Russian S-400 benefits NATO, US should do what strategic partnership entails – Erdogan

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Turkey's Erdogan said NATO "should be happy" that a member state is beefing up security, even with Russia's S-400 air defense system. He also called on Trump to waive sanctions and sell Turkey fighter jets.

If Turkey *"will become stronger in its security area, who will also be stronger? This will strengthen the alliance itself,"* President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Sunday, calling the S-400 deal the most important in Turkish history.

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Washington officials have other ideas. Purchasing the S-400 opens Ankara up to sanctions under CAATSA, a 2017 act that, among other things, can be used to penalize allies for *"transactions"* with the Russian defense sector.

However, the US has not yet applied sanctions to Turkey for the S-400 deal, despite House Foreign Affairs Committee chair and CAATSA co-sponsor Rep. Eliot Engel declaring on Friday that Erdogan *"must face stiff consequences"* for siding with *"Vladimir Putin over the alliance."*

Though a NATO ally, Turkey has often had an antagonistic relationship with the US. Both countries sparred over trade last year, and Ankara has pressured Washington to extradite Fethulla Gulen, an Islamic cleric Erdogan claims orchestrated the failed 2016 coup against him.

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Despite the frequent animosity, Erdogan remained optimistic on Sunday that Trump will *"find the middle ground"* and refrain from sanctioning Turkey. Trump *"has the authority to waive or postpone CAATSA,"* he added, pointing out that he had enjoyed a warm discussion with the US leader on the matter at last month's G20 summit in Osaka, Japan.

Speaking after the meeting, Trump blamed the current spat on the Obama administration for refusing to sell the US' Patriot missile system to Turkey. Erdogan echoed these words on Sunday, saying *"offer us the patriots and we'll take the patriots from you. But we need to have alternatives."* The Obama administration refused to supply the missiles as Ankara wanted the deal to come with a transfer of technology.

In the run-up to Turkey's S-400 purchase, the US used the threat of withholding the next-generation F-35 stealth fighter jet from Ankara as a bargaining chip, citing concerns that the S-400 could learn the jet's 'secrets' if operated alongside it.

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Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan warned his Turkish counterpart, Hulusi Akar last month that Turkey would find itself excluded from the F-35 program if it did not reverse course on the purchase by July 31. Turkey has invested $1.25 billion in the program, is one of nine partner states developing the warplane, and has ordered 100 units. The Pentagon and State Department, however, remained silent over the weekend as Turkey took delivery of its first S-400s.

Erdogan told journalists that Turkey had remained *"loyal"* to the F-35 program, making its payments on time, and that his apparent loyalty should be repaid with future defense cooperation. *"We are strategic partners,"* he said. *"Let's do what strategic partnership entails."*