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Russia, Turkey Tensions Heating Up: Putin Surrounds Turkey with Military Presence

BY MICHAEL VAN DER GALIEN

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Vladimir Putin was dead serious when he warned Turkey that it would "regret more than once" shooting down a Russian fighter jet. Not only has the Russian president announced all kinds of

sanctions against Turkey, but he's now also surrounding the Islamist-led country with his military.

As *Hurriyet Daily News* reports, Putin has sent 14 helicopters to Erebuni air base in Armenia. Half of these helicopters are armored Mi-24 attack helicopters, while the other seven are Mi-8 model transport helicopters.

Meanwhile, Putin has also sent a submarine called the *Rostov-on-Don* to the Mediterranean. Russia has a naval base there, and the Russian president is apparently looking to give it a major boost: the submarine is armed with Caliber cruise missiles.

As if that doesn't make his aggressive intentions clear enough, Putin has also stepped up its presence at the Hmeymim air base outside Latakia in Syria. This air base is now home to 55 Russian fighter jets, "including SU-30 fighter jets and SU-24, 2U-25 and SU-34 bombers along with seven Mi-24 and five Mi-8 helicopters."

These jets are obviously weapons of aggression, not of defense. Putin says they'll be used against ISIS and other groups fighting against Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, but their presence will undoubtedly make Turkey nervous, not in the least because Putin's also stepping up his military presence in other places in the region. And there's more: the air base is also fortified with Pantsir-S1, Buk-M2, S-200, Pechora-2M and S-400 air defense batteries.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan may wonder why Putin has taken the time to do so, since ISIS and Al Nusra aren't exactly known for having dozens of fighter jets and bombers they can use against Assad and Russia. Only one country in the region does: Turkey.

The only question is now whether and if so how Turkey will respond to this obvious challenge to its hegemony in its own backyard.