



## Turkish President Erdogan Says the Country Could Buy More Russian S-400 Missile Systems Despite Strong Objections by the United States

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan remarked this week that the country is considering buying more Russian S-400 missile systems, despite strong objections by the United States. The potential move by the key North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ally has worried some, as Turkey has continued to work with Russia regarding weapon sales. The United States in particular has expressed concern, threatening to impose new sanctions and saying that the S-400s present a security threat to its F-35 fighter jets and broader NATO defenses. Turkey's initial purchase of S-400s from Russia a few years ago strained relations with the United States, prompting the U.S. to sanction them under a law aimed at pushing back the Kremlin's influence while also removing Turkey from the F-35 Lightning II jet program. The United States has argued that the S-400s could be used by Russia to secretly obtain classified details on F-35 jets, but Turkey insists that they would not be integrated into NATO systems and do not offer a threat to the alliance. This most recent missile systems dealing between Turkey and Russia is one of the main sticking points in the current state of Turkish-U.S. ties, and Erdogan commented that the issue would be discussed further in his talks with Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin this week.

This is not the first time that Turkey has dealt with missile sales from Russia. Following the Turkish-Russian agreement over the first batch of missiles, which was officially delivered back in 2019, the U.S. imposed sanctions on Turkey's Defense Industry Directorate, its chief Ismail Demir, and three other employees this past December of 2020. This deal troubled the United States and other NATO allies because of Turkey's coordination with adversaries like the Kremlin. Erdogan has claimed that no other nation can, nor should, dictate who Turkey engages in arms dealings with, and that ultimately it was Turkey's right to decide on these matters uninterrupted in its position as a sovereign state.

In the preceding years, U.S. and Turkish relations have been strained over the missile system sales and a few other notable issues including American backing of Kurdish militant groups. Thus, some analysts contend that Erdogan may be seeking to strengthen ties with Russia, especially since talks with U.S. President Joe Biden and top officials under the new administration regarding key differences have not proven to be very fruitful for either side. One of the areas, however, in which the United States and Turkey have been able to coordinate successfully is with the situation in Afghanistan. Turkey played a critical role during the recent U.S. troop withdrawal there, as the two countries were able to collaborate in the evacuation operation of Afghan refugees. In fact, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken expressed his gratitude with Turkish officials for their logistical support in the airlift endeavor, and the State Department said that the United States would continue to work with Turkey on aid efforts in Afghanistan.

While Turkey coordinates with the United States on certain issues, it has also displayed a willingness to do so in other areas with American rivals like Russia and China – as highlighted by the missile systems interactions with Russia. Among other subjects discussed during Erdogan's meeting with Putin in Sochi this week, the two leaders addressed the aforementioned weapons deal topic. It seems evident that while Turkey will undoubtedly remain a vital strategic partner of the United States and NATO, Erdogan's government will also try to balance this by maintaining positive relations with other major players on the global stage.