

Gog Makes Another Chess Move!

Part 5

A year ago, Russia's mask of non-hostility towards Israel was still in place in the form of strategic coordination with Israel regarding the latter's bombings in Syria. This allowed it to conceal that it fully sided with Israel's enemies - Syria and Iran.

Even as it refrained from trying to stop Israel from bombing Iranian targets in Syria - as if it could have prevented this - it was at the same time enabling and sponsoring Iran's expansion into Syria. Gog has made his latest chess move, the delivering of the S-300 anti-missile system.



The rear doors of the huge nearly 200-ton An-124 transport aircraft dropped to the ground, and in a video supplied by Russia's military, two Transport, Erector and Launch (TEL) vehicles, each weighing tens of tons, drove down the ramp and onto Syrian territory.

The S-300 delivered to Syria – the picture above shows the TEL with missile canisters but not the radar systems and command and control vehicles that form part of the S-300 – is a major upgrade and escalation promoted by Russia's military as retaliation against Israel. In the last couple weeks some 49 pieces of the S-300 system have been delivered to Syria.

The S-300 is a long-range air defense system designed for use in the European theater and ill-suited to the confines of Syrian airspace, bordering on Iraq, Jordan and Israel. We do not know if the system delivered is new: it is probable an old S-300 freshly painted.

While the delivery of the S-300 is the Russian Ministry of Defense's response to Israel, who they blame for the loss of an IL-20M surveillance plane shot down by Syrian air defenses on September 17, 2018, the delivery of the S-300 may cause the Russians more problems than they want to think about, including the possibility of losing more aircraft to "friendly" fire.

The Russians will train the Syrian army on how to use the S-300 system. That will take time, and the training provided in 2007 to the Syrians for their existing anti-aircraft systems has proven inadequate. With high attrition in the Syrian military, it would be hard to believe any of the trained operators are still serving. If they were, they would still need to be retrained since their previous instruction was 11 years ago. Putin has stated that Russian crews will man the S-300 during the estimated 3-months of training for their Syrian crews.

It will take three months to train Syrian specialists to use Russian S-300 air defense systems, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said on Tuesday at a Russian Security Council meeting chaired by President Vladimir Putin. *"We have finished personnel recruitment and have begun to train them,"* he said.

So far, Russia has supplied Syria with 49 equipment pieces as part of delivery of the S-300 air defense system, Shoigu said. *"In conformity with the presidential decision, we have begun to carry out a number of measures to reinforce Syria's air defense systems in order to ensure better protection for our servicemen. We have completed the delivery of S-300 systems. It included 49 pieces of equipment, including radars, control vehicles and four launchers,"* he told a Russian Security Council meeting chaired by President Vladimir Putin.

The Syrian military is poorly organized and run and because of tremendous attrition during the Syrian civil war, the quality of recruits appears to have dropped even further. The Syrian military and police have lost 99,868 soldiers, with another 64,041 losses of pro-government militia fighters.

To get an idea of the scope of the government losses, Syria in the past fielded an army of 304,000, of which half were reserves. Combat losses are an aggregate but don't include non-combat deaths and desertions.

According to recent research, "an estimated 100,000 Syrian soldiers and officers have left their positions since the beginning of the crisis in 2011. While many have deserted to flee the conflict and take refuge abroad, a smaller number of military personnel have defected to the opposition."

What all of this means in practical terms is that recruiting and keeping talented people in the Syrian military has to be a huge challenge; on top of that many of the recruits are raw and inexperienced as well as uneducated.

The current size of the Syrian army, post-2015, is no more than 100,000. Commentator Mihail Khodarenok has written; translated from Russian: *"While militias, Iranian volunteers,*

Hezbollah and PMCs fight in lieu of the Syrian army, Bashar Assad's soldier busy themselves with collecting bribes at checkpoints. This view becomes more and more widespread among military experts aware of the actual situation in Syria."

Operating a modern air defense system is a challenge. The Syrian army's performance so far with air defense has demonstrated that they really don't know what they are doing and often fire their anti-aircraft systems in order to avoid criticism from their superiors, which is why they keep on shooting long after the threat has left the area.

The Russians may now have made it far worse, because the S-300's range is greater than the older systems in use in Syria. According to public information, the radar of the S-300 could potentially cover northern Israel's airspace.

Will Syrian gunners shoot their missiles into Israel? If they do, it is likely to trigger a general war. This could become an eventual spark to set off the whole region. This statement below confirms what might result.

TEL-AVIV, October 3. Israel cannot give up operations in Syria even though Russia has supplied air defense systems S-300 to that country, Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman told the public broadcaster Kan in an interview on Wednesday.

"I cannot say that we are happy about the presence of S-300 [in Syria - TASS], but at the same time this is a situation where we have no way out, where we have no opportunity to make decisions," Lieberman said. "In any case, we are not looking for adventures. We merely protect our vital interests. Regrettably, we are in a situation where we cannot afford any compromises concerning our security interests."

The Israeli cabinet ordered the army to continue acting against 'Iran's entrenchment' in Syria. Once again Lieberman blamed the Syrian military for the loss of Russia's Ilyushin-20 plane. *"It was Syria's air defense that shot down the Russian Ilyushin-20. The responsibility rests squarely on Syria,"* he claimed. *"I've seen the version that Israel was hiding behind. I am not going to wage any media battles with the Russian side. It is very regrettable that fifteen Russian soldiers and officers lost their lives,"* he said, adding that *"at the same time we were acting in a balanced and responsible way."* [Investigative findings report it was a French frigate that brought down the Russian IL-20, but Putin ignored the findings since it is cozying up to the French government.

"Currently the main task is to get back to the normal working regime, to coordination, and to use more actively the hot line for preventing conflicts," Lieberman said. *"Over years we have established a very good, working relationship with the Russian side and we have nothing to hide."*

"Our stance is transparent and clear. We have explained it to our partners in Russia and to the world community more than once," Lieberman said. *"As long as our interests remain unaffected,*

we never take any action, but it is clear that we cannot afford to let the whole territory of Syria become one large base for Iran. We will be acting in accordance with our interests."

"We have been acting not with accordance with media reports. The calendar is absolutely irrelevant. We act in accordance with the information being received by our special services," he said. "When we have confirmed information about an attempt to move some weapons from Iran to Syria or from Syria to Lebanon (for the Shiite movement) Hezbollah, we take action."

Russia has supplied to Syria 49 pieces of equipment under the decision to provide the S-300 air defense system in order to enhance the security of Russian military personnel in that country, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said at a meeting of the Security Council chaired by President Vladimir Putin. He believes that it would take three months to instruct Syrian specialists in using the S-300 systems. The work to create a unified system of command of Syria's air defenses will be completed by October 20, Shoigu said. This date could be pivotal.

Russia's radio-electronic reconnaissance plane Ilyushin-20 was shot down over the Mediterranean in the evening of September 17 on its way back to the Khmeimim base. The Russian Defense Ministry said that it was hit by a missile launched with the air defense system S-200, which was counter-attacking four Israeli F-16 jets that were dealing strikes against targets in Latakia province. The Russian Defense Ministry said the Israeli pilots in fact used the Ilyushin-20 as a cover, thus exposing it to air defense fire. Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov blamed the loss of the Ilyushin-20 entirely on the Israeli Air Force and those who made the decision to use the Russian plane as a decoy.

Here's some technical details: Different radars are supplied with the S-300 including "Tin Shield" ST-68U with a range of up to 150km (93 miles) and the 96L6 Cheesboard 3D radar with a range of 300km (186.4 miles). The S-300 model exported to Syria is probably the S-300PMU, or an old version of the S-300 in Russia's inventory, and it has 5V554 interceptor missiles with a range of 150km but also can be fitted with other types of interceptor missiles.

The distance between Damascus, where the S-300 may be headed, and Mt Bental overlooking the Golan Heights and part of Israel is 60km, or **37.3 miles**. Syria's Army commander has stated they are planning to re-take the Golan Heights from Israel lost in the 1967 Six-Day War. Iranian military leaders have stated two or three times that they plan to re-take the Golan Heights for Syria. The Israeli IDF knows what to expect and to prepare for in the coming weeks and months.

The biggest problem for Russia that the S-300 does not solve is the absence of systems in Syria to sort out friendly and unfriendly targets. These are known today as IFF systems – Identification Friend or Foe.

U.S. and NATO IFF are multipurpose: it provides information on the type of aircraft, its speed and direction and it works with codes that are changed on a daily basis to prevent spoofing.

The latest IFF system, known as Mode 5, does all this, provides frequency hopping and encryption to conceal transmitted information from an enemy. It can also link to civilian ADS-B – automatic dependent surveillance-broadcast – and to GPS satellites for navigation. U.S. and European aircraft must have ADS-B by 2019.

Modern military aircraft in the United States typically get FAA certification and the Defense Department normally requires all new aircraft to be in compliance with FAA regulations and get FAA certification.

IFF systems can be used on aircraft, ground vehicles, naval vessels, missiles and even on soldiers to try and cut down on friendly fire accidents. Israel has developed a mini-IFF for unmanned aircraft and the US is working on similar systems.

Until recently the Russians have had trouble with IFF. In 2008 the Russians shot down four of the six warplanes they lost in the Georgia conflict. General Vladimir Shamanov reported: *“In South Ossetia the IFF system, in fact, did not work, and it was very hard for our units to recognize whose equipment they were seeing – ours or Georgian.”*

Russia lost Su-25 ground attack aircraft and a Tu-22M3 long-range bomber. Several other Russian aircraft were badly damaged but survived.

In a similar manner, when special Russian forces shot down Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine in July, 2014, the BUK missile system either lacked IFF or the irregular operators paid no attention to it or didn't know what it meant. Civilian aircraft are equipped with transponders with a code they receive from air traffic controllers.

It was the BUK system that was also responsible for shooting down the four Russian warplanes in South Ossetia where the IFF system did not work. In Syria there are eight BUK complexes – model BUK-M2E – delivered in 2011.

Russia's primary IFF system is called Kremnij. It was upgraded to the 2M version because all of Russia's IFF system had been spoofed by NATO. The Kremnij has two modes – peacetime and wartime. The wartime version is only allowed to be used for war directly involving Russian territory. The peacetime version is jammable and spoofable.

Another Russian IFF is called Parol. It is a replacement for Kremnij-2M, but Kremnij remains in use. The Parol has a more sophisticated waveform and uses encryption like Western systems.

Russia did not provide IFF to Syrian air defense systems or to Syrian aircraft, meaning that the Syrians can only guess what they are shooting at under the best of circumstances. This becomes problematic should there be aerial contact between Israeli and Russian aircraft in the region. In recent months there have been encounters between Russian and Israeli fighter aircraft.

Russia held back on supplying IFF to Syria in fear that compromise of their IFF system would weaken the central focus of Russian defenses in European Russia. This means that the S-300 system delivered to Syria, just like its predecessor air defenses, won't have functional IFF.

The Russian Ministry of Defense's Major General Igor Konashenkov said: *"There were no precedents for transferring Russian IFF systems to other states, including the Syrian Arab Republic."*

As a result, supplying the S-300 is dangerous for three reasons: its range, meaning it can lead to war with Israel if it shoots across the border; its lack of IFF, meaning it can't distinguish between friendly and hostile forces; and the risk to Russian aircraft, meaning it is a threat to Russia's operations in Syria.

It may also be a threat to civilian air traffic around the Damascus airport. If put in the hands of poorly trained operators, the sale of the S-300 to Syria is a reckless measure pushed by the Russian military, who may rule the day they decided to send the S-300 to Syria.

An article written over a year ago presented the unvarnished facts about Russia's support for Iran's expansion in Syria at the expense of Israel's national security. It asserted that the Iranian forces' presence in Syria constituted an existential threat to Israel.

It further explained, for the benefit of those who could not conceive of Putin as so anti-Israel - after all, he had made Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu a guest of honor at the Moscow Victory Day parade in Red Square in May - that this was nothing personal against Israel, but, as they say in the Mafia, just business connected to Russia's rivalry with the U.S.

In truth, the strategic Israel-Russia coordination of Israeli bombings in Syria served Russian interests: Israel declared that it would continue the bombings no matter what, and an Israel-Russia military escalation could only draw the U.S. into the melee and expose Russia as a mere regional power that was no match for the U.S.

Following the September 18 downing of an Ilyushin-20 plane by Syrian missiles, Russia's mask dropped, and the true anti-Israel face of its policy was fully revealed. Indeed, Putin first attempted to conceal it by refraining from fully blaming Israel for the tragedy. But soon enough he joined his subordinates in blaming Israel, and announced that Russia would equip Syria with S-300 missile systems, which would, inter alia, protect Iranian forces in Syria from Israeli attacks.

Now the picture is crystal clear: The Russians, who originally enabled and sponsored the Iranian expansion in Syria as an anti-U.S. measure, will now also protect the Iranians in Syria from Israeli attacks. This constitutes an undeclared act of war against Israel by an enemy, i.e. Russia - since it will not be the Syrians operating the S-300's against Israeli aircraft, because they yet face a long learning curve to do this; it will, for an indeterminate time, be Russian officers.

But with Russia's equipping Syria with S-300's, and their inevitable operation by Russian officers against Israeli aircraft, the Russians risk a major military and technological debacle. They will learn, if they haven't yet from the Ilyushin tragedy, that Israeli-American technology is far superior to Russia's - and that goes not just for the S-300's now being shipped to the Syrians, but also for the S-300's and S-400's that Russia already has in place in Syria for its own defense. Perhaps only an internal Russian military investigation can show what these systems were doing when the Ilyushin was shot down.

Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu rejects the Israeli version of events, according to which the Israeli planes were already back over Haifa when the Ilyushin was shot down. The Russians argue that the radar picture showed an Israeli plane using the Ilyushin as a shield. A possible explanation for this, revealed by the Israeli daily *'Haaretz'*, is that the radar picture available to the Russians was not actual but was the product of Israel's electronic warfare.

Given that this will continue to be part of any future Israeli bombing, the advanced Russian missile defense systems will be rendered no longer marketable. Perhaps this is why the Russians, upon announcing that they will deliver S-300's to Syria, simultaneously announced their willingness to negotiate with the U.S. on this delivery, in order to avert any possible clashes with Israel and their ramifications.

Russia's true face has been revealed not only in the military/strategic sphere - by providing S-300's to Syria - but also by its reversion to the old Russian/Soviet anti-Semitism that not even Russian President Putin's "special relationship" with Chabad can camouflage. Former Israeli Ambassador to Russia Zvi Magen noted: *"The media blamed Israel on the day of crisis in a well-timed orchestrated manner, filled with anti-Semitic elements. This wasn't random."* Given Russia's actual policy towards Israel, this should come as no surprise.

'Southfront' a Middle East media report stated an S-300 air defense system and dozens pieces of additional military equipment have been delivered to Syria, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu reported to President Vladimir Putin on October 2. According to Shoigu, the supplied equipment includes four S-300 launchers, radars and control vehicles. The defense minister pointed out that the training of Syrian S-300 crews will take about 3 months.

An integrated air defense network is set to be established in the war-torn country by October 20. Russia is already delivering equipment and training Syrian servicemen for this purpose. Shoigu pointed out that the defense ministry had also boosted the electronic warfare capabilities of the Russian forces deployed in Syria. Russian forces are monitoring the main directions from which strikes on Syria have been carried out within the range of up 200-km.

US-led coalition spokesman Colonel Sean Ryan stated that the S-300 delivery has had no impact on the US forces deployed so far. *"It hasn't changed anything,"* Ryan stated adding that the coalition is going to use the existing de-confliction mechanism to prevent possible incidents.

However, there is a side directly affected – Israel. The Israeli leadership has stated that the Israeli military will continue its strikes on Syria even despite the delivery of the S-300 systems to Syria and even threatened to destroy the supplied systems. So, now many are looking forward to see how the Israeli Air Force will deal with the boosted capabilities of the Syrian Air Defense Forces.

Important developments are ongoing in the provinces of Idlib and Aleppo controlled by Turkey-led forces.

On September 27, Jaysh al-Islam leader Essam al-Buwaydhani confirmed that the group, which fled the Damascus suburb of Eastern Ghouta to northern Aleppo, has joined the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA).

Currently, Jaish al-Islam is re-organizing and re-arming in order to continue its operations with Turkish support. The group, with help of some mysterious local businessmen, is now building a new town with about 1,400 houses, a clinic, a school and a mosque in the area 15km north of al-Bab.

Essam al-Buwaydhani also claimed that the toppling of the Damascus government is still the group's priority. *"It is not impossible that Assad falls, especially given that the opposition forces are gathered today in one place,"* al-Buwaydhani told *'Reuters'*.

In early October, reports also appeared Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra, the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda) has reached a deal with Turkey and is going to re-organize its forces into three new armies under different brands. If confirmed, this will be another attempt to hide the essence of the terrorists operating in Idlib. Turkey is trying to re-establish the Ottoman Empire, the later version.

On October 2, US Defense Secretary James Mattis stated that US troops have started training their Turkish counterparts for joint patrols around the town of Manbij. *"The training now is under way and we'll just have to see how that goes,"* he stated adding that the US has *"every reason to believe the joint patrols will be coming on time"*

According to the Defense Secretary, the training, which is now ongoing on Turkish soil, had been delayed while equipment was brought in and the two countries worked out the instructions. On September 28, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated that the US did not comply with its responsibilities in the framework of the Turkish-US deal on the Syrian town of Manbij.

"The United States certainly did not comply with the agreed calendar of the Manbij roadmap; YPG did not exit the area. The real owners of the region are not settled in yet," Erdogan stated emphasizing that *"The United States did not keep their promise here."*

Most likely, the US decision to renew steps to implement the Manbij deal in order to avoid further tensions with Turkey, which remains one of the key powers involved in the Syrian conflict. In turn, Ankara seeks to kick off Turkish-US patrols around Manbij itself and to wipe out all YPG-affiliated military and political structures from the town. If this is done, it will be another example how the Erdogan government is actively working to exploit the differences between the US-Israeli-led bloc and the Syrian-Iranian-Russian alliance to pursue its own political and security goals in the region. Turkey walks a fine line to exploit its ties to the U.S. and Russia.

Even without the full Block 3F capability immediately available, Tel Aviv's F-35 fleet would offer the Israel Defense Force a potent capability to strike against Syria's newly acquired S-300s, certainly a better capability than offered by any conventional fighter. However, there is little prospect that Israel would attack those batteries while the Russians still more or less have those weapons under their direct control.

The presence of Russian forces means that Tel Aviv might be temporarily constrained against striking at those S-300 missile batteries, if it were so inclined. But in strictly military terms, the presence of those weapons does not necessarily limit Israel's ability to do so. Israel's new fleet of stealthy Lockheed Martin F-35I Adir versions of the Joint Strike Fighter affords Tel Aviv the ability to defeat the S-300 with relative ease. The U.S. has since announced it would expedite the shipment of a second squadron of F-35I to Israel on October 6th, 2018.

"The operational abilities of the air force are such that those (S-300) batteries really do not constrain the air force's abilities to act," Tzachi Hanegbi, Israel's regional cooperation minister, told Israel's Army Radio reports the *'Reuters' news agency*. *"You know that we have stealth fighters, the best planes in the world. These batteries are not even able to detect them."* One of the F-35's primary missions from its very inception has been the suppression (SEAD) and destruction (DEAD) of advanced enemy air defenses such as the S-300. Indeed, the F-35 will only become more formidable in the SEAD/DEAD role as time goes on and the aircraft is upgraded with the full operational capability Block 3F and subsequent Block 4 software and hardware configurations. Tel Aviv declared its F-35's operational in December 2017 and recently signed an agreement in February with Lockheed Martin to incorporate Israeli specific modifications to bring its planned 50-aircraft fleet to a Block 3F+ configuration by December 2021.

Even without the full Block 3F capability immediately available, Tel Aviv's F-35 fleet would offer the Israel Defense Force a potent capability to strike against Syria's newly acquired S-300s, certainly a better capability than offered by any conventional fighter. However, there is little prospect that Israel would attack those batteries while the Russian still more or less have those weapons under their direct control.

According to the Russians, it will take roughly three months for them to train Syrian S-300 air defense crews. "We have finished personnel recruitment and have begun to train them," Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said on Tuesday according to the TASS news

agency. Shoigu also officially confirmed that the Russians have delivered the S-300 to Syria. *“In conformity with the presidential decision, we have begun to carry out a number of measures to reinforce Syria’s air defense systems in order to ensure better protection for our servicemen,”* Shoigu said. *“We have completed the delivery of S-300 systems. It included 49 pieces of equipment, including radars, control vehicles and four launchers.”*

While the Syrian forces are being trained, Russian forces are likely to retain control of the S-300’s and operate those weapons under their direct supervision. Such an arrangement should prevent any rash actions by Syrian forces and also put a brake on any Israeli plans to strike at the missile batteries.

However, the Israelis might consider eliminating those S-300 batteries if the Russian do in fact hand them over to Syrian control. That is not a foregone conclusion given that it was Assad’s poorly trained and motivated air defense crews who allegedly shot down the Russian Il-20M Coot intelligence-gathering aircraft on September 18 sparking the current tensions in the first place.

The presence of additional Russian-made S-300 batteries in Syria complicates matters for both the United States and Israel. Washington decried the Russian move as escalatory. *“I’m certainly not going to comment on our intention on how we will address that, but my comments before were true,”* Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told reporters on Oct. 3.

As Gog deliberates his chess-board moves, it’s not likely that we will see many more moves before Gog is in Check and Checkmated!

Blessings,

Pastor Bob Reid
EvanTeachr@aol.com