

Turkey may now have a deal

Tensions over the President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's S-400 missile defence system deal

SIMON WALDMAN

Last week, the acting US secretary of defence Patrick Shanahan penned a polite and formal letter to his Turkish counterpart. Its content, however, was far from cordial. He wrote that if Turkey were to follow through with its purchase of the Russian S-400 missile defence system, then Turkey's participation in the F-35 joint strike fighter programme would be discontinued.

If that were not enough, the letter also warned that Turkey could face action under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, and that Turkey's decisions would hinder the its own "ability to enhance or maintain co-operation with the United States and within Nato".

This was the most harshly worded correspondence from the US to Turkey since 1964, when US President Lyndon B Johnson

wrote to Ismet Inonu, warning the Turkish Prime Minister not to intervene in the Cyprus crisis and highlighting the damage such a move would cause to Nato.

Back in 1964, a shocked and disappointed Ankara reluctantly heeded Johnson's demands. This time, however, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has rebuffed Washington and insisted that there is no going back on the S-400 deal. Instead, it was reported that upon their receipt, Turkey might position S-400 batteries towards the east Mediterranean, a posture threatening to Cyprus, given the dispute between the two nations over drilling for offshore natural gas. Ankara also intimated that if excluded from the F-35 programme, it might purchase Chinese J-31s or Russian Su-57s instead.

Turkey, a Nato member since 1952, has the second-largest army in the alliance. Located in an important geostrategic region, Nato

benefits from the use of several Turkish bases and enjoys the nation's support in the Aegean and Black Sea. Turkey has also participated in important Nato missions, such as those in Kosovo and Afghanistan.

But, from the US perspective, these contributions may no longer be enough. The S-400 issue is just one of a number of US misgivings. These include Mr Erdogan's threat to "Ottoman slap" the US military in Syria, where positions of special forces had been leaked by Ankara; the arbitrary arrest and imprisonment of US citizens and consular workers; Turkey's initial blind eye to foreign fighters crossing its border into Syria to join ISIS; not to mention Erdogan's bodyguards attacking protesters carrying the flag of a Kurdish political party outside Turkish ambassador's residence in Washington DC, two years ago. If that was not enough, last year a Turkish state-owned

bank was found to be in violation of the Iran Sanctions Act, and Ankara has openly sided with US enemies, most recently President Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela.

Following these developments, it is little wonder that some commentators have argued that Turkey should be expelled from Nato. However, doing so would be very difficult.

There is nothing written in the North Atlantic Treaty that pertains to expulsion. Nor is there a precedent for removing a member state. A country may leave Nato of its own volition. Article 13 states that "any Party may cease to be a Party one year after its notice of denunciation".

However, if Nato members were absolutely determined to expel Turkey, such an action would have to pass through the North Atlantic Council (NAC), the organisation's senior decision-making body.

However, NAC decisions must



US President Donald Trump speaks to Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan during a meeting.

West Bank annexation is a long-established goal

With Benjamin Netanyahu under pressure and the US signalling its support, the time to realise this catastrophic plan is nigh

JONATHAN COOK

When Israeli prime ministers are in trouble, facing difficult elections or a corruption scandal, the temptation has typically been for them to unleash a military operation to bolster their standing. In recent years, Gaza has served as a favourite punching bag.

Benjamin Netanyahu is confronting both difficulties at once: a second round of elections in September that he may struggle to win; and an attorney general who is widely expected to indict him on corruption charges shortly afterwards.

Mr Netanyahu is in an unusually tight spot, even by the standards of an often chaotic and fractious Israeli political system. After a decade in power, his electoral magic may be deserting him. There are already rumblings of discontent among his allies on the far right.

Given his desperate straits, some observers fear that he may need to pull a new kind of rabbit out of the hat.

In the past two elections, Mr Netanyahu rode to success after issuing dramatic last-minute statements. In 2015, he agitated against the fifth of Israel's citizens who are Palestinian asserting their democratic rights, warning that they were "coming out in droves to vote".

Back in April, he declared his intention to annex large chunks of the occupied West Bank, in violation of international law, during the next parliament.

Amos Harel, a veteran military analyst with Haaretz newspaper,

observed last week that Mr Netanyahu may decide words are no longer enough to win.

Action is needed, possibly in the form of an announcement on the eve of September's ballot that as much as two-thirds of the West Bank is to be annexed.

Washington does not look like it will stand in his way.

Shortly before April's election, the Trump administration offered Mr Netanyahu a campaign fillip by recognising Israel's illegal annexation of the Golan Heights, territory Israel seized from Syria in 1967.

This month David Friedman, US ambassador to Israel and one of the chief architects of Donald Trump's long-delayed "deal of the century" peace plan, appeared to offer a similar, early election boost.

In interviews, he claimed Israel was "on the side of God" – unlike, or so it was implied, the Palestinians. He further argued that Israel had the "right to retain" much of the West Bank.

Both statements suggest that the Trump administration will not object to any Israeli moves towards annexation, especially if it ensures their favoured candidate returns to power.

Whatever Mr Friedman suggests, it is not God who has intervened on Israel's behalf. The hands that have carefully cleared a path over many decades to the West Bank's annexation are all too human.

Israeli officials have been preparing for this moment for more than half a century, since the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza were seized back in 1967.



A Palestinian villa in the West Bank village of Turmus'ayya, with the Israeli settlement of Shilo in the background.

That point is underscored by an innovative interactive map of the occupied territories. This valuable new resource is a joint project of the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem and Forensic Architecture, a London-based team that uses new technology to visualise and map political violence and environmental destruction.

Titled Conquer and Divide, it reveals in detail how Israel has "torn apart Palestinian space, divided the Palestinian popula-

tion into dozens of disconnected enclaves and unravelled its social, cultural and economic fabric".

The map proves beyond doubt that Israel's colonisation of the West Bank was never accidental, defensive or reluctant. It was coldly calculated and intricately planned, with one goal in mind – and the moment to realise that goal is fast approaching.

Annexation is not a right-wing project that has hijacked the be-

nign intentions of Israel's founding generation. Annexation was on the cards from the occupation's very beginnings in 1967, when the so-called centre-left – now presented as a peace-loving alternative to Mr Netanyahu – ran the government.

The map shows how Israeli military planners created a complex web of pretexts to seize Palestinian land: closed military zones today cover a third of the West Bank; firing ranges impact

38 Palestinian communities; nature reserves are located on 10 per cent of the territory; nearly a quarter has been declared Israeli "state" land; some 250 settlements have been established; dozens of permanent checkpoints severely limit movement and hundreds of kilometres of walls and fences have been completed.

These interlocking land seizures seamlessly carved up the territory, establishing the wall