Russia taunts US with biggest military offensive since Cold War

Kremlin sends fleet to strike final blow in battle for Aleppo as White House race reaches its climax

By Ben Farmer, Roland Oliphant and Barney Henderson

RUSSIA has begun its biggest surface deployment since the end of the Cold War as it prepares to effectively end the war in Syria on the eve of the US election. Nato officials warned last night. The Kremlin is sending the full might of its Northern Fleet and part of the Baltic Fleet to reinforce a final assault on the city of Aleppo in a fortnight, according to Western intelligence. The final bombardment is designed to shore up the Assad regime by wiping out rebels - paving the way for a Russian exit from the civil war.

The assault on the city will also serve to highlight US inaction in the run-up to election day and may aid Donald Trump. Yesterday, ahead of this month's debate with Hillary Clinton, his presidential campaign released a letter from defence experts backing plans to increase the size of the US military.

Royal Navy warships are due to escort a group of eight Russian warships, including the country's only aircraft carrier, as they sail past the UK on their way to the Mediterranean. Senior Royal Navy officers expect the task force to sail through the English Channel as early as today in a show of strength dismissed as "non-aggressive" by defence sources. But a senior Nato diplomat said the deployment from the Northern Fleet's base near Murmansk would herald a renewed attack in Aleppo. "They are deploying all of the Northern Fleet and much of the Baltic Fleet in the largest surface deployment since the end of the Cold War," the diplomat said. "This is not a friendly port call. In two weeks, we will see a crescendo of air attacks on Aleppo as part of Russia's strategy to declare victory there."

The additional military firepower is designed to drive out or destroy the 8,000 rebels in Aleppo, the only large city still in opposition hands, and to allow Vladimir Putin, the Russian president, to start a withdrawal.

An intensified air campaign in eastern Aleppo, where 250,000 people are trapped, would further weaken ties between Moscow and the West, which says the Kremlin may be responsible for war crimes.

Mr Trump has consistently praised Mr Putin as a strong leader and has promised a closer relationship with Russia if he wins the Nov 8 US election. He has suggested that, if elected, he would meet the Russian president before the inauguration in January.

Mr Putin has returned the compliment, calling the Republican nominee "outstanding and talented" - one of his closest political allies, Vitaly Khary- novsky, urged Americans to vote for Mr Trump, calling him a "gift to the world".
Meet the man who made the French rethink sex

The rock-star sexologist behind the graphic book taking France by storm tells Celia Walden about passion, porn and female fantasies...

**I** have a problem," I tell the sexologist. "I use condoms. Male, female, they're everywhere. The other day I went to a gay bar and..." Just the memory of it brings me out in a cold sweat. And of course this is all his fault. Until I read Philippe Bremont's book — the book France won't stop talking about, the book that sold 20,000 copies in its first month, has been re-printed twice since April and is to hit our shelves next week — I couldn't enjoy the Wang Promies without covering my daughter's eyes.

"But now there are phallicos everywhere?" nods the author of *The Story of Sex*, the first and only graphic novel to launch the history of sex through the ages, from apecs and the earliest humans to the cybersex our progeny will be having in 100 years' time.

"Yes, I whisper, looking around the Left Bank café in which we meet and trying not to stare at a middle-aged woman eating an omelette. Did he experience something similar in the year it took him to write the book?"

"Fear!" chuckles the 68-year-old psychiatrist and Director of Sexology at the University of Paris-Descartes. "What you've just described has been my life for the past 50 years. I mean, I've been to bed with a woman every night for 50 years."

Sex is everywhere, says Philippe Bremont, below with illustrator Laurence Ceryn. Above right, one of her drawing from the book.

**A chap ditches any pretence of reading Le Monde to gawp at our tête-à-tête**, goes the slogan of the book that is already a bestseller. But for me, sex education is a sensitive issue — even if it's between a woman and a man. I'm not into sex education for kids — not sex education but biology. So what we really wanted was to help adults and kids realise that sex is a subject like any other. Because our book could be made available in secondary schools and colleges — although anyone beneath the age of 16 might find the depictions too shocking.

"For me, sex education is the difference between men and women," intones Bremont. "And if those differences were explained to kids from primary school age onwards, I'm convinced that would do away with a huge amount of male-on-female violence. So, in that way, I see the Story of Sex as a sex education book than a sexual education manual!"

And maybe that's how the people turning up to the pair's talks and signings — often buying two or three copies of the 200-page book at a time — are seeing it too. Although it would undoubtedly make a good Christmas gift for anyone with a keen interest in what happened when the vibrator was invented by Cleopatra, apparently, who filled a hollow gourd with agarous beans, how the Dutch prohibited masturbation by way of a microscope or the sex life of Queen Victoria (there's a Prince Albert-related gusset-piercing image seared on my brain).

The dispelling of sexual myths is also cleverly and amusingly done throughout. As it turns out, prostitution is far from being the oldest profession in the world (although that myth has been used to disparage women), says Bremont. Not all the men of Greek antiquity had homosexual tendencies (although the aristocrats did like to "initiate" young boys), and the chastity belt was invented in the Middle Ages but the Renaissance. However, it is this kind of anthropological fiasco highlights modern sexuality that's most revealing. It wasn't until after the Second World War, for example, that women were "on top" in any sense of the word. "There would have been intellectual and an emancipated few in the 1920s but not until the Ginsberg report in 1948 and 1953, and Masters..."
This week: newish husband's hopes of going on a long cruise hit a snag...

"Don't you have a job already? It's not that I don't have a job, it's that I feel privileged that my daughter and son-in-law have entrusted Rose to me."

"My grandmother lived with us until I was 12, which meant we had a very special relationship. I like to think that Rose will feel the same way about me."

"You need to make sure you do things together, "she suggests."

"We have to be careful not to isolate her from her father."

"And the new will be exciting of course."

"It's just trying to find a way of living together as a couple, whether it's being together for a few days a week, being separate or having open relationships," says Brenton."

"The new will be exciting of course."

"Newish husband and baby daughter have very different interests. How can I please both?

"I've already started to get into a regular routine of going on walks from 3pm to be round with plenty of time before daughter goes to work."

"Then providing Rose is awake, I push her over to our house at breakfast and we can all be together."

"If Rose has already gone back to sleep when I arrive, I just sit her out at my daughter's house and then newish husband is on his own downstairs in the 10-room flat."

"It means I have the music you don't even know what's going on!"

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