

# Pressured by NATO, Turkey Violates the “Azovstal Deal”(Prisoners’ Exchange). Ankara-Moscow Alliance in Jeopardy?

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Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov [condemned](#) Turkiye’s violation of the deal that it helped broker between Moscow and Kiev last year over the release of Azovstal fighters as part of a larger prisoner exchange between the two sides. They were supposed to remain in that West Asian state until the end of the [NATO-Russian proxy war](#) in Ukraine but were just sent home on Zelensky’s plane following his latest trip there, after which they then pledged to return to the frontlines.

Peskov noted that Turkiye was under immense pressure from NATO ahead of its upcoming summit next week, but he still said that “a breach of an agreement flatters no one.” Nevertheless, nobody should be surprised by this development since it should have been assumed that those fighters would inevitably be released before the conflict’s end the moment that they were sent to that country. This cynical assessment is premised on three points.

First, NATO’s pressure upon Turkiye was predictable, especially in the run-up to its upcoming summit. Second, President Erdogan calculated that it would be better to release those fighters during Zelensky’s latest trip ahead of that event than to keep them in his country since this could counteract the false claims pushed by the Mainstream Media alleging that he’s “pro-Russian”. And finally, he expected that Russia’s response would be

contained to rhetoric and that no meaningful consequences would follow.

About the last-mentioned point, these two countries' strategic partnership has remained rock-solid in the sixteen months since the start of Russia's [special operation](#) despite immense pressure from NATO upon Turkiye to completely cut off ties with Moscow. It's a testament to how important President Putin [considers](#) these relations to be that he didn't order his side to curtail bilateral ties one bit in spite of Ankara arming Kiev [with lethal drones](#) for use against his own country's servicemen.

It would thus be inconsistent with precedent for him to overreact to Turkiye's violation of the Azovstal deal by using it as the pretext for unilaterally weakening their strategic partnership that he's so patiently kept intact despite comparatively much worse provocations as explained above. That said, there's also no denying that the optics don't favor Russia since it looks like it was hoodwinked yet again without doing anything to deter future violations of other deals by Turkiye or other supposedly trusted partners.

If the political will is present, which is impossible to know due to the traditional opacity of Russia's decision-making processes, then the most that it could realistically do is seriously consider replacing Turkiye's prior mediating role with another country or collection thereof. In practice, this could take the form of India, the [UAE](#), and/or the [African Union](#) taking on associated responsibilities per their previously expressed interest in doing so if they were requested by both sides to play this role.

Therein lies the challenge, however, since Zelensky and/or his Western patrons might insist on Turkiye continuing to play this role for whatever reason. In that case, even the strongest political will by Russia to have another country or group thereof mediating between it and Kiev could be doomed to fail, though the counterpoint is that no mediation can take place at all if those two don't agree on who should facilitate their talks. It's with this in mind that everything could possibly get a lot more interesting.

As was argued in this analysis [here](#), several developments last week strongly suggest that Russian-Ukraine talks will recommence in some form by the end of the year, though it was thought that Turkiye would once again host them due to Zelensky's recent visit and President Putin's upcoming one. That can no longer be taken for granted after it violated the Azovstal deal in the event that Russia has the political will to deter future violations of other deals by that country or other supposedly trusted partners.

In that case, if it adamantly insists behind the scenes on someone else playing this role instead, then Kiev and its Western patrons could be forced to begrudgingly agree to explore other options if they're serious about resuming these talks. Of course, it could very well be that President Putin prefers for his Turkish counterpart to continue mediating between his country and Ukraine, but that can't be known for sure until such a signal is unambiguously sent.

Until then, there are grounds to believe that another country or collection thereof could replace Turkiye's role, or at the very least be discretely approached by Russia about this. Objectively speaking, India, the UAE, and/or the African Union might be more reliable in this respect since they're not NATO members like Turkiye is and therefore can't be pressured in the same way. India is also truly neutral towards the Ukrainian Conflict since it's consistently abstained from [anti-Russian UNGA Resolutions](#).

Turkiye, the UAE, and a little over half of the African Union's members all voted in support of at least some of them, with the first-mentioned backing all four since the latest phase of the conflict began. Coupled with its sale of lethal drones to Kiev and violation of the Azovstal deal, the case can be made that it's long overdue for Russia to finally consider another country or collection thereof as mediators instead of letting Turkiye retain this role and think that its unfriendly actions won't have consequences.

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