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## Turkey Missed Great Chance to Modernize its Military

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A lot has been said about Ankara suffering severe economic and political damage as a result of worsened relations with Russia. There is another aspect of the relationship that has been kept out of spotlight so far.

The Turkish armed forces remained weak even during the Cold War, when they were rendered enormous financial, material-technical, and military assistance from NATO and the US. They lagged significantly behind many NATO members in terms of rearmament, and the arms they had at their disposal were rather outmoded. The problems remain unsolved today with obsolete US-made tanks produced in the 1960s still in the inventory and the lack of modern long-range air defense systems among many other drawbacks.

About a dozen of years ago President Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party had ambitious plans to upgrade country's military. In November 2005, information seeped into press about a decision of the Executive Committee of the Turkish Defense Industry to reinforce military infrastructure and intentions to invest \$50 billion in this sphere over the next ten years.

The need to upgrade the military has been a burning issue on the Turkish government's agenda ever since then. Before Turkey downed a Russian combat plane in November 2015, Moscow had been an important factor in the modernization plans. Besides, Russia is the only country that can help Turkey effectively tackle some serious problems – something Ankara's NATO membership has failed to do for so many years.

The Treaty of Friendship and Brotherhood between Soviet Russia and Turkey signed on March 16, 1921 could be considered the starting point of weapons trade between the two countries. After the signature of the accord, Russia began to provide the Turkish government with financial support and weapons. Turkey's accession to NATO «did not become an obstacle» to Russian arms exports to Turkey. Today the Turkish armed forces' arsenals include BTR-80 armored personnel carriers, Mi-17 helicopters, anti-tank missile systems, and a variety of small arms imported from Russia.

Turkey was the first NATO member to start military cooperation with the Russian Federation after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In May 1992, both parties reached an agreement on selling Russian weapons and military vehicles (Mi-17, armored personnel carriers, machine guns, grenade launchers and sniper rifles) to Turkey for a total of \$300 million. Turkey armed its Gendarmerie and SWAT (special weapons and tactics) with small arms, sniper rifles, grenade launchers, anti-tank rocket launchers and multiple-launch rocket systems produced in Russia. In April, 1994 Russia and Turkey signed an inter-governmental agreement on military-technical and defense industry cooperation. This was the first time Moscow concluded such an agreement with a NATO country. In May 2001, a joint Russian-Turkish commission on military-technical cooperation was set up to make the cooperation more stable and long-term. In December 2004, during the first President Putin's visit to Turkey, the sides moved further toward a wider contractual base of bilateral defense cooperation signing the documents on the protection of intellectual property related to military technology and classified information. The production of Russian T-80 and T-90 tanks in Turkey was discussed.



Between 2008 and 2010, Rosoboronexport supplied Ankara with 80 Kornet-E antitank missile systems with 800 missiles. Russia and Turkey jointly designed and manufactured a short-range air defense system which combined a launch system made by the Turkish company Aselsan with the Russian-made Igla surface-to-air missile system. The new air defense system is called PMADS-IGLA. Its tests have already been completed. Until recently, post-sale maintenance of all military hardware supplied from Russia has been carried out by Russian companies, but the plans to build repair facilities on the Turkish soil had been in works.

Here is a good example of Turkey's special interest in military cooperation with Russia. In 2012 Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, then Prime-Minister of Turkey, intended to ask the Russian party to put out S-400 «Triumph» air defense systems instead of S-300 «Favorit» ones to Turkish tender, no matter it was reported earlier that Russia will not start the deliveries of S-400 air defense systems to foreign countries until it would fully fill the need of its own army.

Russia intends to put 56 divisions of S-400 systems into service by 2020.

At the IDEF-2013 exhibition in Istanbul, Rosoboronexport proposed to Turkey a joint development of an air defense system on the basis of the Antey-2500 (a modern modification of the S-300 air defense system). The proposal was made as part of a tender for the supply of long-range air defense systems that had been conducted in Turkey since 2009. The tender was won by the Chinese HQ-9 air and missile defense system – however the contract has not been implemented. Thus Turkey is left with obsolete air defense systems – a major «hole» in the country's defense capability.

At the IDEF-2015 exhibition, Russia presented over 200 types of military products. Anatoly Aksyonov, an expert of Rosoboronexport, said that «the main area of cooperation for the next several years will be the integration of Russian weapons systems and combat modules to Turkish armored vehicles and warships».

According to sources in the Russian defense industry, Turkey also showed interest in the Zubr and Murena-E hovercraft as well as in possible joint development of such up-to-date vessels.

At that time, Russia provided after-sales support for Mi-17 military transport helicopters and supply spares. Both parties were discussing possible increase in arms exports to Turkey. There is another important area as well – scientific and technological cooperation with the Turkish defense industry. According to Rosoboronexport's statement made those days, «*The most promising areas of Russian-Turkish technological cooperation include joint projects to develop short-range surface-to-air missile systems, armored vehicles, tactical digital communications, orbital space systems, and various types of naval armaments. With the use of the findings of analyses of some of the latest armed conflicts, Rosoboronexport will hold presentations of armaments that countries in the region have the greatest demand for*».

Rosoboronexport was referring to about 20 models, including the Yakovlev Yak-130 combat trainer aircraft, Kamov Ka-226T light multipurpose helicopter, Mil Mi-26T2 heavy transport

helicopter, Mi-28NE attack helicopter, Ka-52 attack/scout helicopter, Beriev Be-200 amphibious aircraft, Antey-2500, Tor-M2E and Buk-M2E SAM systems, upgraded T-90 main battle tank, Terminator tank support fighting vehicle, and TOS-1A heavy flamethrower. The naval arms to be shown by the Russian corporation include the Gepard 3.9 frigate, Amur-1650 submarine, and Mirazh and Mangust patrol boats.

Turkey's Defense Minister, İsmet Yılmaz, stopped by Rosoboronexport's booth at IDEF-2015 to discuss the S-300 and other Russian arms.

«NATO Beware: Turkey May Buy Russia's S-300 Air Defense System» read the headline of the National Interest article devoted to the prospects of Turkey's acquisition of Russian-made S-300 long-range air defense systems.

The fact that in many cases mentioned above Russia offered to launch joint production on the Turkish soil is especially important. Turkey strives for nation oriented production. The coverage ratio of national defence technology also increases. This ratio was 25% in 2003, 41.6% in 2007 and 54% in 2011.

Last year Turkish Defense Minister said, the country planned to have 100 percent national production in the defense industry and increase exports.

Russian-designed armor units and other weapons systems produced in Turkey could be a great boost to the country's heavy industry with thousands of new jobs.

The very thought of military cooperation between Russia and Turkey seems to be more like a far-fetched fantasy today, despite the fact that just a few months ago both parties had discussed long-term plans to boost cooperation in that field. The plans have become stymied now. As a country greatly interested in gaining access to Russian cutting edge military technology, Turkey has become a big loser.

Turkey has great political ambitions not backed by military potential. It could have gained a lot to tackle the problem in the most efficient way. By downing the Russian plane last November, it actually cut off the nose to spite the face. There is another example for comparison. Greece, Turkey's arch-rival and a NATO member, which enjoys good relations with Russia, has greatly enhanced its air defense capability with Russian-produced S-300 highly capable systems already operational. Last year, Greek Defense Minister Panos Kammenos said, Greece is negotiating with Russia for the purchase of missiles for its S-300 anti-missile systems and for their maintenance.

With the military cooperation suspended, Russia has not lost much. Today it is the world's largest arms producer along with the US.

No significant deals with Ankara had been concluded to make Moscow suffer any financial losses, but Turkey has lost a good chance to modernize its armed forces with the help from Russia.