



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

New F-16s will finally arrive in Turkey - a victory that has left scars



US President Joe Biden said at the 2022 NATO summit in Madrid last June that the sale of F-16 aircraft to Turkey would not be a quid pro quo for Turkey agreeing to Sweden and Finland joining NATO.

The exact opposite and expected happened. The **decisions** were made according to the quid pro quo principle with which everyone was satisfied - opening the door to Sweden for membership to NATO, Turkey receiving American jets, and President Biden reaping the political dividends as a broker of the whole deal.

The President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, pledged the authority and influence of his country in the process of political bargaining in this case and once again managed to regain the stake.

This was a significant, lengthy and tense test of relations within NATO, primarily the treatment of Turkey by the allies, but also the ability to make decisions of mutual benefit in times of crisis, such as the current one in light of the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

A deal could have been reached earlier

From the distance of 2 years, everyone involved could say that the tightening of relations was unnecessary and that the deal could have been reached much earlier.

While President Biden advocated delivering aircraft to Turkey, the principal opponents were influential members of the US Congress, who conditioned the arrangement on Turkish concessions. Some of them are not completely satisfied with it.

“For much of the time President Erdogan has been in office, Turkey has been an unfaithful NATO ally – so this is welcome news,” said Chris Van Hollen, a Democratic Senator and member of the Foreign Relations Committee, which approves arms shipments.

Pressuring Turkey was not an insurmountable obstacle for strategic agreements and affairs between the US and Turkey

He will continue to pester Turkey and its president for attacking the Kurds in Syria, otherwise American allies, for Turkey's role in Azerbaijan's operation in the disputed region of Nagorno Karabakh with Armenia and "aggressive actions in the Eastern Mediterranean".

Others like Senator Van Hollen will **continue to pressure** Turkey regarding the rule of law and unsatisfactory political and media freedoms.

However, pressuring Turkey was not an insurmountable obstacle for strategic agreements and affairs between the US and Turkey, which was the case with the large delivery of the F-16 fleet.

The delay has consequences for Turkey

Turkey and President Erdogan can feel like winners after the approval of the US administration to sell the requested aircraft. However, even this victory is not without scars.

Even though there are no longer any obstacles to the deal, the impression remains that Turkey could have reached it almost 2 years ago if it had immediately ratified the admission of Sweden and Finland to NATO, also asking in return for the delivery of a fleet of American aircraft.

However, the issue of NATO expansion with 2 Scandinavian countries came at a delicate moment of presidential and parliamentary elections in Turkey, when neither President Erdogan nor his party wanted to do it, thinking it would harm their reputation.

If the new F-16s had arrived earlier in the Turkish Air Force, there would have been more time for transitioning to newer generation aircraft

Almost 2 years are not insignificant for the Turkish defence. If the new F-16s had arrived earlier in the Turkish Air Force, there would have been more time for transitioning to newer generation aircraft, primarily the domestic Kaan fighter.

The maiden flight of this fifth-generation stealth fighter is a matter of days, as Temel Kotil, CEO of Turkish Aerospace Industries, which leads the project, **announced** at the beginning of the month.

Turkey has high hopes for the production of the Kaan and wants it to replace the current fleet of about 270 US F-16s.

Balancing forces with Greece

Another scar on Turkey's tightening of relations over NATO expansion and the demand for the delivery of fighter jets is that at the same time as the American green light for the delivery of F-16s to Turkey, there was also a green light for deliveries of more modern F-35s to Greece.

Athens is a collateral beneficiary of Turkey's tightening of relations strategy with the US and NATO because with the new 40 F-35s, the delivery of which was approved by the US, it will technologically rise above Turkey, with which it has long had strained relations in the border zone in the Aegean.

The large purchase of state-of-the-art American fighters (worth about \$8.5 billion) comes only 2 years after the Greek purchase of 24 modern French Rafales. The Greek Air Force has been making more significant technological advances than the Turkish Air Force.



The US has been using the deal to establish as large a balance of powers as possible between its 2 significant allies in the Mediterranean - Greek PM Mitsotakis with Turkish President Erdogan

With the acquisition of new F-16s, Turkey will probably get restrictions on their use regarding Greece, as **reported** unofficially by the media in Athens.

According to those reports, Turkey's use of new F-16s would be limited to the purposes needed by NATO, not for flying over the Greek islands.

The US has been using this deal to establish as large a balance of powers as possible between its 2 significant allies in the Mediterranean, that is, to stop their frequent border skirmishes that damage the shared defence capabilities.

Even though Ankara will undoubtedly be pleased with the delivery of new F-16s and the modernisation of a portion of the current fleet, the way it was accomplished will leave NATO allies with the impression that Turkey is not fully committed to the alliance.

This reservation towards Ankara, despite the finished deal, will also remain the prevailing feeling among the influential committees of the US Congress.

Some of their members, who have so far opposed concessions to Turkey, will continue to be adamant about any future arrangement, which could create new issues and delays for Turkey in fulfilling its defence plans because it was expected that this was not the last Turkish quid pro quo.