

# Ankara defends S-400 purchase to Washington

Tue, 2021-02-09 21:12

ANKARA: Turkey's recent purchase of a Russian missile defense system has caught the attention of the US while Turkey is trying to justify its future aspirations by leaning toward an old rival.

Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar reiterated the country's plans to use the controversial S-400 Russian missile defense system in the same way Greece deployed its S-300 system, within the NATO alliance, during a crisis between Turkey and Cyprus in the late 1990s.

According to Karol Wasilewski, an analyst at the Polish Institute of International Affairs in Warsaw, this is not the first time the Turkish decision-makers have used a false parallel between Greece's S-300 and Turkey's S-400 systems.

"I think we should be very cautious here," he told Arab News. "If minister Akar really means that Turkey would operate S-400s exactly like Greece and outside Turkey's territory, then we may interpret his words as an initial offer of compromise directed to the American administration."

Caglar Kurc, a researcher on defense and armed forces, draws attention to the timing differences between the purchase of S-400s by Turkey and the installment of the S-300s on the Greek island of Crete.

"Russia was not such a big threat to the US and American-Russian relations were better in the 1990s," Kurc told Arab News. "However, now they are considered main rivals. Therefore, the outcome varies depending on the changes of American interests."

Akar was referring to Greece's two S-300 PMU-1 battalions in Crete that are kept as a standalone system within NATO and implied that Greece never received such criticism for its purchase of the older S-300 missile system from Moscow.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had criticized the possession of the S-300s by Athens and claimed it is an obvious double standard.

Greece originally acquired the S-300s from Moscow to dissuade Turkish flights over its airspace. The crisis was temporarily resolved after Cyprus transferred the systems to Greece, which deployed them on Crete, where they remain today in storage. The S-300 missile system has been used only in NATO military drills without being integrated into the Greek air defense network.

Now the question is whether the past procurement of the S-300s is comparable with the "new generation" S-400s.

Washington stands against its NATO ally Turkey and its acquisition and operationalization of the Russian air defense system on its soil. The US kicked Turkey out of its F-35 fighter jet program, finding the S-400s were a significant threat to the stealth fighter jets and would not be interoperable with the Western-built hardware.

In response, Turkey offered a joint working group about the interoperability of the S-400s and F-35s.

Aaron Stein, director of research at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, thinks this is the most tangible suggestion he has ever seen from the Turkish side on this issue.

"It could be something that both sides discuss, but I think US officials will ask for more," he told Arab News. "It is clearly a walk back from Ankara, so I guess that's progress."

Kurc also finds the Turkish offer as a good compromise.

"If the US wants to continue its partnership with Turkey instead of further alienating it, the offer would be accepted," he said. "However, it is still unclear whether Washington will endorse it absolutely without any pre-condition."

Turkey received the first components of the S-400 in July 2019. In October 2020, Turkey tested the Russian system for the first time in the northern city of Sinop – a move that was harshly condemned by the US State Department.

In December 2020, the US punished Ankara with sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), while the issue ranks top on the agenda of the Joe Biden administration.

"The S-300 in Crete was meant for Cyprus. It ended up in Crete because Ankara objected so vociferously to its original deployment site. The US Air Force (USAF) does train against it," Stein said.

"However, the USAF has lots of air defense goodies in the continental US including high-end Russian systems. It is not absolutely necessary to train in Crete to familiarize pilots with the system, nor do I expect it vital to train against a Turkish S-400," he added.

Wasilewski instead suggests a solution in which the S-400s are kept in storage in, for example, Northern Cyprus.

"It would require both Turkey's willingness to compromise and very skillful diplomacy on the US side," he said. "It would also require solving the worries of Cyprus, yet I still see this as the best solution."

In this way, Wasilewski thinks that on one hand, the US would get rid of a problem with its ally, and on the other, Turkish decision-makers could sell such a deal to their nationalist electorate more easily.

Ankara, however, pledged to proceed with talks for the procurement of a second batch of the missiles from Moscow despite the US opposition. However, during his phone meeting with Erdogan's top adviser Ibrahim Kalin last Tuesday, Jake Sullivan, US national security adviser, expressed his country's concern about Turkey's acquisition of the S-400s that "undermines the alliance's cohesion and effectiveness."

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will hold a phone call with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Wednesday, and the S-400s top the US agenda this time.



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S-400s still an issue for US-Turkish ties under Biden Turkey says turning back on S-400s 'problematic', seeks US dialogue

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# [UAE added to UK 'red list' of countries with travel restrictions](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-02-09 19:22

LONDON: The UAE has been added to a British list of countries with additional travel restrictions designed to limit the spread of COVID-19.

The UK government on Tuesday announced the measures following growing concerns that imported variants of COVID-19 could be resistant to the country's main vaccine produced by AstraZeneca.

Downing Street is expected to introduce mandatory hotel quarantines for 33 countries on the list, which includes the UAE.

Quarantines in hotels, or similar government-approved locations where travelers must self-isolate, have been touted as a successful strategy for reducing COVID-19 transmission following successful efforts in Singapore, Taiwan, Australia and New Zealand.

The so-called "red list" applies to countries deemed to be high risk due to rates of COVID-19 infections. The new measures will mean that flights to the UK from these destinations are suspended.

The only arrivals permitted from "red list" countries are British and Irish nationals or those with UK residence rights.

The hotel quarantine will come into effect from Feb. 15, with room booking available from Feb. 11.





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Dubai updates entry requirements as UAE COVID-19 cases surge  
UAE COVID-19 pandemic toll climbs to 520 as 1,214 new cases confirmed

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## [France condemns Houthi air attacks on Saudi Arabia, demands end to Yemen offensive](#)

Tue, 2021-02-09 17:47

LONDON: France has strongly condemned recent attempted air strikes by Yemen's Houthi militia against Saudi Arabia.

The Iran-backed Houthis launched a series of armed drones toward the Kingdom's southern region on Sunday and Monday with eight intercepted and destroyed by the Arab coalition.

"The proliferation and use of drones undermines the stability of the region,"

the French foreign ministry said in a statement, while reaffirming its “firm commitment to the security of Saudi territory.”

France also said it was “very concerned” about the militia group’s ongoing offensive in Yemen’s Marib governorate.

On Monday, the Houthis launched a three-pronged offensive on the oil-rich, government-controlled province, triggering clashes with army troops and allied tribesmen backed by air cover from Arab coalition warplanes, Yemeni government officials said.

Yemeni Prime Minister Maen Abdulmalik Saeed said the Houthis were targeting residential neighborhoods in Marib and Jouf with ballistic missiles and drones, despite international calls and efforts to reach a political solution. Several civilians have been killed in the offensive.

“The ongoing escalation, both in Yemen and against Saudi Arabia, must end immediately,” the French foreign ministry added.

Paris called on the Houthi militia to end their offensive in Yemen, as well as their destabilizing regional actions, and to engage constructively in a political process to end the crisis in the war-torn country.

France also said it was “in favor of a cessation of hostilities in Yemen and a relaunch of discussions with a view to a comprehensive political agreement involving all components of the country, under the aegis of the UN.”



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# Iran's dissident surveillance operation exposed

Author:

Mon, 2021-02-08 22:25

LONDON: Iran is running two surveillance operations in cyberspace, using various methods to spy on more than 1,000 dissidents, according to a leading cybersecurity company.

People in Iran, the UK, the US and 10 other countries have been tracked by Iranian hackers, Check Point said.

It added that two groups are involved in disseminating spyware among dissidents that is then used to monitor them and to steal call recordings and other media.

One of the groups, Domestic Kitten, uses various methods to trick people into downloading malicious software to their phones.

For example, they mimic apps for Tehran-based restaurants, offer fake mobile-security apps or provide local news via a compromised app. In one case, they supplied an infected wallpaper app that also contained pro-Daesh imagery.

Check Point said Tehran has achieved at least 600 successful infections using these methods.

The other group involved in the hacking scandal, Infy, is known to have been operating as early as 2007, and has targeted peoples' computers by sending emails with attractive content and an attachment containing spyware.

The Infy campaign, according to Check Point, is one of Iran's most sophisticated campaigns yet.

"It is clear that the Iranian government is investing significant resources into cyber operations," said Check Point cyber-research head Yaniv Balmas.

"The operators of these Iranian cyber-espionage campaigns seem to be completely unaffected by any counter-activities done by others, even though both campaigns had been revealed and even stopped in the past. They have simply restarted."

Amin Sabeti, executive director at the Washington-based Digital Impact Lab, told Arab News that once Iranian operatives break into dissidents' devices, their priority is finding out who these people are speaking to in Iran.

"They want to find the network of people, especially those outside the country, and figure out what they're talking about and who they're talking to – then they arrest them," he said.

Sabeti added, however, that Iran is not a top-tier cyber threat. "It can't



compete with Russia or China,” he said.

What Tehran’s cyber agencies excel at is what Sabeti called the “social engineering” side of hacking.

“In terms of the technology they aren’t that sophisticated, but in implementation they’re excellent,” he said.

“They understand their target perfectly – they study them and figure out what they want, and compromise them from there.”

The Intelligence Ministry and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Sabeti said, each run their own distinct cyber entities with different targets. The IRGC focuses on foreign dissidents, while the ministry focuses on Iranians at home.

The work of various security operations often overlaps, and the end result, he said, is an interconnected system of spying that “looks like it was taken from the Soviet Union’s playbook.”



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US general says Washington will help Saudi Arabia defend against ‘common threat of Iran’



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## Algeria orders investigation into student police abuse claim

Author:

By AOMAR OUALI | AP

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Mon, 2021-02-08 18:44

ALGIERS: In an unprecedented move, the prosecutor's office in the Algerian capital has ordered a preliminary investigation into torture and sexual abuse that a student protester claimed during his trial he was subjected to by judicial police.

The claim by Walid Nekiche at his trial last Tuesday drew widespread criticism in the media, along with the prosecution's request for a life sentence for the oceanography student. Nekiche was on trial for "plotting against the state" and possessing tracts against the national interest for his actions in pro-democracy protests.

Nekiche was finally sentenced to a year in prison with six months guaranteed behind bars and freed because he had already been held in detention since his November 2019 arrest.

But the prosecutor on Sunday ordered an investigation opened into his claims that he had been subjected to "violence and sexual aggression by members of the judicial police" questioning him following his arrest.

The demand for a preliminary investigation comes days before the second anniversary on Feb. 22 since the Hirak pro-democracy movement was born with nationwide street protests that helped force former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to leave office after 20 years in power. Dozens of student protesters were jailed, as well as a powerful coterie of top officials and business leaders for corruption under Bouteflika.

The preliminary probe also comes at a time of renewed political tensions with President Abdelmadjid Tebboune absent for months for treatment for COVID-19 and then follow-up care.



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