



The S-400 Deal: A “Strategic Victory” for Russia?

OE Watch Commentary: In early 2017, when Turkish officials initially announced plans to buy the S-400 (long-range missile defense) system from Russia, many assumed that they would eventually “come to their senses” and back out of the deal, as they had previously walked away from a similar deal with China. However, this time Turkey has not backed out, and the missiles are being delivered in July. This is happening despite repeated warnings about the various problems it would cause for the country (being excluded from the F-35 program and sanctions, among others). Given that NATO is generally considered the final anchor that still binds Turkey to the West, this development has significant geopolitical implications. The accompanying passage sheds light on a Turkish perspective on the issue. The author, a respected expert and a former Turkish diplomat who is critical of the deal, laments that it will “separate [Turkey] from the link that kept it facing West for 200 years.” He also sees it as a Russian strategic victory.

The author goes through the technical, military, political, economic, and geopolitical losses that Turkey will incur from the deal. After laying out all of these losses, he suggests that the purchase has no reasonable explanation other than Russian manipulation and strategic moves (mostly in Syria) which painted Turkey into the corner in which it currently finds itself. He writes that “the S-400 purchase is not something that can be explained by logic, strategy, technology or diplomacy.” He explains it as a “veiled Russian coup,” adding that Putin is probably “laughing quietly in the Kremlin.” He claims that with this sale, Putin has won the “first victory in his... war against the West,” by pitting Turkey against NATO. He ends on a sarcastic note, questioning whether Turkey will find “eternal peace and happiness in Eurasian deserts.”

From a technical and military standpoint, he points out that the F-16s, “which are the backbone of our air force” will become impossible to fly, due to sanctions. In addition, he notes, Turkey’s NATO-integrated air defense and early warning system will become unusable. He also points out that Turkey’s air and naval forces will become more vulnerable, which will have to be addressed by ordering SU-57 planes and more S-400’s from Russia. He warns that this will make Turkey even more dependent on Russia, given the need for maintenance, equipment and training for these systems.

Economically, he points out that the CAATSA [Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act] sanctions will quickly bring Turkey’s precarious economy to the brink of collapse. Ironically, he notes, it will be the International Monetary Fund “which is based in Washington” that Turkey would have to turn to, if its economy does collapse. He also points out that being excluded from the F-35 supply chain will cost the Turkish defense industry approximately \$15 billion and will push some Turkish defense contractors into bankruptcy. This does not even include the costs from the loss of technical know-how.

He claims that the questions being raised about Turkey’s NATO membership, “will shake the core structure of the Turkish Armed Forces.” Most notably, he laments that the S-400 purchase will force Turkey to shift axes and be interpreted as “the end of Turkey’s unhappy marriage with the West” due to irreconcilable differences. (Also see: “Turkish-Russian Military Cooperation” in this issue of *OE Watch*.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“The S-400 purchase will force the Republic of Turkey to shift axes. It will separate this country from the link that kept it facing West for 200 years.”

“Let’s call it what it is: The S-400 purchase is a veiled Russian coup. You can be sure that... Putin is laughing quietly in the Kremlin.”

Source: Aydin Selcen, “Altın vuruş olarak S-400 alımı (The S-400 purchase as a golden trigger),” *Gazeteduvar.com.tr*, 16 June 2019. <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/yazarlar/2019/06/16/altin-vurus-olarak-s-400-alimi/>

From a technical standpoint, what will happen if we buy the S-400? The F-16’s, which are the backbone of our air force, will become impossible to fly. Our NATO-integrated air defense and early warning system will become unusable. The CAATSA [Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act] sanctions will quickly bring our already-vulnerable economy to the brink of collapse. In particular, the vulnerability that will emerge in our air and naval forces-- which is certain and quickly accelerating-- will have to be addressed by ordering SU-57 planes and more S-400’s from Russia. We will become dependent on Russia for the maintenance, equipment and training of these systems.

Politically, all of these will have brought Putin- originally a professional intelligence agent- his first victory in the “hybrid war” that Russia launched against the West around 2007 with a single motion, by pushing the two S-400 batteries on NATO-member and a NATO flank country Turkey. Islamists, leftists, nationalists have all taken the same side, and are thinking that Turkey is stepping into being ‘non-aligned,’ and while the S-400 purchase has been marketed to the public this way, in fact Ankara will be pulling the ‘golden trigger’ on this [Putin’s hybrid war].

The S-400 purchase will force the Republic of Turkey to shift axes. It will separate this country from the link that kept it facing West for 200 years. Meanwhile, we still don’t know why the S-400 is so imperative, and what threat it will protect us and from whom....

What may be the cost of walking away from the S-400 purchase in this final period leading up to 31 July? From a military point of view, the first point would be Idlib [Syria]. In fact, even while the purchasing process was going on, a Turkish Armed Forces observation point was targeted by 35 mortar shells. The Syrian army’s operations are on-going as well. There is talk of another two million Syrian civilians being swept towards our borders. ...

Economically, we are approaching collapse... Which would be a heavier cost- the US burden [sanctions] or Russian acts? The correct answer is that of the US. In fact, when our economy does collapse, the place we would go to is the IMF and the IMF is in Washington. There’s also the cost of being excluded from the F-35 supply chain, and the approximate 15 billion dollar loss that some of our defense contractors will incur, potentially pushing them into bankruptcy. I’m not even counting the potential loss of technical know-how throughout the process.

Diplomatically-- remember that thing called diplomacy-- we should not have painted ourselves into a corner by being faced with these alternatives. We should not have been in a position to choose between the US and Russia, between the F-35 and the S-400. We should have avoided the current situation before we got to this point. Have we heard about any diplomacy traffic between our Moscow or Washington Ambassadors, any initiatives, meetings, or behind-the-scenes negotiations? No.

Let’s call it what it is: The S-400 purchase is a veiled Russian coup. You can be sure that the Russian President Putin is laughing quietly in the Kremlin.... The S-400 purchase has no explanation to do with logic, strategy, technology or diplomacy. Buying the S-400s will just make our current position even more difficult. And the S-400 batteries will contribute nothing to our country’s defense....

The questions being raised about our NATO membership will shake the core structure of the Turkish Armed Forces. And our unhappy marriage with the West will end due to irreconcilable differences.... And of course since everyone in the country is anti-American, ... we’ll throw ourselves into Eurasian deserts and achieve eternal peace and happiness there.