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Pentagon/NATO versus the BRICS

Both sides are staking out their territory across the Middle East as BRICS countries warn the West about interventions.

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Few may have noticed when, last week, US State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland cryptically **announced** that Washington "would cease carrying out certain obligations under the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty with regard to Russia".

Translation: Washington will not inform Russia from now on about the redeployment of its

global armada. The Pentagon's worldwide "repositioning" strategy is now supposed to be a secret.

Some essential background is in order. CFE part one was signed way back in 1990 - when the Warsaw Pact was still in effect, and NATO was supposed to defend the "free" West against what was depicted as a threatening Red Army.

CFE part one established a significant reduction of the number of tanks, hardcore artillery, fighter jets and helicopters and that both sides would be constantly talking about it.

CFE part two was signed in 1999, in the post-USSR world. Russia did move the bulk of its arsenal behind the Ural Mountains while NATO kept expanding right up to Russia's borders - blatantly betraying the promise made in person by George Bush Sr to Mikhail Gorbachev.

Enter Vladimir Putin in 2007, when he decided to suspend Russia's role in the CFE until the US and NATO ratified part two. Washington did absolutely nothing, and spent four years mulling what to do. Now, even "talking" is on hold.

Don't mess with Syria

Moscow, nevertheless, has already known for years where the Pentagon wants to tread: Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania.

Yet NATO's dream is something completely different: Already outlined at a **Lisbon summit** a year ago, it wants to turn the Mediterranean into a NATO lake.

EU diplomats in Brussels confirm, off the record, that NATO will discuss in a key meeting in early December how to establish a beachhead very close to Russia's southern border to turbo-charge the destabilization of Syria.

For Russia, a Western intervention in Syria is an absolute no-no. Russia's one and only naval base in the Eastern Mediterranean is in the (Syrian) port of Tartus.

Not by accident, Russia has installed its S-300 air defence system - one of the best all-altitude surface-to-air missile systems in the world, comparable to the American Patriot - in Tartus. The update to the even more sophisticated S-400 system is imminent.

Moreover, at least 20 per cent of the Russian industrial-military complex would be in deep crisis if those assiduous Syrian clients were lost.

Essentially, NATO - not to mention Israel - would be suicidal to try to attack Syria by the sea. Russian intelligence is working with the hypothesis of an attack via Saudi Arabia.

Other countries, too, are very much aware of NATO's "Libya remix" strategy.

Take last week's **meeting**, in Moscow, of the deputy foreign ministers of the emerging BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).

The BRICS couldn't be more explicit: Forget about foreign intervention in Syria, as in "any external interference in Syria's affairs, not in accordance with the UN Charter, should be excluded".

The BRICS also condemn the extra sanctions on Iran ("counterproductive") and any possibility of a strike. The only solution - for both Syria and Iran - is dialogue and negotiations. Forget about an Arab League vote leading to a new R2P ("responsibility to protect") resolution approved at the UN Security Council.

This is a geopolitical earthquake. Russian diplomacy has coordinated with the other BRICS members a major pounding on the table; we will fight new US interventions - "humanitarian" or otherwise - in the Middle East. Now it's Pentagon/NATO versus the BRICS.

Brazil, India and China are following as closely as Russia on how France - under the neo-Napoleonic Liberator of Libya Nicolas Sarkozy - and Turkey, both NATO members, are invested, no holds barred, into smuggling weapons and betting on a civil war in Syria, while at the same time thwarting any possibility of a dialogue between the Assad regime and the fragmented opposition.

Chokepoint alert

It's also no secret of the BRICS that the Pentagon "repositioning" strategy implies an undisguised attempt to force, in the long run, "denial of access" to Chinese shipping and an expanding Chinese blue-water navy.

The repositioning now on across Africa and Asia especially concerns chokepoints. No wonder three of the world's crucial chokepoints are matters of national security for China, in terms of its supply of oil.

The Strait of Hormuz is the key global oil chokepoint (roughly 16 million barrels a day, 17 per cent of all oil traded worldwide, more than 75 per cent exported to Asia).

The Strait of Malacca is the crucial link between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea and the Pacific, the shortest sea route between the Persian Gulf and Asia, with a flow of around 14 million barrels a day.

And the Bab el-Mandab, between the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, is the strategic link between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, with a flow of 4 million barrels a day.

The Obama administration's national security adviser Thomas Donilon has been insistently arguing the US needs to "rebalance" its strategic emphasis - from the Middle East to Asia.

That goes a long way to explain Obama sending marines to Darwin, in Northern Australia, a

move analysed in a previous Al Jazeera [article](#). Darwin is very close to another chokepoint - Jolo/Sulu in in the southwest Philippines.

The first NATO secretary-general, Lord "Pug" Ismay, coined that famous mantra according to which the Atlanticist bloc should "keep the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down."

Now NATO's mantra seems to be "keep the Chinese out, the Americans in and the Russians down".

But what the Pentagon/NATO's moves - all part of the Full Spectrum Dominance doctrine - are actually doing is to bring Russia and China closer and closer - not only inside the BRICS, but especially in the expanded Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which is fast becoming not only an economic, but a military bloc as well.

Full Spectrum Dominance implies Washington encircling Asia with hundreds of military bases and now - untested - missile defence systems. Crucially, this also implies the threat of all threats: first-strike capability.

Beijing, at least for now, has not branded the expansion of Africom (US Africa Command) against its commercial interests, or the Marines positioned in Australia, as an act of war.

But Russia - as in the case of [missile defence](#) expanding on Eastern Europe and Turkey, the "no talking" regarding CFE, and NATO's designs on Syria - is becoming much more forceful.

Forget about US "strategic competitors" Russia and China yielding their sovereignty, or compromising their national security. Someone's got to break the news to those generals at the Pentagon; Russia and China are not exactly Iraq and Libya.