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Ambassador

Embassy of Turkey
Washington, D.C.

May 31, 2019

The Honorable Peter J. Visclosky
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ken Calvert
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Visclosky and Ranking Member Calvert,

I am writing to provide you with a detailed background on the attempts of Turkey to reinforce its air and missile defense capabilities. It is my understanding that this topic will be part of the discussion in the context of the Defense Appropriations debate in the weeks ahead.

As you may know, there has been a longstanding gap in Turkey's air and missile defense capability. Turkey started its most recent search for advanced air and defense systems from its Allies in the mid-2000s, years before the Syrian conflict began. These efforts intensified by 2012 as the threats originating from beyond NATO's southeastern flank increased tremendously.

The deployment of Patriot missiles batteries by the U.S., Germany and the Netherlands along Turkey's southern border as part of a coordinated NATO action in January 2013 provided a temporary relief.

However, the decision of U.S. to withdraw its Patriot system deployed at the Turkish-Syrian border in 2015 for "maintenance" left Turkey in a very unfortunate and vulnerable position at a time when air and ballistic missile threats to Turkey from Syria increased significantly with the active involvement of Russian forces in the war theater. In that time frame, multiple ballistic missiles were launched by the Syrian regime against opposition areas, three of them landing on Turkish territories. The fact that the Syrian regime also possesses chemical weapons capability multiplies our threat perceptions.

Nevertheless, Turkey continued its search for NATO interoperable systems during the 2013-2017 period. Unfortunately, our relentless efforts and negotiations with Allies, including the U.S. did not yield any positive outcome.

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It was only in 2017 that we managed to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with a French-Italian consortium (EUROSAM) for a long term cooperation. We still continue to keep this dialogue open regarding the SAMP/T system. However, this project fails to meet our urgent and very real short-term defense needs.

The procurement of the S-400 system emerged as the only viable system meeting our urgent needs and expectations, especially in terms of technical capabilities, delivery timeline and price. In other words, the course of action Turkey had to take was not a matter of preference but of necessity.

In this regard, when approaching this specific issue from a simple "cause and effect perspective", we all need to acknowledge that Turkey's decision to procure the S-400 systems is not the cause of the current discussions, but the effect of the unwillingness on the part of our Allies to put a tangible and mutually acceptable offer on the table in a timely manner.

We appreciate the recent Patriot offer proposed by the U.S. Had this offer been made 18 months ago when Turkey first approached the U.S., perhaps the current situation would have evolved differently. Despite all the setbacks, Turkey, as part of a comprehensive effort to augment its air and missile defense capacity, will be ready to proceed with the purchase of Patriot missiles if we can reach a satisfactory deal in the ongoing negotiations.

However, I feel myself obliged to express that conditioning the Patriot offer and Turkey's participation in the F-35 program to the cancellation of the S-400 procurement and steps taken towards imposing sanctions on Turkey will only be counterproductive. The linkage of our procurement of the S-400 system with our participation in the F-35 program in itself lacks reasoning.

Turkey joined the F-35 program in 1999 and since then has fulfilled all its obligations. Turkey also contributes to the production of vital F-35 parts. By threatening to remove Turkey from this project, the U.S. does not only impair its own reliability as a defense partner but also disregards the air defense needs of an Ally, thereby contributing to the weakening of NATO's overall deterrence capability.

Turkey remains strongly committed to the NATO Alliance and attributes vital importance to its strategic partnership with the U.S. In this spirit, we are ready to take necessary technical measures to ensure the safe and secure operation of the S-400 as a stand-alone system on Turkish soil.

In this vein we proposed, the establishment of a joint technical committee with the U.S. to explore and discuss the technical concerns related to the alleged interaction between S-400s and F-35s. NATO officials have expressed that they are ready to facilitate the formation of such a committee. We are still looking forward to hearing from the U.S. side regarding this proposal. A basic tenet of diplomacy is to give enough chance to dialogue and consultations before resorting to unilateral measures.

Turkey and the U.S. are two very important strategic partners and long standing friends. This friendship deserves positive engagement and understanding from both sides. In this spirit, I sincerely believe that it is a historic duty for all of us to do our utmost and spare no effort in order to overcome the challenges we are facing.

The Turkish Embassy stands ready to provide additional information to your office on this matter, or on any other issue of mutual importance in our respective foreign policy agendas.

Please accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

Sincerely,

Serdar Kılıç

Cc: The Honorable Betty McCollum
The Honorable Tim Ryan
The Honorable C. A. Dutch Ruppersberger
The Honorable Marcy Kaptur
The Honorable Henry Cuellar
The Honorable Derek Kilmer
The Honorable Pete Aguilar
The Honorable Cheri Bustos
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The Honorable Tom Cole
The Honorable Robert B. Aderholt
The Honorable John Carter
The Honorable Steve Womack
The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart

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Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.