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### **The S-400 Dispute: No Reconciliation in Sight**

The Turkish-US quarrel over Ankara's purchase of the Russian S-400 air and missile defense system reached a deadlock since no side is stepping back from its position. While Turkey claims that the purchase of the S-400 missile system does not pose a threat to the North Atlantic Alliance, the US sees Ankara's move to purchase the S-400 missile defence system as undermining the Alliance's collective security.

The S-400 deal between Ankara and Moscow was inked in December 2017. The two parties signed a \$2,5 billion agreement for the delivery of two batteries of the system, Russia's most advanced long-range anti-aircraft missile system. Turkey will be the first NATO member country to acquire the system. Moreover, Turkey seeks to build its own missile defence system as the deal also involves the transfer of know-how and technology. While operationally the biggest implications regard interoperability, the political meaning of the purchase cannot be underestimated.

Lately, the clash among NATO allies became worse when US Vice President Mike Pence even questioned Ankara's NATO membership and loyalty during a meeting of NATO ministers in Washington. "*Turkey must choose. Does it want to remain a critical partner in the most successful military alliance in history or does it want to risk the security of that partnership by making such reckless decisions that undermine our Alliance?*" [Doina Chiacu, Sarah Dadouch, "US VP Pence warns Turkey against buying Russian air defenses", *Reuters*, April 3, 2019] Pence asked, prompting response by the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu. "*Nobody, neither the West nor Russia, should ask us to choose*", further reiterating that Moscow's S-400 sale to Ankara is "*a done deal*" [Sevil Erkuş, "Turkey's purchase of Russian S-400 is 'done deal': Turkish FM", *Hürriyet Daily News*, March 29, 2019].

As a consequence, three anti-Turkish resolutions reached the US Senate. One calls for sanctions over US citizens and consular officials in Turkish prisons; the second one recognizes the 1915 events as a genocide and the third resolution urges the United States to cooperate with Greece, Southern Cyprus and Israel against Turkish interests in the Mediterranean through the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act (EMSEPA) which proposes to lift the US arm-sales embargo on Cyprus. The resolution

is a counter-strategic move to balance Turkey's military engagement with Russia through empowering Ankara's foes in its immediate proximity.

The dispute over the S-400 deal comes amid growing US pressure on countries worldwide not to buy Russian-produced arms. In September 2018, the US imposed sanctions on the Chinese military's Equipment Development Department and its director for purchasing Su-35 combat aircraft and S-400 surface-to-air missile system from Russia. Similarly, the US has threatened Egypt, one of its most important strategic allies in the Middle East, with sanctions over its agreement with Russia to purchase Su-35 multirole combat aircraft worth about \$2 billion. According to the US CAATSA Act (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions) issued in 2017, Iran, North Korea and Russia are facing sanctions with the aim of combating those countries' political, economic and military influence across the globe.

The quarrel over the S-400 missile system fuels already existing tensions between the two NATO allies. The US support for the People's Protection Units (YPG)-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) which Ankara considers to be the Syrian branch of the terrorist-designated Kurdistan Worker's Party PKK, and the Congress' decline back in 2009 to deliver Ankara a similar Patriot missile system of the PAC-3 batteries, are perceived to be detrimental to Ankara's security interests, thus pushing the distrustful ally into the arms of Russia in the search for an alternate security provider.

Washington stated that it already halted deliveries of the F-35 fighter jet parts to Turkey that is F-35 program partner. However, information supplied by Lockheed Martin indicate that Turkey would be the bigger loser if excluded from the F-35 program because "*F-35 industrial opportunities for Turkish companies are expected to reach \$12 billion*" [F-35, "Building on Decades of Partnership"].

Ankara risks to replace its dependence on the United States with a growing dependence on Russia, a country that it is also at odds with over issues of critical importance to it – again most notably in Syria. Even though both sides are dependent on each other, the rift grew that deep that no side is willing to yield. The sale will have negative long-term bilateral implications.

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