



Deployment of Russian Anti-Drone System to Syria and Implications for Turkey

OE Watch Commentary: Russia's Sapsan-Convoy, a new multifunctional mobile anti-drone system, was successfully tested during the "Caucasus 2020" military exercises in September. Right after the military exercises, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced that Russia might deploy the Sapsan-Convoy to Syria. The accompanying article written by a Turkish defense expert and published by *Edam.org*, an independent think tank in Islamabad, claims that this may be a harbinger of a Syrian regime operation on Idlib, which Russia would support. In this scenario, Russia would use the system to shield Syrian regime forces from Turkish drones, which have previously conducted successful strikes against them. As such, the deployment of this system in support of the Syrian regime might limit Turkey's UAV superiority in Syria. Against this backdrop, the expert makes several recommendations for Turkey's decision-makers to consider.

The first recommendation is to take into account the heightened risk of loss for Turkish forces and drones against Syrian regime forces when the Sapsan-Convoy is deployed to Syria. With the protection of this system, regime forces will be able to maneuver troops without being subjected to Turkish drone attacks, in the event of an offensive on Idlib.

Second, this multifunctional system would be able to restrict Turkish UAVs' intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance and target detection activities and possibly shoot them down. Furthermore, it may interfere with Turkish electronic warfare systems active in Syria for intelligence gathering; and carry out counterintelligence activities and cyber-warfare by hacking into them. The author argues that Turkey must have a comprehensive plan to counter cyber-warfare against its electronic warfare systems.

Third, in a likely operation in Syria, the loss of Turkish drones to the Russian Sapsan-Convoy would have a significant impact on the Turkish defense industry and the economy. Fourth, the downing of Turkish UAVs in Syria would negatively impact their export prospects and cast doubt on their recent successes in Syria and in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Fifth, Turkey must ensure to incorporate UAVs and electronic warfare into its military exercises to prepare for systems designed to counter them. Sixth, the Turkish defense industry must invest in loitering munitions or kamikaze drones in response to increased electronic warfare systems in neighboring countries. Finally, Turkey should develop alternatives to GPS-based subsystems in smart ammunition and invest in more resistant data links for the safety of smart ammunition and ground control elements. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“It is essential for Turkish security forces to include the enemy's cyber-electronic warfare and information warfare capabilities... in their war games...”



Vladimir Putin in Khmeimim Air Base in Syria.

Source: kremlin.ru via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin_in_Khmeimim_Air_Base_in_Syria_\(2017-12-11\)_05.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin_in_Khmeimim_Air_Base_in_Syria_(2017-12-11)_05.jpg), Attribution: CC-BY-4.0



Continued: Deployment of Russian Sapsan-Convoy to Syria and Implications for Turkey

Source: Dr. Can Kasapoğlu, “Rus Sapsan-Convoy Elektronik Harp Sisteminin Suriye’ye Konuşlandırılmasına İlişkin Siyasi-Askeri Değerlendirme (Political-Military Assessment of the Russian Sapsan-Convoy Electronic Warfare System’s Deployment to Syria),” *edam.org.tr*, 16 November 2020. <https://edam.org.tr/rus-sapsan-convoy-elektronik-harp-sisteminin-suriyeye-konuslandirilmasina-iliskin-siyasi-askeri-degerlendirme/>

The Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, Sergei Shoygu, made statements that the Sapsan-Convoy mobile electronic warfare & anti-drone system could be deployed to Syria following its performance in the Caucasus 2020 military exercise in September.

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The deployment of this electronic warfare system to Syria should be examined closely in the current situation in which the possible Ba’ath regime’s operation on Idlib is underway.

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For the Russian Federation, Syria is a “war laboratory.”... In addition, the Syrian battlefield is home to a serious presence of drones.

The transfer of Sapsan-Convoy-like systems to the Ba’ath regime may increase the resistance of the Syrian Arab Armed Forces - especially at the level of maneuvering units - against Turkish UAV capabilities. In the case of using the aforementioned systems, for example, if an operation such as the Spring Shield is carried out, the Turkish Armed Forces’ unmanned aerial vehicle losses may be more than expected.

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In the event of a possible conflict, the economic aspect of the issue should not be overlooked. In the near future, the Turkish defense industry will switch from tactical and MALE (medium-altitude / long endurance) classes to high-operational & strategic classes with systems such as Akıncı and Aksungur. Naturally, the unit costs of the aforementioned systems are higher than the unmanned aerial vehicles such as Bayraktar TB-2 and ANKA currently in the inventory and losses are more difficult to replace. In addition, the fact that systems such as Akıncı and Aksungur will carry expensive weapons and sensors such as SOM air-to-ground cruise missiles, Sonobuoy and AESA radars is another factor to be considered in the context of defense economy... In a nutshell, the new generation of Turkish UAVs being downed by Syrian/Russian electronic weapons systems will be very costly for the Turkish defense [sector]...

In addition, top level Turkish UAVs being downed by Russian electronic warfare systems in Syria ...will create a negative impact on Turkey’s defense export potential...

...It is essential for Turkish security forces to include the enemy’s cyber-electronic warfare and information warfare capabilities especially in their war games...

One of the responses that can be given to the increase in electronic warfare capacity in neighboring countries is that the Turkish defense industry must invest in attack armed drone (loitering munition or kamikaze drone) systems with anti-radiation properties and qualities defined as ‘home-on-jam’ (HOJ)...

Developing alternative solutions to GPS-based subsystems in smart ammunition is another important area...



China’s cyber policy appears to have three vectors —peace activist, espionage activist, and attack planner— that dominate China’s cyber policy. Some are always hidden from view while others are demonstrated daily. Three Faces of the Cyber Dragon is divided into sections that coincide with these vectors.

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