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Turkey Might not Buy Russian S-400 Missle System After All, Says Retired General

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A retired Turkish general has claimed that the chances of NATO member Turkey actually going ahead with the purchase of Russia's advanced S-400 anti-aircraft missile system were "even less than 10 percent."

Haldun Solmazturk told Chinese news service Xinhua Nov. 2 that he did not rate the prospect of the acquisition being completed even as on the same day the CEO of Russia's Rostec state corporation, Sergey Chemezov, told TASS that the deal to sell the hardware to Turkey had been arranged at more than $2 billion in value.

Back in September, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced that Ankara had signed an agreement to purchase the missile system from Russia and had already made a down payment. And last month, Erdogan said that Turkey was also interested in acquiring the S-500 surface-to-air missile system from Russia.

Hasan Koni, a professor of public international law at Istanbul Kultur University, meanwhile, said that the US sanctions currently faced by Russian companies may negatively affect Turkey's final decision on acquiring the S-400. He added that Ankara may back out by citing Russian unwillingness to transfer the technology as a pretext.

According to Koni, the US might even block delivery of newly developed F-35 jets to Turkey if the S-400 deal was finalized.

A top NATO general in late October warned that Turkey that it could face "necessary consequences" if it goes ahead and buys the S-400.

"The principal of sovereignty obviously exists in the acquisition of defense equipment, but the same way that nations are sovereign in making their decision, they are also sovereign in facing the consequences of that decision," Czech general Petr Pavel, chairman of the NATO Military Committee, told reporters.

On Sept. 22, after a meeting in Washington, DC between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and US counterpart Donald Trump, The Washington Post published an opinion piece entitled "Trump may have to sanction his Turkish president best buddy."

It noted that if Turkey goes through with the S-400 transaction in light of its rapprochement with Moscow, then, according to the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, which Trump begrudgingly signed into law in August, the United States must sanction any foreign entity that engages in significant transactions with the Russian Federation's defence and intelligence sectors.

Pavel, who met a group of reporters hosted by the Defense Writers Group, pointed out the difficulty that the Russian missile defense system cannot be integrated with Nato systems.

Erdogan has blamed NATO countries for failing to propose a viable alternative to the long-range Russian missile air defense system, but NATO secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg said early in October that the Turkish president was talking to Paris and Rome about similar hardware.

"He told me that Turkey is in dialogue with France and Italy on possible delivery of air defense systems from them... on top of the S-400," Stoltenberg told Reuters.

In 2013, Turkey started talks with China Precision Machinery Import and Export Corp (CPMIEC) on buying a missile defense system. Eventually, however, it opted not to sign the final deal after NATO allies expressed concern over Ankara's plans to buy it, citing security and compatibility problems.

Ankara next turned to Russia to buy the anti-aircraft defense hardware when in 2015 it canceled the controversial deal with the Chinese company.

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