

# Will Turkey abandon S-400? Trump meeting will give answer

Author:

Sun, 2019-11-10 00:45

ANKARA: During his meeting next week in Washington, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced that he will discuss Patriot systems, F-35s and the Russian air defense system S-400 with US President Donald Trump.

"The only thing that would make Erdogan's visit to Washington worthwhile to either side would be a breakthrough on the S-400 and F35 question," Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, Ankara office director of German Marshall Fund of the US, told Arab News.

"If Turkey could find a way to keep the S-400 nonoperational in return for being readmitted to the F35 program and acquiring Patriot batteries, this would be a big step toward improvement of US-Turkey relations and putting Ankara back on a Western track," he also added.

Turkey's Defense Industry Directorate recently announced that delivery of a second batch of S-400 systems to Turkey may be delayed beyond the planned timeline, which is 2020. The reason of the delay is believed to be about talks on technology sharing and joint production.

For Washington, the S-400 system, which is not compatible with the NATO defense system, brings a threat to its F-35 fighter jets. As Turkey started receiving its first batch of S-400s in July, Washington removed Ankara from the F-35 program, where Turkey was a significant manufacturer and buyer. Russia offered to sell its SU-35 fighter jets to Turkey as an alternative to F-35s. Ankara is still evaluating the offer's strategic and financial repercussions.

On the other hand, if there is no such deal on the table, Erdogan's visit to Washington will have an unnecessary public relations cost for both leaders, Unluhisarcikli thinks.

Ali Cinar, a US-based foreign policy expert, thinks Turkey has a legitimate air defense need, however it has also been made clear by both the Pentagon and NATO officials that the Russian S-400 system is a direct security threat to the F-35 stealth fighter jets, which serve as the core air defense system for NATO.

"With Turkey purchasing the S-400 and the US imposing sanctions on Turkey for doing so, it is clear that policymakers on both sides downplayed the severity of the situation. Now, leaders of both nations must come back to the table and look for a way forward which would include Turkey taking part in the F-35 program, receiving an acceptable Patriot missile system offer and working to deactivate the S-400 system," he told Arab News.

Cinar also noted that this is the expectation from the US side that Ankara keeps the S-400 but deactivates the system.

## **FASTFACT**

For Washington, the S-400 system, which is not compatible with NATO defense

system, brings a threat to its F-35 fighter jets.

“Even Republican Senator Lindsey Graham has indicated that this would be acceptable to Congress. Turkey is very clear to use S-400 from now on; however, it is open to purchasing Patriot missiles as well,” he said. According to Cinar, the result of the meeting between the two presidents will depend on which side will give up or convince the other side.

But, Joe Macaron, a resident fellow at the Arab Center in Washington, thinks that Erdogan wants to acquire these Patriot missiles while keeping the S-400 deactivated, and is betting that Trump’s inclination to make lucrative deals will override the Pentagon’s veto.

“Ankara is offering both carrots and sticks to Washington, either a Patriot deal or deepening military ties with Moscow, which reflects how Erdogan has the upper hand in the relationship with Trump,” he told Arab News.

Therefore, Macaron added, if Erdogan pulls this through, it remains to be seen what preconditions the Pentagon will be able to force on this deal to make sure the S-400 is never operational.

“With US troops remaining in Syria for now based on a fragile US-Turkish cease-fire, an emboldened Erdogan has a bargaining card to use in his White House meeting next week,” he said.



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New Delhi to receive S-400s in 18-19 months

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## Iran's top Al-Quds officials in Baghdad to support Abdul Mahdi

Author:

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BAGHDAD: Qassim Suleimani, the commander of Iran's Quds Force and field commander in charge of Iran's operations in Iraq, has been in Baghdad for 11 days to manage the crisis and provide direct support to Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, two of Suleimani's associates told Arab News on Saturday. Baghdad and nine southern Shiite-dominated provinces have witnessed anti-government mass demonstrations since Oct. 1. More than 300 demonstrators have been killed and 15,000 wounded, mostly in Baghdad, with tear gas and live bullets used by Iraqi forces to quell the protests, while scores of activists and journalists have been arrested.

Suleimani and his deputy, Maj. Gen. Hamed Abdollahi, are in Baghdad "to provide the necessary moral and logistical support" to Abdul Mahdi, whose dismissal has become the first demand of the protesters, a prominent Shiite leader told Arab News.

The general, or Abu Duaa, as his closest allies call him, attends almost daily meetings in Baghdad with leaders of Iranian-backed political forces in an attempt to dismantle the crisis and prolong the time Abdul Mahdi remains in office.

"Abu Duaa has been in Baghdad for 11 days. He is here to provide the necessary support to Abdul Mahdi," one of the top Iraqi Shiite leaders told Arab News.

"The demonstrations will end soon in one way or another. There is money spent generously to get some engines (organizers of demonstrations) out of the scene, at the same time there are other means (arrests and kidnapping).

"The carrot and stick policy has been operational for weeks and is beginning to bear fruit."

The dismissal or resignation of Abdul Mahdi, which has become one of the most important demands of the demonstrators, is not put forward as one of the solutions for Suleimani and his allies, and the military solution is also not on the table.

Suleimani's ally said some Iraqi military leaders were demanding military intervention to end the demonstrations, especially in Tahrir Square where most demonstrators are gathering in Baghdad.

"They demanded the intervention of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMU), but Suleimani rejected this option in principle.

"He clearly said that this is an American trap to drag the PMU factions to clash with the demonstrators and then demand their dissolution."

## NUMBER

300 – demonstrators have been killed and 15,000 wounded, mostly in Baghdad.

The PMU factions have not intervened as combat troops, “but that does not mean it (PMU) did not intervene as intelligence or security support,” the ally said.

Suleimani’s ally said that the solutions offered do not include the dismissal or resignation of Abdel Mahdi, although everyone knows that the cause of the current problem is him and his private office manager Abu Jihad.

“Our problem with the Americans, Sadr and Najaf is caused by Abu Jihad,” he said.

“Adel Abdul Mahdi has not taken any real decision since he became prime minister and all the decisions were made by Abu Jihad.

“Those two (Abdul Mahdi and Abu Jihad) are protected and their protector (Suleimani) insists that there is no real problem worth sacrificing them.

“He (Suleimani) does not deal with Iraq as a single country, but rather as part of a system that includes Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Palestine, so any suggested solutions that exclude Adel or Abu Jihad are not acceptable (by Suleimani).

“The Iranians are not like Americans. They do not give up their ally easily, so they will continue to support Abdul Mahdi until the very last moment.”

The solutions proposed by Suleimani and agreed by the majority of key political players include a ministerial change involving more than half of the Cabinet, and to gradually vote on a number of important laws, accelerate the adoption of constitutional amendments to be ready for a referendum in April, vote to reduce the number of members of the Parliament to half, the abolition of the provincial councils, “which represent the vicious circle of corruption in the provinces,” change the election law “to allow the rise of individuals and small lists” and change the High Electoral Commission, the source said.

Changing the system from parliamentary to presidential may be included in the constitutional amendments but will not be passed as the Kurds, Sunnis and Najaf reject this system “because it is the key to sliding into dictatorship.”

“Now we are worried about Najaf (Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani) because it is really upset. This is really our last chance. (If not taken) then people will come out in an armed revolution,” Suleimani’s ally said.

“I’m not optimistic because the tools are the same. Real solutions mean big losses and no one is willing to take any losses.

“The situation will calm down and people (demonstrators) will return to their homes, but they will return to the street later.”



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Iran able to enrich uranium up to 60%, says atomic energy agency spokesman  
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## [Iran able to enrich uranium up to 60%, says atomic energy agency spokesman](#)

Sat, 2019-11-09 20:51

TEHRAN: Iran has the capacity to enrich uranium up to 60 percent, a spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) said on Saturday, far more than is required for most civilian uses but short of the 90 percent needed to make nuclear bomb fuel.

"The organization has the possibility to produce 5 percent, 20 percent and 60 percent, and has this capacity," AEOI spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi said during a news conference at the underground Fordow nuclear plant, the official IRIB news agency reported.

"At the moment, the need is for 5 percent," he added.

Iran's highest political authority, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said last month that the country had never pursued the building or use of nuclear weapons, which its religion forbids.

Iran said on Thursday it had resumed uranium enrichment at Fordow, stepping further away from its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers after the United States pulled out of it.

The pact bans production of nuclear material at Fordow, a highly sensitive site that Iran hid from UN non-proliferation inspectors until its exposure in 2009.

Inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will visit Fordow on Sunday, Kamalvandi said.

Since May, Iran has begun to exceed limits on its nuclear capacity set by the pact in retaliation for US pressure on Tehran to negotiate restrictions on its ballistic missile program and support for proxy forces around the Middle East.

Iran says its measures are reversible if European signatories to the accord manage to restore its access to foreign trade promised under the nuclear deal but blocked by the reimposition of US sanctions.



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# Strikes on Syrian medical facilities appear deliberate: UN

Author:

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IDLIB: More than 60 medical facilities have been hit in Syria's Idlib province in the past six months, including four this week, and appear to have been deliberately targeted by government-affiliated forces, a UN rights spokesman said on Friday.

Idlib in Syria's northwest, the target of a Russian-backed offensive launched this summer to capture it and surrounding areas, is part of the last major rebel bastion in Syria's 8 1/2-year war.

Since April 29, 61 medical facilities have been hit there, including some that were struck several times, UN human rights spokesman Rupert Colville told journalists.

"We can't determine if every single attack is deliberate but the large scale of these attacks ... strongly suggests that government-affiliated forces conducting these strikes are, at least partly, if not wholly, deliberately striking health facilities," he said at a Geneva news briefing.

"They can't possibly all be accidents," he told Reuters later. He said that, if it is proven that any or some of these were deliberate, they would amount to war crimes.

Damage was reported at the Kafr Nobol hospital on Nov. 6 – which had also been hit in May and July – and two air strikes also directly hit the Al-Ikhlis hospital in southern Idlib, incapacitating it this week, Colville said.

## **BACKGROUND**

Idlib in Syria's northwest, the target of a Russian-backed offensive launched this summer to capture it and surrounding areas, is part of the last major rebel bastion in Syria's 8 1/2-year war.

Syria's war has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands and forced 13 million people from their homes, half of whom have left their wrecked country.

Since a Turkish-led offensive across Syria's northern border a month ago to push out Kurdish YPG fighters, at least 92 civilians have been killed in northern and northeastern Syria, Colville added.

That offensive displaced 200,000 people, of whom nearly half of them remain displaced are dispersed across camps and shelters, Najat Rochdi, Senior Humanitarian Adviser to the UN Special Envoy for Syria, said on Friday.

A UN-backed panel is meeting in Geneva this week, with delegates from the government, opposition and civil society, in what the United Nations says is

an important step in the long road to political rapprochement in Syria.



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Turkish-Russian patrols pelted by residents in north Syria  
Turkish patrol kills protester amid shaky truce in northeastern Syria

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## [Turkish-Russian patrols pelted by residents in north Syria](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-11-09 00:52

IDLIB/TURKEY: Local residents on Friday pelted with shoes and stones Turkish and Russian troops who were conducting their third joint patrol in northeastern Syria, under a cease-fire deal brokered by Moscow that forced Kurdish fighters to withdraw from areas bordering Turkey. The patrols are aimed at allowing Turkey to ensure that the Syrian Kurdish groups have evacuated the border zone. The agreement with Russia – and a separate one with the US – halted the Turkish invasion of Syria last month that targeted groups it considers a security threat for their links to a Kurdish insurgency inside Turkey.

The pelting of the Turkish-Russian patrol occurred east of the border town of



Qamishli, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, and the Kurdish Hawar news agency. Videos from the area showed men, women and children pelting armored vehicles as they drove near a cemetery before speeding away.

There was no immediate comment from the Russian or Turkish military about the incident that appears not to have caused damage to the vehicles.

Turkey's Defense Ministry said the troops were patrolling a region between Qamishli and Derik, east of the Euphrates River. It said the patrols were being supported by drones, but provided no further details.

## **NUMBER**

**92** – civilians have died so far as a result of Turkey's incursion into northern Syria, according to the UN.

An Associated Press journalist saw four Turkish armored personnel carriers cross into Syria to join the Russian forces.

Mutafa Bali, a spokesman for the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), tweeted that Turkish troops fired tear gas on protesters in Derik, injuring 10 people. The town is controlled by SDF and American forces, but the Turkish troops were passing through on the patrol.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan complained this week that Syrian Kurdish fighters were still present in areas along the border, despite the separate agreements with Russia and the US.

Erdogan also said Turkish troops were being attacked by some Syrian Kurdish fighters from areas they had retreated to, adding that Turkey would not "remain a spectator" to these assaults.

The UN said on Friday that 92 civilians have died so far as a result of Turkey's incursion into northern Syria. Rupert Colville, a spokesman for the UN human rights office, said the death toll was based on "verified incidents" that included to Nov. 5.

Also in northern Syria, the Observatory and the Thiqa news agency, an activist collective, said on Friday a suicide attacker detonated a truck outside a police station in the northern town of Rai that is controlled by Turkey-backed opposition fighters.

The Observatory said the blast killed three people, while Thiqa reported two civilian deaths.

Bombings in areas held by Turkey-backed opposition fighters in northern Syria are not uncommon. Last week, 13 people were killed in a blast in the town of Tal Abyad, which Turkish troops and opposition fighters they back captured last month.



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Daesh-linked Albanian child arrives home to Italy from Syria camp  
Turkish patrol kills protester amid shaky truce in northeastern Syria