

# Erdogan Tells Putin: “We’re in Idlib to Protect the People There.”

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#), [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Military](#), [Militarization and WMD](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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*On Thursday, March 5th, Turkey’s **President Tayyip Erdogan** meets privately with **Russia’s President Vladimir Putin** in Moscow, so as to arrange a face-saving way for Erdogan finally to end his attempted theft of Syria’s Idlib Province away from Syria — his attempt to seize it for Turkey.*

According to Middle East Eye, on Saturday February 29th, reporting under their headline [“Erdogan asks Putin to stand aside as Ankara deals with Syrian government forces”](#), Erdogan said in Istanbul that on Friday the 28th he had told Putin (presumably by phone or some other remote means) that, “We did not go there [into Syria’s Idlib Province] because we were invited by” Syria’s President Bashar al-Assad; but instead, “We went there because we were invited by the people of [Idlib Province of] Syria. We don’t intend to leave before the people of Syria say ‘okay, this is done’.” Thus, “Erdogan said he asked Putin to leave Turkey ‘to do what is necessary’ with the Syrian government.”

In other words: the people in Idlib — the only province in Syria where the percentage of the residents in [a 2013 British poll of all Syrians](#) showed less than 12% saying they “support the Assad Government” (12% having been the percentage of people who said that in Raqqah Province, which was then controlled by ISIS, and which showed as being the *second*-to-most-pro-jihadist Syrian province) — want Turkey’s protection, and therefore Turkey will remain in control over Idlib Province of Syria until “this [protection of the residents there] is done,” which will be never. That was Erdogan’s argument: he will keep Idlib because the vast majority of the people there are jihadists or at least admire jihadists. **Only 4% of the people sampled in Idlib said they “support the Assad Government.”** Only one-third as many supported Syria’s Government as did in the ISIS-controlled province, which had the second-lowest percentage of its residents supporting Syria’s Government. This same British polling organization [found in 2014](#) that 70% of the people sampled in Idlib said that Al Qaeda in Syria, called “Nusra Front,” had a “Completely positive influence” (35%) or else a “Somewhat positive influence” (35%), and that the second-highest on that was Raqqah, at 66%.”

So: on both measures, Idlib was the most pro-jihadist province in all of Syria. And Erdogan wants it to become part of Turkey so as “to protect the people there.”

Between 2014 and now, uncounted hundreds of thousands of fighters who were being led by the Nusra Front and armed by the U.S. coalition and funded by the Saudis (the U.S. and its allies call these fighters ‘rebels’ as if those are like America’s own 1776 rebels against the British Crown and for democracy), fled into Idlib Province after having been defeated elsewhere in Syria; so that the percentage today in Idlib who respect the Nusra Front would

probably be significantly higher than 2013's 70%.

Of course, not everyone who now lives in Idlib is led by Al Qaeda, but even before Idlib became the collection-area and refuge for Al Qaeda followers, that figure was 70%; and, so, if Turkey is to protect them (as NATO member Turkey wants to do), instead of to annihilate the 70%+ of people there who either are jihadists or else are admirers of jihadists, then Idlib will be a virtually permanent festering hotbed for what Al Qaeda represents, which is a fundamentalist-Sunni, intensely anti-Shia, takeover of the entire world. However, Russia, Syria, Iran, and Hezbollah, are all intensely opposed to that fundamentalist-Sunni goal. The U.S. and its allies (including especially America's ally the Saud family who own Saudi Arabia) support that jihadist goal, but seem not to have accepted Erdogan's request of their help to go to war against Russia in order to assist Turkey to seize Idlib for it to become a permanent part of Turkey.

According to Erdogan's own account of what his argument was to Putin, Erdogan — (the leader of) a NATO (or anti-Russian military alliance) member — is telling (the leader of Russia) Putin to, as that headline says, "stand aside as Ankara deals with Syrian government forces."

Obviously, Putin would never willingly do any such thing, but as I headlined on February 29th, ["Turkey Asks NATO to Join Its War Against Syria and Russia"](#), and therefore what Erdogan told Putin (unless he is lying about that) is in keeping with this intention, to compel Russia to comply with the dictates of the U.S. Government and of its allies. Is it a realistic expectation, though, that the U.S. Government and its allies will continue to protect Al Qaeda in Syria, [as they have been doing till now](#)? I don't think so; and here is why:

The anonymous geostrategic genius who blogs as "Moon of Alabama" headlined on February 28th, ["Syria — Deadly Bomb Strike Warns Turkey To End Its Escapades"](#), and this is only the latest in his series of articles arguing that Erdogan has maneuvered himself into a position from which a checkmate can no longer be avoided. He concludes the article with "NATO and the U.S. have both rejected to get involved in the Idlib [sp.] affair. Turkey is on its own and Erdogan will have to be careful. He is not only losing in Syria but [also in Libya](#) and he can not risk to further upset Russia because the Turkish economy depends on it."

If that is true, however, then ultimately Turkey will need to expel NATO from [Incirlik Air Base](#), and [quit NATO altogether](#).

My own opinion, from all of this (for what it's worth), is that Erdogan doesn't yet see far enough ahead to recognize that there's no way possible to avoid checkmate, but he soon will.

This also is the opinion of both [The Saker, on March 2nd](#), and [Tom Luongo, on March 4th](#). However, if U.S. President Donald Trump decides to back Erdogan's attempted theft of Idlib from Syria, then World War III will be likely. That's perhaps the main reason why that is not expected to happen, especially during a U.S. Presidential election year.

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