

The S-400: Turkey Calls Trump's Bluff

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Turkey has just called Donald Trump's bluff by going ahead with the purchase of Russian S-400 anti-aircraft missiles. The outrage in Washington is volcanic. Trump is vowing to rain fire and brimstone sanctions down on the disobedient Turks.

The S-400 is Russia's premier anti-air missile. It is believed highly effective against all forms of aircraft - including stealth planes - cruise missiles, medium range ballistic missiles, drones, and some other types of missiles. It offers the choice of a self-directing version with its own radar seeker, or a less expensive, 'semi-active' version that is guided by its launch-battery radar.

What makes this AA missile (SS-21 in NATO terminology) particularly deadly is its remarkable 400 km range. The S-400 is said by Russia to be able to unmask stealth aircraft. I've been told by Soviet security officials as far back as 1990 that their radars could detect US stealth aircraft.

The missile's remarkable range and detection capability puts at risk some of the key elements of US war fighting capability, notably the E-3 AWACS airborne radar aircraft, US electronic warfare aircraft, tankers and, of course, fighters like the new stealth F-35, improved F-15's, F-22's and B-1, B-2 and venerable B-52 heavy bombers used to carry long-ranged cruise missiles.

The Russian AA system can 'shoot and scoot' - firing and then quickly moving. Even more important, the S-400 system costs about half the price of its leading competitor, the US Patriot PAC-2 system. The S-400 may also be more reliable and accurate. The Great White Father in Washington is not happy.

The Trump administration brought heavy pressure on Turkey not to buy the S-400, threatening to cancel Turkey's order for 100 of the new, stealthy F-35's. Few thought the Turks would defy the US on this issue, but they failed to understand the depths of Turkey's anger at the US.

Most Turks believe that the US engineered the failed 2016 coup against the democratic government in Ankara working through a shadowy religious organization run by the spiritual-political leader, Fethullah Gulen, who lives in exile in the United States. Turkey's elected president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, had been too independent-minded for Washington, clashing over US policy to Syria and the Gulf. He had also incurred the wrath of America's Israel lobby for demanding justice for the Palestinians.

Turkey is now under economic attack by Washington. President Trump is threatening sanctions (read economic warfare) against Turkey, an old, loyal US ally. During the Korean

War, Turkish troops saved American soldiers from Chinese encirclement. But Turks are mostly Muslim, and Muslims are hated by Trump and his allies.

S-400 missiles are now arriving in Turkey. What will Trump do? Cancel sale to Turkey of the F-35 and other military equipment or spare parts. Threaten to oust Turkey from NATO. Get Israel and Greece to menace Turkey.

Turkey can live without the F-35. It's too expensive and may be more vulnerable than advertised. The Turks can get similar, less expensive warplanes from Russia. India and China are both buying the S-400. Even the Saudis may join them though Moscow is delaying the sale. S-400's are also stationed in Syria with Russian forces and are slated to go to sea in a naval version.

If the US reacts with even more anger, Turkey could threaten to withdraw from NATO and kick the US out of its highly strategic air base in southeast Turkey at Incirlik. It's worth recalling that Turkey provided NATO's second largest army after the US. Someone has to remind the deeply unknowing Trump that NATO without Turkey will be declawed. Equally important, that a Turkey unconstrained by NATO membership, will seek sources of oil which it lacks and desperately needs, and new alliances.

Only a century ago, Iraq's rich oil fields used to be part of the Ottoman Empire until taken away by the British and French imperial powers. The days of a subservient, tame Turkey may be ending.

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