

# Turkey Intervenes Militarily Inside Syria: “training Syrian rebels, discussing a no-fly zone with the US”

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Friend turned foe: Turkey rounds on Syria in regional power bid

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Turkey, Syria’s neighbor and long-time ally, is now taking an active role in attempts to dethrone Assad. Ankara is backing Western actions, reportedly providing a base for training Syrian rebels and even discussing a no-fly zone with the US.

Back in 2002 Turkey, strictly following its newly-designed “zero problems with neighbors” foreign policy, was engaged in building strong economic, political, and social ties with neighboring countries.

Everything was going to plan until the Arab Spring hit the region.

Turkey faced a choice: to maintain its policy of engagement with authoritarian Arab leaders, or to take a different path.

And Syria became the country which felt the full force of Ankara’s policy u-turn when Turkey came out in support of Syria’s opposition and aligned itself with the country’s staunch enemy – the US.

Turkey found itself in the frontline of the Syrian crisis last June when thousands of Syrians poured across its border, fleeing a government crackdown on the town of Jisr-al-Shughour. At the time, the Red Crescent said it was caring for 30,000 refugees in camps just inside Turkish territory.

Threats of the conflict spilling into Turkey caused Ankara to consider sending troops into Syria to create a buffer zone. In the event, it was not deemed necessary, but the tensions did not help relations between the two neighbors.

Turkey claimed that the Syrian crisis could not be resolved through negotiations, that Bashar al-Assad could no longer be trusted, and started to act.

Turkey has suspended energy cooperation with Syria and threatened to stop supplying electricity to the country.

It followed the Arab League and announced a raft of punitive measures targeting President

Bashar al-Assad's regime, provoking Damascus to suspend its free trade pact with Ankara.

As a result, cross border trade ground to a halt; flourishing commercial links between northern Syria and south-eastern Turkey were severed as if they had never existed.

Reports about American and NATO forces training Syrian rebels in the southeastern Turkish city of Hakkari added more fuel to the fire.

And according to PressTV reports quoted in the Turkish daily Milliyet, former FBI employee Sibil Edmonds has said the bureau started a training program in Turkey back in May.

She also mentioned that the US was involved in smuggling arms into Syria from Incirlik military base in Turkey in addition to providing financial support for the Syrian rebels.

Russia's Kommersant daily also reported in November on operations being managed from Turkish territory.

Meanwhile, rebel groups that attack government forces have frequently fled retribution by crossing the Turkish border.

And finally, the most recent move from Turkey - discussions with the US about a no-fly zone over Syria, in what looks suspiciously like a Libya-style scenario.

Nikolay Patrushev, head of the Security Council of Russia, said on January 13 that the United States and Turkey - both NATO members - were discussing the possibility of a no-fly zone.

From 'zero problem policy' to regional leadership

Back in 2003, Turkey and Syria entered a golden era of bilateral relations, with a free trade agreement, a visa-free regime and several presidential visits. The border areas became especially close - families living on both sides felt they shared a common home.

To switch from "a zero-problem policy" with your neighbors to a "problem-creating position," you need good reason. And Turkey seems to have few.

Geographically, politically and religiously, Turkey has always been the crossing point of decidedly-different worlds.

Ankara has long harbored ambitions to be the region's powerful, leading state.

But the influence of Iran, Israel and Egypt complicated Turkey's path to its goal.

The Arab Spring has significantly shifted the years-long balance of power in the Middle East. Everyone has become weaker - everyone except Turkey which, on the contrary, has significantly increased its influence in the Middle East and North Africa.

"Turkey wants to be leading this movement of changes and reforms in the Middle East," Dr. Jeremy Salt, a Middle East politics expert, told RT.

"This is a kind of cohabitation between America and Turkey: Turkey helps America in exchange for some stuff. This is how Turkey becomes more and more influential in the region," echoes political science professor Gokhan Bacik.

The road Turkey is now following may look slippery, but no matter how dangerous its choice

may be, there seems to be no way back.

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