

Turkey's Withdrawal from the F-35 Program Due to the S-400 Contract, and America's Syria Study GROUP (SSG)

News:

After the talks between President Trump and President Erdogan in Osaka, there have been some developments on F-35 and S-400 issues. In pursuit of the withdrawal of Turkey, Trump said the following: *"It's a very difficult situation in many ways. So at the moment (on the issue of sanctions) we are looking at this, looking at what we can do. We haven't announced (our decision) yet."* (Sabah, 22 July 2019)

Comment:

Trump did not refer to impose any sanctions on Turkey due to the purchase of S-400, during the June G20 summit in Osaka, Japan. On the contrary, either in his statements made in Osaka or afterwards, he had criticized the Obama administration that it did not allow the sale of the patriot system to Turkey.

Being one of the most significant members of the NATO, Turkey has bought the Russian made S-400 missile defence system and this is not something to be overlooked by the US under normal conditions. In fact, US Deputy Defence Secretary Mark Esper mentioned the following about Turkey's S-400 purchase in the statement he gave to the Senate Armed Services Committee: *"I said to my colleague, Defence Minister of Turkey 'you can either own S-400's or F-35's, but you cannot own them both.'"* (BBC Turkish, July 16 2019)

Also, the issue regarding when these S-400 defence systems were going to be sent and activated is known from the previous year. Minister of Defence, Hulusi Akar, made these statements one year ago: *"We are going to start the installation next year October."* (NTV, October 25, 2018)

The statement made by Hulusi Akar last year does not give any exact date when these systems are going to be installed. Apparently, some changes took place about the date due to some developments in the Turkey-US relations. *"We will complete the shipment to Turkey by the end of the year,"* the CEO of Rostec Sergey Chemezov said at the IDEX 2019 fair. (www.hurriyet.com.tr, 18.02.2019)

In summary, regarding this issue, it was a matter which was already clarified one year ago when it was going to be sent to Turkey and how the planning was going to be like. Changes on dates we face now are related to regional developments, because neither the S-400 defence system nor the F-35 issue alone are far from regional problems and developments.

This is the situation of the S-400 issue for the United States. In August 2017, President Erdogan stated the following on the issue: *"We have taken steps on this issue with the Russian Federation at the moment, signatures have been signed and hopefully we will see S-400 missiles in our country. And we will also run the process by co-producing them."* (BBC English, 25 July 2017). There is also a closeness between President Erdogan's S-400 statement and America's CAATSA sanctions. *Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)*, which came into force on August 2, 2017, envisages sanctions against Iran, Russia and North Korea, which are considered as a threat to US security (BBC

Turkish, July 16, 2019). In other words, a week after the announcement made by Erdogan, a law including the sanctions of CAATSA came into force in the US. These days, some discussions continue whether sanctions will be imposed on Turkey or not. On the other hand, Trump has not made any clear statement regarding this issue, but he mentioned that he is looking what is going to be done.

A number of questions are raised here:

a- Are there any conflicts between Trump and other decision mechanisms of the US?

b- Was the US really incapable of putting pressure on and dissuading Turkey from the S-400 system?

c- As the profits rank first for the US, what is the main reason that made the US administration behave soft against Turkey regarding the S-400 issue?

d- Can Turkey really activate the S-400's?

Of course we can answer all these questions in detail, but I will cut it short and answer them under a few points:

a- We do not think that there are any conflicts between Trump and other decision mechanisms of the US. There are lots of examples. So to say, Trump is playing the good cop/bad cop. His words are related to his profits. Therefore, Trump spoke for the profits of the US both in Osaka and afterwards. In other words, he does not approve imposing any sanctions on Turkey.

As a matter of fact, President Erdogan announced that the S400 missile system will be activated in April 2020. "By the end of the year, we will have finished a certain part of it and by April 2020, we will have finished it completely, and we will continue our way with much more self-confidence." (www.takvim.com.tr, July 15, 2019) However, after the meeting between the US Syrian Working Group chaired by the Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and James Jeffrey, and a delegation headed by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sedat Onal, which took place on July 22 in Ankara. He stated on the same issue that the S-400 air defence system will be activated before 2020. Considering that there is a 180-day period ahead of Trump in the implementation of the CAATSA sanctions, it appears to coincide with the date of Erdogan's statements. However, Mevlut Cavusoglu, depending on negotiations between the United States and Turkey, seems to have brought this date forward until pre-2020.

b- For which profit does the US treat Turkey softly? Which profit makes it act so and the answer for this question is obvious on the developments in Syria. Today's developments in Syria demand it to do so. Otherwise, there is a serious threat and mismatch between the NATO system and the missile system from Russia, which is not acceptable for the United States. The next were stated during the negotiation held between Hulusi Akar and US Deputy Defence Minister: an American delegation is determined to come to Turkey, Ankara next week in order to constitute a safe zone in Syria. It is also underscored that it is essential to sustain the dialogue between the two countries. (CNNTURK, 13 July 2019)

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