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U.S. General Slams Russia's Deployment of S-300 Missiles in Syria

By Reuters

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Joseph Votel / Flickr

A senior U.S. general on Thursday sharply criticized Russia's deployment of the S-300 surface-to-air missile system in Syria, saying it was a needless escalation and a knee-jerk response to last month's downing of a Russian military aircraft there.

Army General Joseph Votel, who oversees U.S. forces in the Middle East, said the deployment also appeared to be an effort by Moscow to help shield "nefarious activities" by Iranian and Syrian forces in the country.

The S-300 deployment "appears to be an effort to cover for Iranian and Syrian regime nefarious activities in Syria. So, again, I think this is a needless, needless escalation," Votel told reporters at the Pentagon.

Moscow said on Tuesday that it had delivered the S-300 following a decision it took after

accusing Israel of indirect responsibility for the downing of a Russian spy plane by Syrian forces as they fired on attacking Israeli jets in September.

Related article: Russia Completes Delivery of S-300 System to Syria

Reuters reported in 2015 that Israel had trained against a Russian-supplied S-300 system in Greece. The United States has also been deepening its military cooperation with Greece, a NATO ally. Last month, Greece hosted U.S. General Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in Athens.

'Problematic'

Israeli Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz, a member of Israel's security cabinet, acknowledged that the S-300 deployment was "a problematic matter for us."

"And it could be for the Americans too. This is a system which certainly makes things difficult for us and requires that solutions be found," Steinitz told Israel's Army Radio.

At the same time, Steinitz acknowledged that the technology driving the S-300 was decades old, with systems developed in the 1970s. He said Israel would continue its campaign against Iran in Syria and would overcome the challenges posed by the S-300.

Votel said the U.S. military was aware of the S-300's capabilities and did not suggest the system's deployment would halt any U.S. military activities in Syria, where U.S. forces are battling Islamic State militants.

"Our forces here have been operating under a latent anti-air threat for some time and we will continue to do so," he said.

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