

Russia's S-400 Air Defense System: Turkey Fell Victim But India Escaped US Sanctions?

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In recent developments, *New Delhi on Friday October 4, 2018, "Russia's President Putin and India's Prime Minister Modi signed a \$5.4 billion agreement to purchase five S-400 air defense systems, delivery scheduled for 2020 - ignoring the threat of possible US sanctions.*

In the existing eventful world, the barely laying extremes of US foreign policies can be seen in its posture towards Turkey and India regarding the purchase of Russia's S-400 defense system. India's freedom to procure the defense system raises speculation over why Turkey is forbidden to do so. Despite being a NATO ally, Turkey is the latest and worst example for the US's allies that self-interests know no border. But the US is not so tough on all its allies and India is one of them. Why?

India is making gigantic strides in military and economic development. India's dispute with China over territories as well as in the Indian Ocean are consistent with US interests in the region, including Washington's "Pivot to Asia" and US-China relations. Moreover, India and the US's economic relationship has seen a tenfold increase in trade from US\$ 5.6 billion in 1990 to US\$ 140 billion in 2017 that cement its place in the eyes of the US lawmakers and policymakers. "In 2016, [India was the ninth largest trading partner of the US](#) and one of the major countries with which America has had trade deficit of more than \$30 billion."

India has also warmed up to Israel and their leaders have inked multiple agreements to boost security cooperation. Moreover, India is challenging Chinese trade mainly in Africa.

India purchases 60 percent of its military gear from Russia, or in other words, India is the largest purchaser of Russian arms. It has almost doubled the import of oil from heavily sanctioned Iran as well as another US adversary - Venezuela. In a joint press conference in May 2018 with Iranian foreign minister **Jawad Zarif**, Indian foreign minister **Sushma Swaraj**, in a reply to a journalist's question regarding the US sanctions on Iranian exports, said that **India doesn't recognize the US's sanctions** and only support sanctions issued by the United Nations.

On August 2, 2017, the US Congress passed the CAATSA bill that imposes sanctions on Iran, North Korea and Russia as main adversaries of the US. Under this law, other states are banned from dealing with these countries. The US Congressional representatives rushed to seek exemption for India. And now, India is negotiating the S-400 purchase deal with Russia despite US sanctions.

Indian-Americans are the wealthiest ethnic group in the US. Although they make up just about 1 percent of the total American population, they are an influential group. With the professional success, financial resources and growing population, Indian-Americans launched lobbying through different networks and forums. Part of India's efforts to influence the US Government has been inspired by its actions against Pakistan's lobby group.

A paramount force that pushes India to the heights in the US foreign policies and decision-making are the five Indian-Americans in the US Congress. Besides Senator-elect Harris, the Indian-American community now has four members of the US House of representatives. **Ami Bera, Raja Krishnamurthi, Pramila Jayapal** and **Ro Khanna** are Indian-American faces in the US legislature.

These powerful figures have certainly used their influence in the amendment of CAATSA to include exceptional states like India. Just like Israeli lobbyists simply convincing the US officials to cut aid to Palestinians or changing the minds of the US officials towards regional issues in its favor, India too has gained weighty role in redirecting the US foreign policies.

Looking for a silver bullet to ditch India of Russia's S-400 defense system, the US said that it mulls over delivery of THAAD missiles for India, according to the Indian Economic Times report in June. Currently, THAAD is deployed only in South Korea and Hawaii and the system is intended to be installed in Japan and Taiwan in the future. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have also reached a deal with the US to purchase the defense system. Reports say that Oman also offered to purchase THAAD, but received a red light.

While the US is offering to equip India with THAAD, it is working to stop Turkey from possessing Russia's S-400.

After decades of proximity and closer cooperation during Syrian war, the two NATO-member states parted their ways particularly after mid-2016. After ISIS lost the ground to Russia-backed Syrian forces, the US decided to support the Syrian-Kurdish People's Protections Unites (YPG), a militia with close ties to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a designated terrorist organization by Turkey and the US, as well as the European Union.

Tensions between the US and Turkey over Syria climaxed in January 2018, as Turkey invaded the Afrin canton in northwestern Syria to remove the YPG. The Kurdish insurgent groups want separation from Turkey or create an independent Kurdistan to which Turkey is highly allergic. Turkey's blocking of the US efforts to beef up YPG brought an end to viability of the conflict in Syria. The US might have YPG as the last resort option available for the time being to recover the loss in Syria, but Turkey's opposition infuriated the US that opened fire at it which still rages.

More shocking events took place over this period of time. The coup attempt in July 15, 2016 in Turkey added further acrimony in the US-Turkey relationship. **Andrei Karlov**, the Russian ambassador to Turkey, was assassinated by a Turkish police officer in 19 December 2016. Turkey's tourism industry was hit with a spate of bombings. All these were planned blow to Turkey.

The US waged an economic war on Turkey, allegedly for the detention of the American pastor in Turkey. Erdogan gave itself the right to avoid handover of the pastor to the US who has been held on charge of involvement in 2016 failed coup attempt, because the US did not listen to Turkey's insistence on extraditing US-based **Fethullah Gulen**, the alleged

mastermind of the coup.

Turkey also stands hostile to Washington's all-weather ally - Israel. It has repeatedly condemned Israel's actions against Palestine. In May, Erdogan called the US Embassy move to Jerusalem a "huge mistake".

Intimacy to Russia, of course, worsened the mutual ties, but not to the extent to throw the entire weight behind it.

As a consequence of Turkey-US strife, the Russia-Turkey rapprochement added up to the NATO members' split. Whether for warming to Russia or abandoning the US "halfway" in Syrian war, Turkey was set to face a flurry of sanctions and shocks. In addition to lira crises, two Turkish senior officials have been sanctioned that led Turkey to take retaliatory action against two US officials.

Turkey struck deals with Russia including construction of a new gas pipeline to Turkey and supply of S-400. Everyone was waiting to watch the US's reaction at the latter deal. Although the US implied its discontentment with Turkey's acquisition of Russian S-400, Ankara argued that the system is necessary to protect its airspace. Erdogan's government also pointed out that Turkey originally approached the US to procure the Patriot missile defense system and only turned to Russia when it could not seal a deal.

Moreover, Turkey contends that Greece, a NATO-member, purchased Russian S-300 defense system in 2015 that was not preceded or followed by any objection or outcry from other NATO members or the US.

The US's wrath at Turkey can also be seen in January 2018 when the presidents of two countries talked on telephone on the brink of Turkey's military operation in Afrin in northwestern Syria controlled by YPG. According to reports, the White House released the transcript of the conversation, which asserted that Trump had expressed concern over escalating violence due to Turkey's Afrin operation and about "destructive and false rhetoric coming from Turkey". Turkish officials immediately claimed that the **transcript did not reflect the true nature of the conversation**.

It indicates that Turkey's military operation was a wholly unilateral move that stood in sharp contrast to the US's agenda.

The war of words will continue so long as either Turkey withdraw from NATO membership or appease the US with concession like allowing to support and arm YPG in a new Syrian war or turn its back to Russia.

The decision to permit or prohibit a state from acquiring S-400 or issues of similar severity is taken based upon the level of expectation from a state due to its strategic location or other advantages. Greece or India might not have lived in a situation corresponding to Turkey's. They are not under as much fire as Turkey for possessing a super offensive or defensive system.

Turkish President **Recep Tayyip Erdogan** feared to lose the power to another contestant in June presidential election amid a meddling environment and frayed ties with the US and therefore availed every opportunity to rig the election in its favor.

Turkey would go its way regardless of the US's threats and install the defense system in the

near future, as it has discovered that the US, especially after the recent row, will not agree to sell THAAD or Patriot Air-Defense system to it.

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