

Amid S-400 crisis, France deploys missile defense battery to Turkey

Author:

Fri, 2019-07-26 21:35

ANKARA: France will deploy a French–Italian Eurosam consortium’s SAMP/T missile defense battery along Turkey’s fragile southern border, Turkish military officials announced on Thursday, even as the deployment of the Russian S-400 defense systems’ hardware to Ankara continues.

In the meantime, Turkey sent commando forces to the Syria border on Thursday after warnings that it would launch a new cross-border operation if a deal was not reached with Washington about northern Syria.

Ankara has been conducting talks with Eurosam over the purchase of SAMP/T for a decade and it granted Eurosam an 18-month contract for studying the feasibility of the joint production.

Dr. Nilsu Goren, research fellow at the Center for International and Security Studies (CISSM) in Maryland, said the French decision to deploy a SAMP/T in Turkey is not surprising, and it seems to have been formulated as a NATO force generation response to the recent attacks on Turkish cities along the Syrian border.

“Other NATO air defense assets, including an Italian SAMP/T battery, have been deployed in Turkey throughout the conflict,” she told Arab News.

“According to Turkish officials, the S-400 air defense system will be ‘standalone,’ meaning that it would not be interoperable with any NATO assets, including the French SAMP/T,” Goren said.

To deter aerial threats arising from the region, Turkey will need to continue to work on creating a layered, network-based national air and missile defense system that is interoperable with its NATO assets, Goren said.

Serhat Guvenc, professor of international relations from Istanbul’s Kadir Has University, said the political meaning of French decision is far greater than its military aspect as this decision is an unprecedented move and is a huge political change on the part of France.

“Since the 1990s, various NATO countries such as Germany, Holland, Italy, Spain and the US have been deploying and operating aerial defense missiles to Turkey’s southern border, but this is the first time that France has done it,” he told Arab News, saying that this decision also contradicts the widespread belief that Turkey and France compete with each other on the Eastern Mediterranean.

For Guvenc, this decision can be taken as a symbol of France’s commitment to

Turkey's security and its show of solidarity with Turkey.

"France, which may not be considered as a traditional ally for Turkey in NATO, is willing to show that Turkey is not alone and therefore this move is meant to address the country's concrete security problems and its fear of abandonment in the Alliance, which was presented as Ankara's pretext for purchasing S-400 from Moscow," Guvenc said.

Once S-400 missile system will be activated – not expected to be before April 2020 – French batteries will not be compatible with them.

Experts note that these batteries are mostly deployed for a duration of 6 months to one year, and this term is extended each time.

Therefore, in the event of S-400 activation, the term of Eurosam's batteries may not be extended for the second time because of the lack of interoperability.

Eurosam's SAMP/T is a new generation mobile, anti-aircraft defense weapon for protecting sensitive areas against lone missiles.

With a range exceeding 100 km, it aims to meet medium and long-range air defense requirements against conflicts unfolding along its borders with Syria and Iraq.



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Turkey will retaliate if US imposes sanctions over S-400sRussia delivers more

[Under siege, Somalia moves to reform its army, pay troops](#)

Author:

Fri, 2019-07-26 21:02

NAIROBI: Deployed in one of the world's most dangerous conflicts, Somali soldiers risking their lives daily against Al-Shabab insurgents were growing weary of being paid months late and shortchanged by their superiors.

"We never received the complete amount," a captain told AFP on condition of anonymity, grumbling about "middlemen" who syphon off troops' meagre wages – some as low as \$100 a month – and plunder budgets meant for weapons, rations and uniforms.

Then in March, his pay arrived on time, in full and straight to his bank account, in what officials say is the first step in a radical shake-up of its graft-ridden armed forces.

The government, under pressure from foreign backers, has started paying troops directly, bypassing army commanders previously tasked with disbursing their pay but diverting the money instead.

Under the new system, payments are linked to a biometric database containing soldiers' fingerprints, personal details and bank accounts, replacing patchy records kept on Excel spreadsheets.

Officials say about 10,000 "ghost soldiers" were expunged from the records – roughly one in three troops according to government estimates, though analysts questioned these figures.

These fictitious troops either did not exist at all or had long ago deserted. By taking control of salary payments, Mogadishu is seeking to cut out powerful commanders who for decades ran the Somali National Army (SNA) "as private fiefdoms," Fiona Blyth from the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia wrote in an April report.

The shake-up was fiercely resisted in some quarters of the army, with several soldiers deserting their barracks in March in protest.

But the government is pressing ahead. In July it also began registering fighters from an allied militia into its security forces, and identifying older or injured soldiers for retirement.

Mogadishu says the reforms are a milestone in decade-long efforts to rebuild the army into a force capable of taking over when the roughly 20,000 African Union AMISOM peacekeepers leave.

"We are not there yet. A lot of things need to be done first... but ultimately I think it will be a game changer," a government adviser told AFP.

African soldiers were deployed in 2007 to provide muscle until Somalia's army could stand on its own. AMISOM's withdrawal is slated for 2021.

Somalia's donors have long complained that there is little to show for the hundreds of millions poured into rebuilding the SNA.

In 2017, after a decade of international money and support, an internal review concluded the army was a “fragile force with extremely weak command and control and military capabilities.”

Many units lacked weapons, basic medical supplies and even uniforms. That same year, the United States suspended aid for the SNA over fraud concerns.

But recent efforts to boost accountability and professionalism in the military have struck a chord with traditional allies.

The United States announced this month it was resuming limited, non-lethal assistance to an army unit in Lower Shabelle, where SNA and AMISOM troops liberated key towns from Al-Shabab in April and May.

“The US notes several Somali-led steps toward security sector reform over the last year, notably the biometric registration,” a State Department official told AFP.

Mohamed Ali Hage, a cabinet minister and top defense official, told AFP this “clearly demonstrates increased confidence in the security sector.”

Analysts say the reforms, though important, gloss over a sobering reality: the SNA is nowhere near ready to secure a nation mired in civil war, clan violence and jihadists still controlling swathes of countryside.

“It’s really an army in name only,” said Matt Bryden, director of Nairobi-based think tank Sahan.

“Just because an individual has been biometrically registered and is on some payroll list, doesn’t mean that they are actually a trained soldier in a formed unit.”

The SNA faces a formidable foe in Al-Shabab, which this month alone bombed the Mogadishu mayor’s office, blew up a checkpoint near Somalia’s international airport and stormed a hotel with gunmen, collectively killing 49 people.

In January, heavily-armed jihadists overran a military camp on the outskirts of Kismayo, killing at least eight soldiers in one of their frequent ambushes of SNA locations.

Efforts by Somalia’s international partners to ready the SNA for war have been criticized as being uncoordinated and piecemeal.

Some are trained by the British, others by the EU or the Turkish. Until 2018, the United Arab Emirates drilled its own troops in Somalia while the US, which focuses on drone strikes and Somalia’s special forces, mentors another unit.

Encouraging these myriad stakeholders – all with their own strategic ambitions in the Horn of Africa nation – to work together has been difficult, say analysts.

Until this happens, the SNA would be “highly uneven in their effectiveness,” said Paul D. Williams, associate professor at the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University.

“Ideally, greater coherence would come from fewer partners directly training and mentoring the SNA. But no single country has proved willing to offer the entire package,” he said.



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[Denmark backs Britain's proposed Hormuz naval mission](#)

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1564154625637809400

Fri, 2019-07-26 10:36

COPENHAGEN: Denmark said on Friday it welcomed a British government proposal for a European-led naval mission to ensure safe shipping through the Strait of Hormuz and would consider a military maritime contribution.

Britain has sought to assemble the mission in Hormuz, used by tankers carrying about a fifth of the world's oil, following Iran's seizure of a British-flagged ship in what London said was an act of "state piracy." The initiative won initial support from Denmark, France and Italy, three senior diplomats said on Tuesday.

"The Danish government looks positively toward a possible contribution to

such initiative,” Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod said in a statement. “The initiative will have a strong European footprint.”

The backing contrasts with a lukewarm response shown by European allies to a similar American call first voiced at NATO in late June, which was resisted by France and Germany. They worried the US-led military alliance would be dragged into a possible confrontation with Iran.

EU-member Denmark is among the world’s biggest seafaring nations and home to the world’s biggest container shipping firm A.P. Moller-Maersk, which sails in the high-tension area.

“The Royal Danish Navy is strong and capable and would be able to contribute actively and effectively to this type of engagement,” said Danish Defense Minister Trine Bramsen.

A final decision would still need to be discussed in parliament.



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Germany remains uncertain over Hormuz naval mission with UK and France Britain tasks navy with accompanying British-flagged vessels through the Strait of Hormuz

Lebanon secures release of American citizen from Syria

Author:

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1564156032177911300

Fri, 2019-07-26 14:59

BEIRUT: Syrian authorities have released a US citizen and he has been handed back to his family, thanks to the mediation of Lebanon, a Lebanese security official said on Friday.

The security official did not reveal the name of the released American, but said it was not Austin Tice, a journalist who disappeared in Syria in 2012. The official said that Lebanon's security chief Abbas Ibrahim had conducted the mediation.

"Lebanon has worked on mediating through General Abbas Ibrahim to release an American and he was handed over to his family already. The American is not Tice because it is not known where he is," the security official said.

Several US citizens have been held in Syria since the war began there in 2011, including people held by militant groups such as Daesh.

The United States has declined to say who it believes is holding Tice, but has said it believes he is alive and has sought the help of the Syrian government's close ally Russia to free him.

Last year the family of another American, Majd Kamalmaz, told the New York Times that he had disappeared at a government checkpoint in Damascus in 2017. Last month Ibrahim flew to Iran to complete the release and repatriation of Nizar Zakka, a Lebanese citizen with permanent residency in the United States who was detained there in 2015.



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Lebanon ups pressure on Syrian refugees to return Security forces in crackdown on Lebanon-Syria border smuggling operations

[More than 100 migrants missing off Libyan coast](#)

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1564085572671516900

Thu, 2019-07-25 19:41

TRIPOLI: More than 100 migrants were missing after their boat sank off the coast of Libya in what might be the worst tragedy in the Mediterranean this year, aid agencies said Thursday.

"The sinking took place off the coast of the city of Khoms," some 100 kilometers (60 miles) from Tripoli, said Safa Msehli, spokesperson for the International Organization of Migration in Libya.

About 145 migrants were rescued by the Libyan coast guard, and survivors had reported that about 150 people remained missing, she said.

General Ayoub Kacem, a spokesman for the Libyan navy, said that "134 migrants were rescued and a body recovered, while 115 other migrants are still missing."

"A wooden boat carrying around 250 people, including women and children, sank some five nautical miles from the coast, according to witness testimony from the migrants who survived," Kacem said in a statement.

The charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said as many as 250 migrants were still missing.

The migrants had been apparently headed out to sea on three boats lashed together, MSF mission chief Julien Raickman told AFP by telephone.

He said survivors had reported a total of almost 400 people on board.

Kacem said most of the rescued migrants were from Ethiopia while others were Palestinians and Sudanese. The coast guard was waiting for authorities to provide accommodation for them.

The head of the UN refugee agency Filippo Grandi tweeted that it was "the worst Mediterranean tragedy of this year."

"Restoring rescue at sea, ending refugee + migrant detention in Libya, increasing safe pathways out of Libya must happen NOW, before it is too late for many more desperate people," he added.

The capsizing came only a few weeks after some 68 migrants died when an Italy-bound boat sank off Tunisia.

That vessel, filled with mostly African migrants, tipped over shortly after setting out from the Libyan town of Zuwara, west of Tripoli, with the aim of reaching Italy.

Libya, which has been wracked by chaos since the 2011 uprising that killed president Muammar Qaddafi, has long been a major transit route for migrants, especially from sub-Saharan Africa, desperate to reach Europe.

Humanitarian group SOS Mediterranee said Sunday it had relaunched rescue efforts off Libya seven months after abandoning operations as European ports refused to accept the migrants.

The Norwegian-flagged Ocean Viking will "conduct search and rescue activities in the central Mediterranean" for SOS Mediterranee and MSF, the group said in a statement.

It said the exodus from Libya was "one of the most perilous sea crossings in the world."

After nearly three years of operations in which it rescued some 30,000 migrants, the Aquarius had been forced to cease operations because of what the group said was obstruction by some European countries.

Italy's populist-dominated government has become particularly hard-line against accepting undocumented migrants on its territory.



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SOS Mediterranee relaunch migrant rescue missions off Libya 'Alan Kurdi' rescue ship picks up another 44 migrants