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Israeli DM Threatens to Attack Russian Ships

By Jason Ditz

May 28, 2013

Israel's long-standing habit of making bellicose threats in the face of neighbors potentially acquiring defensive weapons has reached a new level today, with Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon threatening to attack Russian ships in the Mediterranean if they attempt to deliver anti-aircraft weapons to Syria.

Russia has had a long-standing contract with Syria to provide anti-aircraft defensive systems, and the Assad government is keen to get those shipments completed in the wake of repeated Israeli air strikes against them. The Russian S-300 system, the best the Russian government sells, is seen as being able to foil Israeli attacks.

Israel has struggled to justify its opposition to the deliveries, making ridiculous predictions of a dystopian future in which the whole region is a no-fly zone because Syria is attacking random planes for no reason. Syria's existing arsenal would be able to do this at any rate, and it doesn't. The obvious reason for acquiring the S-300 is to stop the Israeli attacks, and that's also the obvious reason for Israeli opposition. It's just not likely to convince the Russians.

A similar round of Israeli rhetoric was seen over several years related to Iran, with Israeli officials first claiming they had super-secret electronics that would render all S-300's useless worldwide and render Russian airspace defenseless. They later revised that claim and insisted those defensive weapons were an "existential threat" to Israel. After that didn't work either, they threatened massive retaliatory arms sales to "Russia's enemies."

The question of the latest threats is just how desperately Israel wants to keep its overwhelming military superiority over the entire region, and whether the prospect of one of its would-be victims acquiring defensive equipment is such a threat to their long-term strategy that it warrants risking a war with Russia. Logic would suggest it doesn't.