



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on December 16, 2012

U.S. to Send Missiles, Troops to “Defend” Turkey From Syria

The United States will send two batteries of Patriot missiles and 400 troops to undisclosed locations in Turkey to defend against potential Syrian missile attacks, a Department of Defense spokesman announced Friday, while Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said the besieged regime in Damascus will not have the “damn time” to react to the arms buildup on the other side of its border with Turkey.



Pentagon press secretary George Little told reporters traveling with Panetta from Afghanistan to Turkey that Panetta signed the deployment order enroute, the Associated Press [reported](#). During a brief stop at the Incirlik Air Base in Turkey, about 60 miles north of the Syrian border, Panetta told U.S. Air Force personnel he approved the deployment “so that we can help Turkey have the kind of missile defense it may very well need to deal with the threats coming out of Syria.” The Pentagon announced in October that 100 U.S. troops had already been stationed sent near Syria’s southern border as part of a plan for dealing “with various contingencies, both unilaterally and with out regional partners.”

Panetta said Friday that the Defense Department had drawn up plans to give President Obama options if the Syrian government uses chemical weapons against rebel forces trying to overthrow the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. Obama recently [warned](#) Assad “there will be consequences and you will be held accountable” if he makes the “tragic mistake” of using such weapons. Syria has charged Western nations with raising the specter of chemical warfare as a pretext for a military intervention on behalf of the rebels.

When an Air Force member asked the defense secretary if he thought Syria would “react negatively” to the missile deployment, Panetta replied, “I don’t think they have the damn time to worry,” since the Assad regime is struggling to hold onto what is left of its power in fighting the armed rebellion that has been waged since March of 2011. The *New York Times* Thursday [quoted](#) NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen’s prediction of the regime’s imminent “collapse.”

“In general, I think the regime in Damascus is approaching collapse,” Rasmussen said. “I think now it’s only a question of time.”

In addition to the U.S. deployment, NATO members Germany and the Netherlands have each agreed to provide two batteries of the U.S.-made missiles, along with 400 German and 360 Dutch troops to man the systems. The United States, Germany, and the Netherlands are the only countries with the upgraded PAC-3 missiles, said to be capable of shooting down incoming short-range missiles as well as planes. Their deployment “will be defensive only,” NATO spokeswoman Oana Lungescu said in a statement [released](#) Friday.

“It will not support a no-fly zone or any offensive operation, Langescu said. “Its aim is to deter any threats to Turkey, to defend Turkey’s population and territory and to de-escalate the crisis on NATO’s south-eastern border.”



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The nature of the “crisis” and the “threats to Turkey,” were not made clear, however, particularly as it relates to chemical warfare. NATO officials have reported Scud missile attacks on rebel forces in northern Syria this week, but the missiles were said to carry conventional warheads. According to NATO’s military commander, U.S. Navy Admiral James Stavridis, “several of the missiles landed fairly close to the Turkish border, which is very worrisome.” The admiral did not say how close the missiles came when he posted that message on a blog Friday, Reuters [reported](#).

“Syria is clearly a chaotic and dangerous situation; but we have an absolute obligation to defend the borders of the alliance from any threat emanating from that troubled state,” Stavridis wrote.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was formed by the United States and Western European nations after World War II. Turkey joined in 1952. It was described at the time as a temporary defensive alliance against Soviet expansion. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, upon becoming NATO’s first supreme commander in 1951, [said](#):

If in 10 years, all American troops stationed in Europe for national defense purposes have not been returned to the United States, then this whole project will have failed.

Yet the alliance, now 63 years old, has outlived the Soviet Union and has expanded in recent years to its current membership of 28 nations, any one of whom the United States may be called upon to defend under the collective security agreement ([Article 5](#)) of the 1949 treaty, as stipulated by [Article 51](#) of the Charter of the United Nations.

The United States still has [80,000 troops](#) defending European nations that have a combined population and GDP greater than ours. We finally withdrew from Iraq a year ago, but 68,000 American troops are still fighting an 11-year-old war in Afghanistan. With Department of Defense facing budget cuts, the government hanging over a “fiscal cliff” and the national debt at \$16 trillion and rising, it would make sense to reconsider the NATO alliance. Guaranteeing the border security of 28 nations from anything falling “fairly close” to their borders might be the guarantee of our own bankruptcy.

Photo of Patriot surface-to-air missile battery: AP Images

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