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## S-400 IN TURKEY: AN UMBRELLA IN RAINY WEATHER



**The Turkish government's decision to go through with the S-400 deal with Russia raised eyebrows in many capitals on the continent. Few people in Russia even hoped that the Turkish leaders would risk a downright break-up with the United States and close the deal – despite all the warnings, despite the overhead costs from the sanctions and political pressure. The US had a real shock after being so confident that economic pressure and Turkey's exclusion from the new multi-purpose F-35 fighter production program, in which Ankara had been a full participant and manufacturer of some components, would be sufficient to tame the Turkish government's appetite for military technical cooperation with Russia. No less abashed were its European allies, who had enough on their plate as it is and were reluctant to engage in hard battles and arguments with Turkey. Nor were they willing to wash NATO's dirty linen in public.**

And yet, the Russian-Turkish deal was finalized and the first components for the Russian anti-aircraft systems were delivered to Turkey – a major domestic policy victory for Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. After a series of failures in the election of the heads of big cities, including Istanbul, where opposition leaders came to power, Erdogan once again succeeded in uniting the nation under the slogan of Defending the Fatherland. The Turkish media almost unanimously supported the deployment of the new air defense systems, with some of the publications betraying malicious glee with regard to Turkey's NATO allies and, above all, the United States. The images and infographics showing off the capabilities of the Russian systems featured American and European aircraft, an unambiguous hint as to where Turkey would expect an attack to come from.

From a strategic point of view, Erdogan has also strengthened Turkey's sovereignty, having acquired one of the most advanced defense systems in the world, which would secure a significant part of its airspace from hostile aircraft. According to the Turkish authorities, these defensive systems should benefit the country more than, say, the

world's most advanced attack systems, including the multi-purpose F-35 aircraft.

Russia, therefore, acted as a provider of sovereignty, allowing Turkey to dissociate from US security guarantees. Metaphorically speaking, Moscow is distributing umbrellas to those who need them in rainy weather. The strategic importance of this sale is much greater than even its positive effect on Russian-Turkish relations. An increasing number of countries seeking to ensure their sovereignty in international affairs will look to Russia as a provider of this sovereignty.

From a regional policy perspective, however, the situation is not getting any simpler. Russia and Turkey still have differences on a future settlement in Syria. The Russian-Turkish-Iranian triumvirate is still tactical in nature, although there is a tendency to expand it to related areas.

Greece has unexpectedly found itself a beneficiary of these developments and its arguments against Turkey in NATO are suddenly receiving a broader response. Greece's and Turkey's simultaneous accession to NATO in 1952 was in the context of external threat from the Soviet Union, which temporarily downplayed the feud between the two nations. But this arrangement no longer works. And, even though NATO is not an organization that makes hard-hitting decisions in regard to its members, the anti-Turkish efforts of Greek diplomacy might give a fresh impetus to the debate on expelling Turkey.

The Russian-Turkish deal is also important as a precedent for Russia's military technical cooperation with a leading NATO country. Turkey has the second largest army of the alliance and is strategically autonomous from the United States. Strengthening its independence plays against the unity within NATO and bolsters up the polycentric trend in the world. But at the same time it does not automatically imply the stable ongoing development of Russian-Turkish relations. These two are sometimes prone to confrontation, the last incident occurring in 2015, and the parties are not immune to such clashes in the future.

As of today, it can be safely said that Turkey is benefiting from recent developments. Despite US economic and political pressure, Turkey has consolidated its sovereignty and ultimately this step was justified in the eyes of its citizens. Now the ball is in the United States' court and America is compelled to change its game and abandon its harsh rhetoric. Now Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is asking Turkey not to deploy the Russian air defense systems. It is clear from this easing of pressure that the Americans are reluctant to push a confrontation. Turkey remains a valuable ally in the region: American nuclear weapons are deployed in its territory and it is a valuable source of information about terrorist networks in the Middle East. The Americans will not sacrifice such a valuable ally.

What is happening is another sign of the emergence of a polycentric world system, in which each country pursues its own interests, relying less on multilateral guarantees and alliances. This system is less predictable than bipolarity or US dominance. It also opens up significant opportunities for Russian foreign policy.

But at the same time, due to the increasingly complex nature of international relations, it also poses a problem because in this case all partners are to be viewed as potential adversaries. The defense systems Russia supplied to Ankara are also putting significant



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limitations on potential Russian pressure. These defense systems strengthen Turkey's sovereignty on all flanks.

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