

Mustafa Kibaroglu: "Turkey needs both U.S. and Russia"

18 Mar in 13:25 By Vestnik Kavkaza



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Speculations about Turkey's possible refusal to buy Russian S-400 systems under U.S. pressure are being actively fueled. However, Moscow claims that the contract to supply the Triumph S-400 air defense missile systems to Turkey is underway, being implemented as scheduled and will be completed before the end of the year. On the sidelines of the International Winter School in Istanbul, organized by BILGESAM, expert on Turkey-NATO relations Mustafa Kibaroglu, answered Vestnik Kavkaza's questions about Turkey's position on Russia's S-400 and U.S.'s Patriot systems.

- How do you think the story with Turkey's purchase of S-400 and Patriot systems will end? Does Ankara have a long-term U.S. and NATO strategy on this issue?

- Turkey, the U.S. and NATO have 66 years of relations, as many high-ranking Turkish officials have said many times - both President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Defense Minister Hulusi Akar. The latter just a few days ago said that Turkey will remain to be a NATO member as long as the alliance exists. The issue of Turkey's purchase of S-400 from Russia provoked tension in Ankara's relations with NATO and the United States. The United States objected Turkey's purchase of Russian defense system from the very beginning. Washington claims potential problems from the use of the S-400 systems by a NATO member country along with NATO capabilities and the alliance's missile shield. These are politically correct issues. But, in my opinion, the U.S., as well as other allies concerned about Turkey's purchase of Russian anti-missile systems, should ask themselves why Turkey came to this decision, why Ankara had only one option left - the purchase of Russian systems.

As far as I understand, the decision on S-400 has been made, half of the money has already been paid to Russia, there is no possibility to abandon the deal. However, this system will not cover the whole territory of Turkey. It will act autonomously, protecting only four zones - Ankara, Istanbul and possibly the south-eastern territories and part of the Aegean region. NATO allies need to understand Turkey's need of the air defense system, they can still discuss the possibility of introducing the Patriot system or some European system, even with the S-400. Even with the deployment of S-400 systems, Turkey will need an additional missile defense system, and the United States can meet these needs. Turkey's NATO allies should understand its requirements. Ankara is not going to leave the North Atlantic Alliance. I do not think that it would be better for NATO and Turkey if the United States starts imposing sanctions, refuses to provide F-35 or spare parts of F-16. Neither Turkey nor NATO will benefit from sanctions.

- What are the advantages of S-400 over the Patriot systems?

- Technically speaking, the S-400 missiles and air assets are better than those of the Patriot system. But experts say that the S-400 ballistic missiles are not so well tested and their effectiveness has not been proven. Both systems have both advantages and disadvantages. I think the main advantage of S-400 is that even if the United States agrees to sell its system, Turkey will not be satisfied by the conditions of the Americans. There are also temporary and financial aspects. But it's better for Turkey and the U.S., Turkey and NATO to walk together; if their paths diverge, it would be of benefit to no one. Turkey is not better off without NATO, and NATO is not better off without Turkey.

- The United States considers Turkey an important NATO ally on the southern flank. What do you think of it?

- I agree completely. Without Turkey, NATO would not be able to achieve its goals, either geographically or politically. Yes, the S-400 deal has complicated some aspects of cooperation, but Turkey will still need a missile defense system. I think Turkey and NATO can help improve the security situation in the world in general.

- Has Russia-Turkey partnership become closer after the S-400 deal?

- There can be different periods in bilateral relations. Today's period will last 10-15 years. Today, the country are friends, and tomorrow they are rivals - it all depends on the attendant circumstances. Moreover, many aspects of relations depend not only on positions of the two states, but also on non-state actors, for example, on terrorists. In each country, terrorism is perceived in its own way. Turkey and Russia had both good and bad periods. So it will continue - good relations will be replaced by contradictions on some issues that need to be resolved. Turkey and Russia need each other. I hope the countries manage to avoid conflicts and will cooperate. In Syria, Turkey, Russia and Iran are fighting against a common enemy, because they are interested in stable Syria. Common sense should always prevail.



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