

Missile sale may worsen Turkey, Iran ties

By [Global Research](#)

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The Obama administration's disclosure of a possible \$7.8 billion sale of its most advanced version of the Patriot air-defense missile to Turkey has sparked regional concerns with some warning that the arms package might deteriorate Ankara's relations with Tehran.

"For Turkey's part, purchasing the Patriot missiles mean engaging in a conflict with Iran," said professor Ömer Alpaslan Aksu.

The Pentagon has notified Congress over weekend about it plans to sell the Patriot PAC-3 anti-missile batteries and related gear to Turkey, the only NATO ally bordering Iran. The Pentagon estimated the cost at \$7.8 billion, which would be one of the biggest U.S. government-to-government arms sales in years and would mark a return of Turkey as a major U.S. arms buyer.

"Washington needs a working mechanism to bring Iran within bounds amid the rising influence of the Islamic Republic in the region and ongoing negotiations over its nuclear dispute. And in its fresh strategy for the region, the United States gives a crucial role to Turkey," Aksu told the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review on Sunday. "[US President Barack] Obama wants to solve Iranian impasse immediately with all possible options. In any case, he will seek Turkey's assistance," he said.

Such a purchase would represent "a big consolidation of U.S.-Turkish military ties," Soner Cagaptay, an expert on Turkey at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a nonpartisan research group, quoted by Reuters news agency as saying.

Missile shield link?

While pursuing diplomatic overtures with Iran regarding the nuclear deadlock, Washington also does not rule out the military option or plans to deploy a missile-defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic, which have created serious tension between Russia and the United States in the past. Earlier this month, a top defense lobbyist said the negotiations are continuing over U.S. plans to deploy a missile-defense shield in Turkey, a possibility floated last week by a Polish newspaper.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmed Davutoğlu immediately responded to the claims, saying that the government has not received any request from the United States or NATO regarding the missile-defense project. But Riki Ellison, chairman of the U.S.-based Missile Defense Advocacy Alliance, or MDAA, insisted to the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review that he hopes to see a working missile-defense shield in operation by 2013.

"The sale of Patriot missiles does not have a direct link with the U.S. missile shield

program,” said Arif Keskin, an expert on Iranian affairs. “Nevertheless, with this huge military deal, Washington wants to improve Turkey’s military capacity against Iran as it also block Turkey’s likely desires to nuclearization.”

Keskin said any American missile could only be placed in Turkey if NATO gives a green light for the program. “However, if Turkey agrees to open its soil to the missile shield program, it would worsen its relations with not only Iran, but also Syria and Russia.”

Aksu agreed with Keskin, adding: “For now, The Turkish government might take steps in harmony with the United States. However, the ongoing internal debate and hot political agenda could complicate the situation for the ruling Justice and Development Part [AKP] and Washington may lose the opportunity to solve Iranian problem. So, if the U.S. wants to achieve any progress on Iran, it should take actions immediately.”

Carol Migdalovitz, an expert on the country at the research service, said the proposed sale showed Turkey was hedging its bets on improved ties with Iran. “While it has improved (bilateral) trade and energy ties, Turkey remains wary of Iran’s nuclear program,” she told Reuters.

Recalling the chill in Turkey-US relations after the Iraq invasion, Keskin said the United States also seeks a clean page with Turkey and wants to refresh its relationship with the country, which has witnessed rising anti-American sentiment over the past few years. “With the new military deals, Washington signals its willingness to improve its ties with Turkey. The latest package is a firm indicator of this willingness,” he said.

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