



Franklin Holcomb, Hugo Spaulding  
and ISW Russia and Ukraine Team  
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Russia is reshaping the balance of military power in the Middle East and Black Sea region even as it faces potential defense budget cuts. Low oil prices and Western sanctions have caused a prolonged economic crisis in Russia, leading to new proposals for a 5 percent cut in the 2016 military budget. Russia continued efforts to offset the effects of low oil prices and Western sanctions by marketing its military hardware in the Middle East and Asia. Minister of Defense Sergey Shoygu made a surprise visit to Iran amidst reports over the potential sale of Russian supermaneuverable Su-30 fighter aircraft and the delivery of the long-range S-300 surface-to-air missile system, deals that may provide leverage in convincing Iran to support a Russian and Saudi-backed oil production freeze agreement. Russia is also heightening its military posture around Turkey as it shifts the balance of power in the Middle East. Russian officials revealed continued military buildup in occupied Crimea with plans to complete a new airfield, permanently deploy airborne forces, and reinforce the Russian Black Sea Fleet with two submarines in the next two years. Russia reportedly deployed additional fighter aircraft to its airbase near the Armenian capital of Yerevan, 15 kilometers from the Turkish border. A \$200 million Russian arms credit to Armenia came into effect this month, potentially impacting Armenia's frozen conflict with Turkish ally Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave. Russia presented a failed draft resolution to the UN Security Council condemning Turkey for its shelling of Kurdish forces in northern Syria, continuing efforts to portray Turkey as an obstacle to peace in Syria. Russia also continued to present itself as a broker of peace in Syria with a new "cessation of hostilities" agreement coordinated with the U.S., although U.S. officials remain skeptical of Russia's commitment to the deal. Russian intervention in Syria has provided Moscow a platform to exhibit its new military hardware in order to develop military ties in Asia. Indonesia confirmed its intent to purchase Su-35 air superiority fighters from Russia after China became the first customer of the advanced warplanes in November 2015. Russia completed a large shipment of automatic rifles and ammunition to Afghanistan, another country where Russia may attempt to compete with the U.S. for influence.

**1 Cuba.** 16 FEB: The commander of the Russian Ground Forces arrived in Cuba to discuss bilateral military cooperation, including Cuban officer training at Russian military academies.

**2 Estonia.** 18 FEB: Estonia reported that a Russian transport helicopter briefly crossed into Estonian airspace with its transponder deactivated.

**3 Crimea.** 20 FEB: Russian state media revealed plans to bolster Russia's military presence in Crimea over the next two years, including the completion of a new airfield in Sevastopol for military helicopters, surveillance drones, and the permanent deployment of airborne forces to the peninsula.

23 FEB: The commander of the Russian Black Sea Fleet announced that the Crimea-headquartered fleet would receive two submarines and two patrol boats this year as well as additional ships in 2017.

**4 Russia.** 19 FEB: Unnamed Russian officials revealed that Russia was considering trimming its 2016 defense budget by up to 5 percent (\$1.29 billion) due to the oil price-driven economic turndown, a cut that would reportedly be the largest under Putin's presidency.

**5 Turkey.** 19 FEB: Russia presented a failed draft resolution at the UN Security Council condemning Turkish shelling of Kurdish forces in Syria and Turkish and Saudi discussions of possible ground intervention.

24 FEB: Russia's Defense Ministry accused Turkey of subverting the U.S. and Russian-backed "cessation of hostilities" agreement by shelling targets in northern Syria.

**6 Syria.** 18 FEB: Russia's ambassador to the UN called on the Assad regime to support Russian-backed ceasefire efforts but claimed that pro-regime forces would "probably capture" the key northern city of Aleppo from opposition forces. This statement may reveal Russia's intent to continue facilitating regime gains around the key northern city despite the "cessation of hostilities" agreement.

22 FEB: Russia and the U.S. released a joint statement backing terms for a "cessation of hostilities" in Syria effective February 27 following a phone conversation between Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Barack Obama.

23-24 FEB: U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry suggested that the U.S. would consider a "Plan B" if Russia subverted the "cessation of hostilities" agreement, amidst reported doubts in the U.S. intelligence and defense communities over the veracity of Russia's commitment to the deal. Russia criticized the U.S.'s consideration of new courses of action, potentially involving increased U.S. support to the armed opposition.

**7 Armenia.** 18 FEB: The text of a \$200 million Russian arms export credit to Armenia was released after the credit came into effect on February 10. The June 2015 agreement applies to the purchase of Russian multiple launch rocket systems, armored vehicles, and MANPADs, weapons that could affect the balance of power in Armenia's frozen conflict with Turkish ally Azerbaijan.

20 FEB: Russia reportedly deployed five additional MiG-29 fighter jets near the Armenian capital of Yerevan to reinforce its airbase, approximately 15 kilometers from the Turkish border.

**8 Iran.** 18 FEB: The U.S. State Department said that Russia's potential sale of Su-30 fighter jets to Iran would violate the UN arms restrictions introduced following the July 2015 Iranian nuclear deal if not approved by the UN Security Council.

21 FEB: Russian Minister of Defense Sergey Shoygu held top-level meetings in Iran amidst reports over the potential sale of Russian Su-30 fighter aircraft and the delivery of the Russian long-range S-300 surface-to-air missile systems.

23 FEB: Iranian oil minister Bijan Zangeneh denounced the preliminary Russian-Saudi agreement to freeze oil production at January 2016 levels as "ridiculous" due to Iran's recent sanctions relief, casting doubt over the success of the deal.

**9 Afghanistan.** 24 FEB: Russia delivered an aid package promised since at least November 2015 including 10,000 AK-47 assault rifles and ammunition to the Afghanistan National Security Forces, reportedly the first direct Russian military assistance to Afghanistan since 2001.

**10 East Asia.** 17 FEB: Indonesia's defense minister confirmed plans to purchase around ten advanced Su-35 air superiority fighters from Russia, a deal which could be concluded in the coming months.

19 FEB: An unnamed military diplomat reported that Russia could deliver the first set of Su-35 fighter aircraft to China around the end of 2016 as part of an agreement revealed in November 2015.