

Russia and Turkey, “Allies” Fighting One Another: On Opposite Sides of the War on Syria

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Global Research, February 21, 2020

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

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US forever war in Syria shows no signs of ending because restoration of peace and stability to the country would be a major strategic blow to Washington’s aim for controlling the Middle East — NATO and Israel serving as junior partners in its project.

Turkey’s Erdogan is a significant obstacle to resolving years of war in Syria because of his revanchist aims — what his support for ISIS, al-Nusra, and likeminded jihadists is all about, using them as proxies (earlier and now) in northern Syria.

His aims and Russia’s in the country are world’s apart. Negotiations between his regime and Moscow on the conflict are uneasy at best.

Multiple recent rounds failed to resolve differences, further talks planned, including a possible summit involving Putin, Iranian President Rouhani and Erdogan.

On Thursday, Russia’s Foreign Ministry spokeswoman **Maria Zakharova** slammed his support for jihadists in Syria, saying:

“We are expressing significant concerns over such support for (these elements) from the Turkish armed forces.”

It “violat(es) the Russian-Turkish agreements on separating armed opposition from terrorists, and creating a demilitarized area, and it may provoke a further escalation in the conflict in this part of the Syrian national territory,” adding:

“On February 20, the Russian center for reconciliation of the conflicting sides in Syria reported several mass attacks with the use of a large amount of armored vehicles at the positions of the Syrian army in the Idlib de-escalation zone carried out by terrorist units.”

“At the same time, the actions of (jihadists) were supported by artillery fire by the Turkish forces, which allowed terrorists to breach Syrian army’s defenses” before being repelled with Russian aerial support, a statement by its military saying:

“In order to prevent terrorist groups from advancing deep into Syrian territory, Su-24 aircraft of Russia’s Aerospace Force delivered a strike at the request of the Syrian command against the terrorists’ armed formations that had penetrated the area. This helped the Syrian troops to repel all the attacks successfully.”

A Russian reconnaissance drone filmed Turkish artillery providing support for al-Nusra terrorists near Nayrab village in southern Idlib province.

AMN News reported that Russia's aerial response was "devastating," repelling Turkish-supported jihadists, destroying or damaging their equipment, causing a number of casualties, including Turkish soldiers killed or wounded.

Tass reported that jihadists "sustain(ed) heavy losses" of fighters, weapons, and military equipment.

Days earlier, Sergey Lavrov accused Ankara of breaching its agreed on Astana obligations by escalating conflict instead of pursuing efforts to resolve it, adding:

"It is only natural that the Syrian armed forces, reaffirming their commitment to the original agreements on Idlib, including an agreement on a ceasefire, respond to such inadmissible provocations. We support them in this."

"The Syrian army's actions are a response to a flagrant violation of the agreements on Idlib."

"Contrary to some estimates, let me emphasize that the Syrian troops are not pushing militants and terrorists back on a foreign territory but on their own soil, thereby reestablishing the legitimate Syrian government's control over its territories."

"Judging by hysterical comments by some Western representatives, one (gets) impression that...Russia and Turkey agreed to put the issue on the back burner, leave terrorists alone and let them do whatever they want."

"This is not true. No one has ever promised to leave terrorists unscathed in the Idlib de-escalation zone" or anywhere else in Syria.

On Thursday, a Kremlin statement said Putin discussed Syria with Germany's Angela Merkel and France's Macron by phone.

"Special attention was paid to issues of settling the Syrian crisis in the context of rapidly escalating situation in Idlib as a result of aggressive actions by (Turkish supported) extremist units against Syrian government forces and civilians."

"The importance was underscored of preventing humanitarian consequences for civilians."

"Vladimir Putin stressed the importance of taking effective measures on neutralizing a terrorist threat while observing the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic."

Merkel, Macron, and other key NATO leaders are allied with US imperial aims — Erdogan involved in Syria in pursuit of his own objectives.

According to Turkey's Daily Sabah, Erdogan regime war minister Hulusi Akar suggested that US Patriot air defense missiles could be installed in northern Idlib territory controlled by Turkey, adding:

Ankara and Moscow are discussing use of Idlib's airspace controlled by Russia's military.

Neither country wants belligerent confrontation with the other.

Would Erdogan use long-range Russian S-400 air defense missile's against its aircraft in Idlib airspace?

What's highly unlikely is possible. In 2015, Turkish warplanes downed a Russia Su-24 fighter jet in Syrian airspace, an incident Putin denounced at the time as a "stab in the back."

Bilateral relations improved significantly since that time. How far Erdogan may push his revanchist agenda in Idlib remains unknown.

According to the Middle East Eye (MEE), citing an unnamed Turkish official, Ankara "asked the US to conduct aerial patrols in its airspace bordering...Idlib to show support for (its) ongoing military operations against forces loyal to Damascus," adding:

Erdogan and Trump spoke by phone on the situation in Idlib. DJT "promised that he would sanction (Syrian) officials, or anyone involved in attacks against the civilians."

"(H)e would issue strong-worded statements. But he didn't commit himself to anything involving the military, yet."

No large-scale confrontation occurred between Syrian and Turkish forces so far.

Both countries want it avoided. So does Russia, going all-out to prevent it.

Moscow has a significant investment in Syria since intervening against jihadists in September 2015 at the request of Damascus.

Putin supports Syria's liberating struggle while trying to maintain good relations with Turkey and prevent clashes between Russian and US forces.

It's a delicate balance not easily maintained, especially when dealing with US and Turkish belligerent regimes.

In mid-March, war enters its 10th year with no prospect for resolution in sight.

As in all wars, civilians in harm's way suffer most.

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