That kind of capability also gives Turkey a lot of bargaining power with Russia and Iran which Erdogan will carefully use to his own benefit. So far Erdogan has only threatened to deliver an “Ottoman slap” to the USA and Secretary of State Tillerson is traveling to Ankara to try to avert a disaster, but the Turkish instance that the USA chose either the Turkish or the Kurdish side in the conflict very severely limits the chances of any real breakthrough. One should never say never, but it would take something of a miracle at this point to really salvage the US-Turkish relationship. Russia can try to capitalize on this dynamic.

The main weakness of this entire concept is, of course, that the USA is still powerful enough, including inside Turkey, and it would be very dangerous for Erdogan to try to openly confront and defy Uncle Sam. So far, Erdogan has been acting boldly and in overt defiance

of the USA, but he also understands the risks of going too far and for him to even consider taking such risks there have to be prospects of major benefits from him. Here the Russians have two basic options: either to promise the Turks something very inciting or to somehow further deteriorate the current relationship between the US and Turkey.

The other obvious risk is that any anti-Kurdish operation can turn into yet another partition of Syria, this time by the Turks. However, the reality is that the Turks can't really stay for too long in Syria, especially not if Russia and Iran oppose this. There is also the issue of international law which is much easier for the USA to ignore than for the Turks.

For all these reasons using the Turks to put pressure on the USA has its limitations. Still, if the Turks continue to insist that the USA stop supporting the Kurds, or if they continue putting military pressure on the Kurdish militias, then the entire US concept of a US-backed "mini-Kurdistan" collapses and, with it, the entire US partition plan for Syria.

So far, the Iraqis have quickly dealt with the US-sponsored "mini-Kurdistan" in Iraq and the Turks are now taking the necessary steps to deal with the US-sponsored "mini-Kurdistan" in Syria at which point \*their\* problem will be solved. The Turks are not interested in helping Assad or, for that matter, Putin and they don't care what happens to Syria as long as \*their\* Kurdish problem is under control. This means that the Syrians, Russians, and Iranians should not place too much hope on the Turks turning against the USA unless, of course, the correct circumstances are created. Only the future will tell whether the Russians and the Iranians will be able to help to create such circumstances.

Step two: saturating Syria with mobile modern short/middle range air defenses

Right now nobody knows what kind of air-defense systems the Russians have been delivering to the Syrians over the past couple of years, but that is clearly the way to go for the Russians: delivering as many modern and mobile air defense systems to the Syrians. While this would be expensive, the best solution here would be to deliver as many Pantsir-S1 mobile Gun/SAM systems and 9K333 Verba MANPADs as possible to the Syrians and the Iranians. The combination of these two systems would immensely complicate any kind of air operations for the US Americans and Israelis, especially since there would be no practical way of reliably predicting the location from which they could operate. And since both the USA and Israel are operating in the Syrian skies in total violation of international law while the Syrian armed forces would be protecting their own sovereign airspace, such a delivery of air-defense systems by Russia to Syria would be impeccably legal. Best of all, it would be absolutely impossible for the US and Israeli-led block to know who actually shot at them since these weapon systems are mobile and easy to conceal. Just like in Korea, Vietnam or Lebanon, Russian crews could even be sent to operate the Syrian air defense systems and there would be no way for anybody to prove that "the Russians did it" when US and Israeli aircraft would start falling out of the skies. The Russians would enjoy what the CIA calls "plausible deniability".

The other option for the Russians would be to offer upgrades (software and missile) to the existing Syrian air defense systems, especially their road-mobile 2K12 Kub and 9K37 Buk systems. Such upgrades, especially if combined with enough deployed Pantsirs and Verbas would be a nightmare for both the US Americans and the Israelis. The Turks would not care much since they are already basically flying with the full approval of the Russians anyway, and neither would the Iranians.

One objection to this plan would be that two can play this game and that there is nothing preventing the USA from sending even more advanced MANPADs to their “good terrorist” allies, but that argument entirely misses the point: if both sides do the same thing, the side which is most dependent on air operations (the USA) stands to lose much more than the side which has the advantage on the ground (the Russians). Furthermore, by sending MANPADs to Syria, the USA is alienating a putative ally, Turkey, whereas if Russia sends MANPADs and other SAMs to Syria the only one who will be complaining will be the Israelis. When that happens, the Russians will have a simple and truthful reply: we did not start this game, your US allies did, you can go and thank them for this mess.

The main problem in Syria is the fact that the US and the Israelis are currently operating in the Syrian skies with total impunity. If this changes, this will be a slow and gradual process. First, there would be a few isolated losses (like the Israeli F-16 recently), then we would see that the location of US and/or Israeli airstrikes would gradually shift from urban centers and central command posts to smaller, more isolated targets. This would indicate an awareness that the most lucrative targets are already too well defended. Eventually, the number of air sorties would be gradually replaced by cruise and ballistic missiles strikes. Underlying it all would be a shift from offensive air operations to force protection which, in turn, would give the Syrians, Iranians, and Hezbollah a much easier environment to operate in. But the necessary first step for any of that to happen would be to dramatically increase the capability of Syrian air defenses.

Hezbollah has, for decades, very successfully operated under a total Israeli air supremacy and their experience of this kind of operations would be invaluable to the Syrians until they sufficiently built up their air defense capabilities.

Conclusion: is counter-escalation really the only option?

Some starting to believe that the Empire has decided to attempt upon a partial “reconquista” of Syria, even Macron is making some noises about striking the Syrians to “punish” them for their use of (non-existing) chemical weapons. At the very least, the USA wants to make the Russians pay as high a price as possible for their role in Syria. Further US goals in Syria include:

- The imposition of a de-facto partition of Syria by taking under control the Syrian territory east of the Euphrates river
- The theft of the gas fields located in northeastern Syria
- The creation of a US-controlled staging area from which Kurdish, good terrorist and bad terrorist operations can be planned and executed
- The sabotaging of any Russian-backed peace negotiations
- The support for Israeli operations against Iranian and Hezbollah forces in Lebanon and Syria
- Engaging in regular attacks against Syrian forces attempting to liberate their country from foreign invaders
- Presenting the invasion and occupation of Syria as one of the “victories” promised by Trump to the MIC and the Israel lobby

So far the Russian response to this developing strategy has been a rather a passive one and the current escalation strongly suggests that a new approach might be needed. The shooting down of the Israeli F-16 is a good first step, but much more needs to be done to dramatically increase the costs the Empire will have to pay for its policies towards Syria. The

increase in the number of Russian commentators and analysts demanding a stronger reaction to the current provocations might be a sign that something is in the making.

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