

Turkey risks sanctions if it activates S-400 missile system, experts warn

Author:

Sat, 2020-03-14 00:41

ANKARA: Turkey has reportedly decided to activate its Russian-made S-400 surface-to-air missile system in April despite warnings from the US that if it does so, it will be unable to acquire America's Patriot missile-defense batteries.

Ankara's purchase of the S-400s from Russia has been a major source of disagreement between Ankara and Washington, which insists that the Russian system is incompatible with the NATO systems. Turkey says it has no intention of integrating the S-400s into NATO systems.

Following recent tension with Russia over Syria's rebel-held Idlib province – where dozens of Turkish soldiers have been killed by Russia-backed Syrian regime attacks, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan recently stated that he was interested in purchasing the US Patriot system to reinforce Turkey's defenses.

But the US administration has clearly stated that it will not sell the Patriot system to Turkey unless it scraps its plans to use the S-400s.

Karol Wasilewski, a Turkey analyst at the Polish Institute of International Affairs, thinks that Erdogan and Turkish decision-makers are serious when they say that they would like to have both S-400s and Patriots.

"It corresponds to their vision of (Turkey having) a multi-vector foreign policy," he told Arab News. "But Turkey won't get the Patriots as long as it has active S-400s on its soil. If the Turks activate the S-400, the US will most likely impose sanctions under the 2017 Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)," he said.

CAATSA sanctions cover 12 options, including the denial of visas to officials, prevention of access to the US-based Export-Import Bank, refusal or prohibition of export licenses and the prevention of any transactions with the US financial system.

Erdogan has been asked repeatedly by his US counterpart Donald Trump to abandon the \$2.5 billion Russian system, which began arriving in Turkey in July accompanied by much fanfare.

BACKGROUND

President Tayyip Erdogan recently stated that he was interested in purchasing the US Patriot system to reinforce Turkey's defenses.

In response to Ankara failing to take the warning seriously, Washington removed its NATO ally from the multinational manufacturing program for F-35 joint-strike fighter jets and prohibited the sale of those aircraft to Turkey.

“Not only is it impossible for Turkey to operationalize S-400 and also purchase Patriot batteries at the same time, operationalizing the S-400 will likely lead to sanctions by the United States,” said Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, Ankara office director of the German Marshall Fund of the United States. These sanctions, he warned, could not only be selected from the CAATSA options, but also from the harsher Turkey Sanctions bill, S. 2641, which has already passed the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee.

Bill S.2641 places restrictions on US arms sales to Turkey for use in any military offensive in northern Syria, and will mean that America opposes any loans being granted to Turkey from international financial institutions. It also restricts visas and freezes Turkish assets in the US. At the same time, the bill calls for the enforcement of CAATSA sanctions against Turkey. While the White House claims that such a move risks pushing Turkey into a closer relationship with Russia, the US Congress reportedly favors imposing sanctions on Ankara.

Still, Unluhisarcikli suggests there is a way to “overcome this stalemate.” “The US could deploy Patriot batteries in Turkey for a year in return for Turkey committing to not activating the S-400 in that same period,” he said. This way, Unluhisarcikli argues, sanctions would at least be postponed and there would be a window of opportunity to resolve the S-400 problem in a more positive way that would not so heavily damage an already weakened Turkish economy.

It is still unclear to what extent Ankara might be willing to compromise in order to avoid sanctions, considering that last year Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu stressed that Turkey needs the Russian system, and said, “A product is not bought to be kept in the box.”

In other words, the Turkish government has already made up its mind about the S-400 system.

If Turkey, NATO’s second-largest member in terms of military force, activates the rival Russian system as declared, it will likely set the country on a collision course with its NATO allies over concerns that the Russian system could undermine NATO technology and open a potential backdoor through which to spy on NATO assets.

For Washington, the only solution to this impending crisis is that the system remains inactive.



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NATO leaders ramp up pressure on Turkey over S-400 missile system
Erdogan: Turkey's efforts to solve S-400 missile row with US to continue until April

[Amid coronavirus chaos, Corona is not the best brand name. Or is it?](#)

Fri, 2020-03-13 23:31

CAIRO: Up until recently, Egyptians associated the word "Corona" with a venerable chocolate-manufacturing company.

However, after the emergence of the new coronavirus, the name has taken on a whole new meaning.

Many Arabs familiar with Corona confectionary have been pondering as to whether the global outbreak has impacted on sales and damaged the brand's image.

As counterintuitive as it may seem, Ahmed Shaaban, Corona's sales manager, said the health crisis has had the opposite effect.

He pointed out that sales had increased as the coronavirus infection spread from Wuhan in China, where it originated, around the globe. It has now been officially declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO).

“Egyptians have been buying more Corona chocolate bars. Many visit our stores to joke with the staff about the relationship between the virus and chocolate. The conversation usually ends up with the purchase of our chocolate,” Shaaban added.

Mohamed, a salesman at a Corona outlet, said: “The association of our product name with the name of the virus has encouraged many people to buy our products.” Jokingly, he added: “The virus has been the best advertising we’ve ever had.”

On a serious note, the outbreak is posing a growing threat to the Egyptian economy, with pressure on tourism, trade and gas exports, according to a Reuters report.

The country has recorded at least 80 infection cases, many of whom were on a Nile cruise ship in Luxor, where its Pharaonic temples are a major tourist attraction.

Tourism, which had rebounded after the 2011 uprising in Egypt, has been showing the first signs of a slowdown.

But Egyptians are not holding back on buying their favorite chocolate.

“I was raised on Corona chocolate, and I passed my love for it down to my children,” Amani Wajid, a cinema employee in Cairo, told Arab News.

“The coincidental link between coronavirus and Corona chocolate has given rise to jokes at home, but at the end of the day we love Corona chocolate.”

Corona, originally called the Royal Chocolate Co., was founded in the Egyptian city of Ismailia in 1919.

The factory’s headquarters later moved to the coastal city of Alexandria, and the company’s name was changed to Corona. At the time, the owner was a Greek businessman named Tommy Christo, whose reputation for magnanimity has outlived him among his employees.

“Christo used to treat the staff with great generosity, and gave them excellent salaries and bonuses,” Shaaban said. “He used to give out movie tickets to employees, workers and their families, and also distributed boxes containing a large selection of Corona products at the beginning of each year.”

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

Several years after the revolution of 1952, led by the Free Officers Movement, the Corona Co. was nationalized through a decree by then President Gamal Abdel Nasser.

The merger of Nadler Confectionery Co. with Corona and Al-Hawamdiya Factory gave birth in 1963 to a nationalized industrial asset, Alexandria Chocolate and Confectionery Co. Mohamed Rashad Zaki, an engineer, was appointed chairman of the board.

In 2000, when a downturn in the global economy hit Egypt hard, Corona witnessed a drop in its market share. The company was sold to the Sami Saad Group in 2000 as part of a larger government program of privatization and economic reform.

Shaaban said that due to its dependence on imported manufacturing materials, Corona was adversely affected by the rise in the value of the dollar against the Egyptian pound in 2016.

Since then, the business has been substituting imported raw materials with local commodities in an attempt to reduce its exposure to foreign-exchange fluctuations.

Although privatization failed to halt the decline in Corona chocolate sales, the firm has been on a recovery path in recent years as a leading FMCG company locally in the sandwich-biscuit and cocoa categories.

The practice of selling Corona products exclusively through its outlets has been discontinued in favor of arrangements with supermarkets, including Hyper One, Zahran and Seoudi.

Corona exports about 15 percent of its production and aims to expand in the US, Libya, Tunisia and Kenya.

“We aim to increase our exports to 20 million Egyptian pounds (\$1.3 million) during 2020, as opposed to 10 million pounds in previous years,” Shaaban added. “We have drawn up a plan to increase the number of distributors for our products in Egypt in order to raise the growth rate by 40 percent by the end of the year.”



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Companies in Saudi Arabia adapting to coronavirus measures
Twitter moves to protect conversations on COVID-19 in MENA region

[Death toll at 21 as Egypt storms, flooding enter second day](#)

Fri, 2020-03-13 18:14

CAIRO: Thunderstorms and flooding around Egypt entered a second day Friday, interrupting daily life in much of the country, including the capital Cairo, as the death toll rose to 21, authorities said.

Most of the fatalities took place in the country's rural areas and run-down slums. At least six children died, either from electrocution or rubble after heavy rains knocked down their houses.

Since the rains hit late Wednesday and early Thursday, social media has been inundated with images and video showing flooded roads and villages as well as water-filled apartments in some of Cairo's richest neighborhoods.



A man rides a cart during a thunderstorm and heavy rains in Cairo, as the government announced a day off while the rain exceeds the infrastructure's capacity in most cities, Egypt Mar. 12, 2020. (Reuters)

Chaos always accompanies bad weather in Egypt, raising questions about the country's poor infrastructure and dilapidated sewage and drainage systems. To minimize the impact of bad weather, the government closed down schools and suspended work in businesses and government offices after forecasters warned of heavy rains and flooding across much of the country through Saturday.



A man tries to fix an auto rickshaw during a thunderstorm and heavy rains in downtown of Cairo, as the government announced a day off while the rain exceeds the infrastructure's capacity in most cities, in Egypt Mar. 12, 2020. (Reuters)

Late on Thursday, Cairo's Water Authority announced it had suspended water service to the entire megacity because heavy rain had overwhelmed the vast sewage system. Water would return when the weather improved, it said, without offering an exact time. By Friday morning water had returned to some parts of the city.

The floods forced the country's railway authorities to suspend train service nationwide. Power outages were also reported in several parts of the country, including parts of Cairo.





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13 injured in Egypt train accident amid heavy rainThunderstorms bring widespread flooding to Egypt, killing 5

[Pentagon confirms strikes against five Iran-backed militia group facilities in Iraq](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-03-13 02:17

WASHINGTON: The Pentagon on Thursday confirmed that the United States had carried out strikes against five Iran-backed militia weapons storage facilities in Iraq, a day after a deadly rocket attack killed two American and one British service member.

“The United States conducted defensive precision strikes against Kataib Hezbollah facilities across Iraq,” a Pentagon statement said.

“These weapons storage facilities include facilities that housed weapons used to target US and coalition troops,” it said. The strikes were “defensive, proportional and in direct response to the threat posed by Iranian-backed Shia militia groups,” the statement added.



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Shiite militia likely to blame for killing US troops in Iraq: US general
Iraq opens investigation on attack on base that killed US troops

[Professor takes the plunge to protect Kuwait's coral reefs](#)

Fri, 2020-03-13 02:06

KUWAIT: Dr. Dari Alhuwail is a true modern-day hero. When he is not working as an assistant professor at Kuwait University's Department of Information Science, he is with the Kuwait Dive Team, plunging deep into the sea to protect the country's marine environment.

“I am saying this in all honesty and without the tiniest bit of cheesiness or corniness: we are ‘Team Mission Impossible’,” he said with the unmistakable

pride of someone who has been associated with the volunteer diving team for close to 13 years now.

The Kuwait Dive Team is a group of diving professionals committed to protecting the marine ecosystem through salvage operations.

Officially, Alhuwail handles international relations, communicating with associations such as Project AWARE and Ocean Conservancy, but he also takes regular trips to monitor the corals and clear sea debris.

Alhuwail's relationship with the team goes back to his high-school days, when he saw press releases of the Dive Team's initiatives for picking up marine debris, sunken boats and beach trash.

"For me, their efforts symbolized something greater," he said.



Dr. Dari Alhuwail, an assistant professor at Kuwait University's Department of Information Science, has been a part of the Kuwait Dive Team since his high school days. (Supplied)

"All of the work that we undertake essentially involves protecting Kuwait's coral reefs because the reefs are one of the most important elements in the marine world." Alhuwail said.

“For example, on a regular day, we lift sunken boats and vessels, move debris and ghost nets from the waters and moor buoys to safeguard the reefs so that the boats don’t anchor there.”

In 2010, Kuwait experienced its worst coral bleaching season, with almost 80 percent of its reefs affected. Alhuwail says they are now recovering, but more effort is needed to reclaim what is lost.

“We have a coral transplantation project in place where we try and build new homes for the reefs, and we have artificial reef installations around Kuwait.”

Alhuwail cites amateur diving and spearfishing around the reefs as some of the human activities that can damage these areas.

“Amateur divers have lesser control over their buoyancy, and sometimes when you swim too close your fin breaks off a coral – it might have taken 10 or 20 years for that bit to grow.”

“No, we are not your regular 911,” said Alhuwail trying to explain the range of work he undertakes as part of the Dive Team.

However, the members do respond to some calls, for example about sunken boats that pose a threat to passing vessels. Even then, many factors need to be considered before the team sets out.

“The sea has certain rules that need to be observed – high tide, low tide, wind speed and direction, wave height, and add to that the things we need to do our homework on – location of the operation, threat to life, additional resources requirement and so on.”

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Tunisian seeks to bring mobility to MENA's differently abled