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## Russia evacuates Tartus, also military, diplomatic personnel from Syria. High war alert in Israel

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Shortly after the DEBKAF aired a special video on the Syrian war's widening circle, Moscow announced Wednesday June 26, that the evacuation which had begun Friday of all military and diplomatic personnel from Syria was now complete, including the Russian naval base at Tartus.

"Russia decided to withdraw its personnel because of the risks from the conflict in Syria, as well as the fear of an incident involving the

Russian military that could have larger consequences," said a defense ministry official in Moscow. He stressed that a 16-ship naval task force in the eastern Mediterranean remains on post and arms shipments, including anti-air weapons, would continue to the Syrian government in keeping with former contracts.

In another sign of an impending escalation in Syria, the Israeli Golan brigade staged Wednesday an unannounced war maneuver on the Golan, attended by Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and top army chiefs. In London, Prime Minister David Cameron called the government's National Security Council into session in Downing Street on Syria. Opposition leader Ed Milliband was invited to attend the meeting, a custom observed only when issues of the highest security importance are discussed.

Earlier Wednesday, debkafile carried the following report in its special video presentation under the heading: Putin and Obama cross swords on Syrian. What Next?

The sullen confrontation between Presidents Vladimir Putin and Barack Obama at the G8 Summit in Northern Ireland last week condemned Syria to five months of escalating, unresolved vicious warfare – that is until the two leaders meet again in September.

For now, tempers are heating up between Washington and Moscow on Syria and other things too, notably the elusive American fugitive Edward Snowden.

US and Israeli intelligence watchers see the Syrian crisis entering seven ominous phases:

1. A five-month bloodbath centering on the battle for Aleppo, a city of 2.2 million inhabitants. The Syrian army plus allies and the fully-mobilized opposition will hurl all their manpower and weapons into winning the city.

Military experts don't expect the rebels to hold out against Assad's forces beyond late August.

2. Neither side has enough manpower or game-changing weaponry for winning the war outright.

That is, unless Presidents Obama or Putin steps in to retilt the balance.

3. The US and Russia are poised for more military intervention in the conflict up until a point just short of a military clash on Syrian soil – or elsewhere in the Middle East. US intelligence analysts have judged Putin ready to go all the way on Syria against the US - no holds barred.

The Russian president is meanwhile deliberately goading Washington and raising temperatures by playing hide-and-seek over the former NSA contractor Edward Snowden, charged with espionage for stealing and leaking classified intelligence. At home, he is

considered variously as a traitor and a brave whistleblower.

For several hours Snowden vanished between Hong Kong and Moscow – until the Russian president admitted he was holed up in the transit area of Moscow airport and would not be extradited by Russia to the United States.

4. Iran, Hizballah and Iraq will likewise ratchet up their battlefield presence.

5. A violent encounter is building up between Middle East Shiites flocking to Syria to save the Assad regime alongside Russia, and the US-backed Sunni-dominated rebel forces.

It could scuttle the secret US-Iranian negotiating track on its nuclear program, which was buoyed up by the election of the pragmatic Hassan Rouhani as President of Iran.

6. The Geneva-2 Conference for a political solution for the Syrian crisis is dead in the water. Moscow and the US are divided by unbridgeable issues of principle, such whether Bashar Assad should stay or go and Iranian representation.

7. So long as the diplomatic remains stuck in the mud, the prospects of a regional war spreading out of the Syrian conflict are rising. Iran, Israel, Jordan and Lebanon may be dragged in at any moment – if they have not already, like Lebanon.

A small mistake by one of the Syrian warring parties in Syria could, for example, touch off Israeli retaliation and a wholesale spillover of violence.

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