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Turkey In Talks to Purchase Russia's Newest Missile System

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Andrei Makhonin / Vedomosti

Turkey has announced that it is in talks with Moscow to purchase S-400 "Triumph" anti-aircraft missile systems, Russia's most advanced military technology.

The two countries will hold an intergovernmental commission meeting on arms cooperation by year's end to discuss the potential sale, the Kommersant newspaper reported Monday.

"We're not just holding talks with Russia ... but also with other countries that have similar missile systems," Turkish Defense Minister Fikri Işık told the NTV television channel. "Currently, Russia's position on this issue is positive."

However, the potential deal faces serious challenges. Turkey has always been a small destination for Russian military exports. In May 2015, a Russian delegation attended the IDEF 2015 military technology exhibition in Istanbul and the Russian state arms exporter

Rosoboronexport announced its intentions to sell more arms to Turkey.

Then, on Nov. 24, 2015, Turkey shot down a Russian fighter jet over the Turkish-Syrian border, an event that ended all cooperation between the two countries. In recent months, relations between Moscow and Ankara have improved, but problems remain.

The general staff of the Russian Armed Forces and Federal Security Service (FSB) nearly vetoed the sale of S-400s to China on the national security grounds, a Defense Ministry source told Kommersant. Russia and China ultimately signed a contract in September 2014.

However, Turkey may pose a greater challenge, an unidentified official who works on arms exports told Kommersant. The country is a NATO member and wants to gain access to transfers of Russian's most advanced military technology. This is "a direct national security issue," he said.

Turkey's NATO allies could also oppose the transfer, considering the S-400 incompatible with NATO's anti-aircraft forces. Finally, the sale could face technical delays: Russia must first provide China with S-400s, a transfer that will take place no earlier than 2018. Next, Moscow will likely begin transferring the missile system to India, a source connected to military-technical cooperation told Kommersant. In all likelihood, Turkey would only receive the S-400 systems sometime in the 2020s.

State weapons exporter Rosoboronexport has declined to comment on the negotiations with Ankara.

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