

The US-Turkey Crisis Over Russian S-400 Missiles

(Translated)

Al-Rayah Newspaper - Issue 610 - 29/07/2026

By: Ustadh Hassan Hamdan

This crisis takes us back to the Syrian revolution, when Russia entered Syria to secure American interests—believing it would be granted rewards and privileges, see sanctions lifted, and perhaps even have its annexation of the Crimean Peninsula overlooked.

As the revolution dragged on and Russia realized it had stepped into a quagmire, the US—aware of Russia's growing realization of this danger—feared that Moscow might hastily undertake actions not sanctioned by Washington. Consequently, the US directed Turkey [Türkiye] to enter into a quasi-alliance with Russia to regulate the pace of its attacks and ensure they did not cross established red lines. These lines included refraining from eliminating the opposition forces concentrated in Idlib, before the completion of the US-led project for a final resolution to the Syrian crisis; the US wanted the opposition to remain so it could negotiate with the regime when the final settlement was drafted. Outwardly, Turkey appeared to be a friend of the revolution, while Russia appeared to be a friend of the regime.

Relations between Russia and Turkey deteriorated following the incident in which a Russian aircraft was shot down. However, because the US was keen on alignment between the two parties, it sought for Turkey to apologize and move closer to Russia—which is precisely what occurred. After initially insisting that the Russian aircraft had violated its airspace and that no apology was warranted, Turkey reversed its stance and issued an apology on June 27, 2016.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov stated at the time, “The Turkish President expressed his sympathy and deep condolences to the family of the killed Russian pilot and offered an apology.” He added that Erdoğan affirmed he would “do everything in his power to restore the traditional friendly relations between Turkey and Russia” (Al Arabiya, June 27, 2016).

Subsequently, relations improved significantly, and Erdoğan engaged in ongoing meetings and agreements with Putin. He spoke with him by phone on June 29, 2016; according to Turkish presidential sources, the call took place in a “very friendly atmosphere.” Turkey and Russia began to project an image of friendship, with Erdoğan addressing Putin as “friend.” Cooperation between them regarding Syria intensified—a collaboration between a supposed close friend and an avowed enemy who was killing Muslims and bombarding homes with missiles.

This situation persisted until late 2017, when Russia's stance became strained and it began threatening to eliminate the opposition in Idlib. This was a highly sensitive matter; the US feared that Russia might act rashly and defy American wishes by launching a final offensive on Idlib before the US-backed political solution for the Syrian crisis had matured. At this juncture, it became essential for Turkey to

forge a strong, alliance-like rapprochement with Russia, ensuring that any sweeping offensive on Idlib would only proceed with the consent of both parties. Thus, the \$2.5 billion S-400 deal was born—an attractive agreement for Russia, particularly given its economic crisis and the Western sanctions imposed upon it. Erdoğan justified the purchase by noting that more than half of Turkey's pilots had been detained following the failed military coup of mid-July 2016; consequently, the Turkish Air Force no longer possessed enough qualified pilots to operate its entire fleet of F-16 fighter jets. Therefore, the advanced Russian S-400 system was needed to compensate for the pilot shortage and ensure the country's air defense.

Russia welcomed the deal, though Turkey initially insisted on joint production—a condition Russia rejected. Turkey eventually agreed to the deal without that stipulation, yet managed to use it to halt the Russian offensive on Idlib at the time. The United States was aware of the deal but did not initially take a hardline stance, allowing matters to proceed quietly; however, once its own objectives were met, it revisited the issue and exerted renewed pressure. Recognizing the risks involved, Turkey kept the system in storage rather than deploying or activating it—especially following US sanctions under CAATSA. This 2017 US legislation mandates sanctions against nations concluding major military deals with Russia; a key consequence for Turkey was its complete exclusion from the fifth-generation F-35 fighter jet program. Following the meeting between Trump and Erdoğan at the recent NATO summit, agreements were reached on several issues—including the lifting of sanctions on Turkey in exchange for abandoning the S-400 system, with a proposal to sell it to a Gulf state. More precisely, the initial purchase of the system was driven by political considerations and a US “green light” related to the Syrian revolution; likewise, the decision to abandon and sell it came with a US “green light” linked to the US-Iran conflict. In both instances, Erdoğan’s Turkey acted in service of American interests.

This implies Erdoğan’s consent to play a role in the war—not necessarily through a direct attack on Iran or active combat engagement, but rather by opening military bases, allowing the use of Turkish territory, and activating defense agreements between Turkey and Gulf States.

This underscores the strength of the bond between Trump and Erdoğan, as well as the high praise Trump heaps upon the Turkish leader—including his remarks that Erdoğan refrained from joining a war against the Jewish entity out of regard for his relationship with Trump. It is a relationship built at the expense of sanctities, lives, honor, and Gaza. Yet, there are minds to which falsehood has been made to appear attractive, blinding them to the truth and leading them to glorify that falsehood simply by comparing it to something else. There is no power nor strength except in Allah (swt).