

Turkish-Russian missile deal escalates Turkey-NATO conflict

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Amid escalating conflict between Ankara and its NATO allies, and within the Turkish ruling class, over the first anniversary of the failed coup attempt on July 15 of last year, Turkish Defense Minister Fikri Isik said Tuesday that talks between Ankara and Moscow had reached an agreement on Turkey deploying Russia's S-400 missile system. This missile system would not be integrated into NATO's air defence network.

Speaking to journalists in Ankara on Monday, Isik said that negotiations between the Turkish and Russian governments are "on the point of a successful conclusion." He did not give a date for the signing, however. Alexander Mikheyev, CEO of Russia's state-run arms exporter Rosoboronexport, also confirmed the purchase agreement.

Bloomberg News reported last week Turkey's agreement with Russia to purchase one of the world's most sophisticated missile-defence systems, at a cost of \$2.5 billion. Under the terms of the deal, Ankara will purchase two missile batteries from Russia within a year and co-produce two more in Turkey.

Parallel to the announcement of the imminent conclusion of the Turkish-Russian missile deal, Ankara also signed an initial accord with French-Italian consortium Eurosam on the development of another missile defence system.

Speaking July 14 at a reception for Bastille Day in the French embassy in Ankara, the Turkish defence minister said that Turkish companies would work with the Italian-French consortium. According to Turkey's state-run Anadolu news agency, he "described the move as one of the most concrete developments of Turkey's alliance within the defence industry."

Currently, Ankara does not have its own long-range air-defence systems. It relies on Spanish Patriot Advanced Capability-2 and Italian SAMP-T missiles,

stationed in 2016 in southeastern Turkey, after the US, Germany and the Netherlands decided to remove their Patriot batteries from the country. This stepped up Ankara's efforts to acquire its own missile-defence system.

Should it be signed, the S-400 deal would further undermine Ankara's relations with NATO, especially with the US, as occurred when Turkey decided to buy a long-range air defence system from a Chinese state-run company in 2013. Under US pressure, the Turkish government was forced to scrap the \$3.4 billion program altogether in November 2015.

After the project was cancelled and the Turkish air force shot down a Russian bomber on November 24, 2015, undermining Turkish-Russian relations, Ankara expressed its intention to independently develop a missile defence system. This aim was not realized, however, and Ankara turned to Moscow to purchase the S-400 air and missile defence system.

Despite Turkish officials' numerous statements that the deal with Russia shouldn't be seen as a search for an alternative to NATO or the EU, the S-400 deal is a blow to these two crisis-ridden imperialist alliances.

By obtaining its first long-range air and anti-missile defence system from Russia, Turkey could conceivably close its skies to NATO fighters if necessary.

Speaking on the S-400 deal, US Defense Secretary James Mattis told reporters last Friday that they would "have to see—does it go through? Do they actually employ it? Do they employ it only in one area? All that kind of stuff. But you know, we'll have to take a look at it."

The Turkish government, led-by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, also knows the risks involved. Due to his inability to comply with US interests and war strategies in Syria contrary to Ankara's own interests,

Erdogan has become the main target of Turkey's imperialist allies, in a conflict that reached its highest point in the coup attempt of July 15, 2016.

As the coup attempt failed thanks to mass popular opposition, Erdogan and his government openly accused Ankara's Western allies—especially the US and Germany—of backing the putschists, and banned German parliamentarians from visiting their troops in Turkey.

In response, Berlin decided to redeploy its troops and equipment from the Incirlik base to positions elsewhere, possibly Jordan, while Berlin and its European allies, notably Austria and the Netherlands, banned Turkish government officials from organizing rallies in the campaign on the April 16 Turkish constitutional referendum.

Hypocritically using Erdogan's post-coup crackdown on the opposition as a pretext, the European Parliament has voted against the continuation of accession talks between Ankara and the EU. Meanwhile on July 7, more than two years of talks in Switzerland between the leaders of Greek and Turkish Cypriots to reunify the divided Cyprus collapsed.



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