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Turkey's Missiles Diplomacy

On December 2017, Turkey officially signed a \$ 2,5 billion agreement with Russia for the purchase of the S-400 long-range anti-aircraft missile system. Moscow has already started to execute the contract, beginning the production of the missiles: the first S-400 will be delivered to Ankara by early 2020 [*Daily Sabah*, "Turkey won't give up S-400 deal with Russia, presidential spox Kalin says", 29 June 2018].

The agreement encompasses also the transfer of technology and technical know-how for missiles' maintenance, since Turkey aims to build its own defence industry sector.

The United States are pressing Ankara to renege the contract. Beyond political and strategic reasons, the S-400 system is not compatible with NATO's air defence systems for obvious logistic reasons [*Reuters*, "Pompeo presses Turkey on S-400 missiles purchase from Russia", 27 April 2018]. Turkey states that Russian missiles' procurement would be complementary with other purchases from NATO members (for instance, the American Patriot missiles), in order to strengthen Turkish air defence.

In such a framework, the planned acquisition of more than 100 Lockheed Martin's F-35 Joint Strike Fighter by Turkey has openly turned into a subject of international discussion. On April 2018, three U.S. senators presented a bill aimed to stop the delivery of F-35 to Turkey: the bill would also limit Ankara's possibility to receive technical data for the maintenance of the fighter jets.

Turkey plans to increase air defence capabilities to cope with rising internal and transnational threats, emanating from Kurdish armed militancy and jihadi groups. Securing Turkey's borders with Syria, Iraq, and Iran stands at the top of Ankara's national security agenda. At the same time, Turkey looks for strategic balance in the Aegean and the whole Eastern Mediterranean.

However, the "missiles issue" is not only about defence and power politics for Ankara: it is also related to diplomacy and international alliances, that are experiencing a deep reshuffling after the July 2016 failed

coup. Russia is the first partner of Turkey in Syria and, notwithstanding rising frictions, the United States remain an important ally for Ankara: in such a picture, the “missile issue” can be better framed in a “missile diplomacy” shape, by which Turkey aims to maximize security benefits, balancing difficult geopolitical alignments.

***Eleonora Ardemagni** is Associate Research Fellow at the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), regular analyst for the Aspen Institute Italy. She teaches at ASERI (Graduate School of Economics and International Relations, Catholic University, Milan, Master in Middle Eastern Studies).*