

The West Hates Peace in Syria: From De-Escalation to Almost World War III in Just Two Hours

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On the 17th of September, an important meeting was held in Sochi between Erdogan and Putin to discuss Syria, in particular Idlib. A few hours after the agreement between the two leaders was reached, there was a French-Israeli strike on Syria's coastal area of Latakia, causing the loss of a Russian Air Force Il-20 aircraft and bringing the world to the brink of a thermonuclear war.

The agreement between Erdogan and Putin over the province of Idlib was reached after five hours of discussions and proposals. Ultimately, as explained by RT, the agreement concerns a 15-20 kilometer demilitarized zone, the identification of terrorist groups to fight, and combined patrols by Turkish and Russian soldiers on the borders of Idlib to monitor the situation and the opening of main roads between Hama, Damascus and Aleppo over the next few months.

RT [specifies](#):

“[Erdogan and Putin] We’ve agreed to create a demilitarized zone between the government troops and militants before October 15. The zone will be 15 to 20 kms wide, with full withdrawal of hardline militants from there, including the Jabhat Al-Nusra. As part of solving the deadlock, all heavy weaponry, including tanks and artillery, will be withdrawn from the zone before October 10. The area will be patrolled by Turkish and Russian military units. Before the end of the year, roads between Aleppo and Hama, and Aleppo and Latakia must be reopened for transit traffic. The agreement has received general support from the Syrian government.”

There were manifold goals for the talks between Erdogan and Putin. For the Kremlin there were innumerable points to be clarified and points of tension to be softened. One of the reasons why Russia and Turkey decided to sit around a table and discuss the imminent Syrian offensive in Idlib was the shared concern surrounding possible Western reactions. Moscow wants to avoid offering France, the UK and the US a pretext to strike Syrian forces in response to the umpteenth false-flag chemical attack. This would once again raise tensions, risking a direct confrontation between Russian and Western armed forces. In the unfortunate event of Russia exchanging fire with such aggressor countries, relations between Moscow and the European capitals would be further damaged, perhaps this time irremediably.

Moscow would thus be reluctant to press Damascus to pursue an offensive in Idlib. It is even

probable that Xi Jinping and Putin discussed the best solution for Idlib during their recent meeting, perhaps imagining an agreement with Turkey in order to avoid an escalation of international tensions at a time when sanctions and tariffs have already upset the economic environment as well as relations between countries. Putin and Xi Jinping must consider factors beyond Syria alone, finding workable solutions to contain the chaos of the US-led world order.

Damascus of course does not shy away from an offensive on Idlib but understands the needs of its allies. Moreover, it is well aware that it will be able to take advantage of this pause to resupply and allow its troops some rest as well as engage in military planning for new offensives in other areas of the country, perhaps in Al-Tanf.

The reason why Turkey has accepted the agreement on Idlib stems from Erdogan's weak position. After having antagonized his European and American allies, he can only rely on Russia and Iran (as well as Qatar) as his remaining lifeline. The defense of Idlib and its terrorists would have put Erdogan in direct opposition to Russia and Iran, forsaking his last remaining sources of political support.

Had there been a failure to reach an agreement on Idlib between Ankara and Moscow, then the risk of Russia and Syria going to war with Turkey, or with Israel, France, the UK and the US would have been quite possible, though one trusts cooler heads would have prevailed given the stakes. With Trump in office and the midterm elections in November 4, 2018, it is better not to take excessive risks, especially with a wag-the-dog scenario being a part of the American foreign-policy playbook.

For Turkey, a failed agreement would have had disastrous consequences, with potentially millions of refugees fleeing from Idlib into Turkey, provoking a possible civil war. Moreover, Syria and Russia would have liberated the territory, eliminating Turkish influence in Syria. The chances of a confrontation between Moscow and Ankara, even beyond the military sphere, would have become high, with enormous repercussions for the stability of Turkey and its ambitions as a leading country in the region. A hot war would have destroyed the last three years of rapprochement with Moscow, the good economic and political relationship with Iran, and a potential source of financial diversification in Beijing. It would have been unprecedented disaster, which could easily have resulted in a coup by thousands of jihadists returning home from Syria, angry at Turkey not protecting them from the advancing Syrian Arab Army.



Source: author

If there was any doubt that some factions in the West were unhappy with the agreement between Turkey and Russia, it was enough to wait a few hours after Putin and Erdogan met to see the West's reckless war machine in action. Four Israeli F-16 jets and a French frigate (possibly also a US presence) launched a missile attack on Syria. This time, unlike previous times, there was no justifying reason offered, such as an alleged use of chemical weapons. They were in reality protesting implicitly against the agreement just reached between Turkey and Russia that should guarantee Assad control over the whole territory of Syria, something unacceptable to all of Syria's enemies.

It is also possible that under the direction of the US, France and Israel hoped that by

attacking a Russian aircraft, a disjointed reaction from Moscow would have been provoked, escalating the conflict and providing the US and her allies the opportunity to enter the Syrian conflict directly. The downing of the Russian Il-20 would therefore have been a planned provocation. Fortunately for the rest of the world, Moscow maintained a calm attitude at that moment, and together with Syrian systems, virtually knocked down or diverted all the missiles fired. Israel used the larger radar cross-section of the Russian Il-20 to screen its F16s, thus deceiving the Syrian S-200 defense systems and causing the downing. As TASS reported, Israel did not respect the agreements reached with Moscow regarding the rules of engagement. Tel Aviv warned Moscow only one minute before attacking, leaving little time for the Il-20 to move to safety and land in Latakia. Specifically, the words reported by [official](#) Russian [sources](#) leave little room for interpretation:

The Israeli warplanes approached at a low altitude and created a dangerous situation for other aircraft and vessels in the region. The Israeli pilots used the Russian plane as cover and set it up to be targeted by the Syrian air defense forces. As a consequence, the Il-20, which has a radar cross-section much larger than the F-16, was shot down by an S-200 missile system. 15 Russian military service members have died as a result.

The Israelis must have known that the Russian plane was present in the area, but this did not stop them from executing the provocation. Israel also failed to warn Russia about the planned operation in advance. The warning came just a minute before the attack started, which did not leave time to move the Russian plane to a safe area. We consider these provocative actions by Israel as hostile. Fifteen Russian military service members have died because of the irresponsible actions of the Israeli military. This is absolutely contrary to the spirit of the Russian-Israeli partnership. We reserve the right for an adequate response.

The Russian reaction will be measured and strategically effective. It is even possible that the consequences of this attack will lead Moscow to change its assessment of weapons systems sold abroad. The worst scenario for Tel Aviv and her allies could be Syria being armed with S-300s and Iran with S-400s. As often happens, the considered Russian response will eventually improve the global environment in which the Moscow and her allies operate. The Russian Federation is not ruling anything out, and has the political right to equip its closest allies with game-changing technology in order to deter possible conflicts in the future.

The United States and her allies were hoping that the Russians and Syrians would advance on Idlib, thereby providing them with the opportunity to implement their well-rehearsed routine. There would be a false-flag chemical attack allegedly committed by Assad's troops, which would provide justification for a massive attack to try and degrade the performance of the Syrian air defense with a view to facilitating future attacks. Without the Syrians and Russians advancing on Idlib, the need for a fake chemical attack disappears, and with it the excuse to attack the country. This increases the frustration of Western countries, who lose their justifying reasons to launch their missiles. The actions off the coast of Latakia of the French and Israelis should therefore be understood as an agitated reaction to unexpected developments that were frustrating their plans.

As this latest attack showed, the West's actions are a lashing out with no possibility of changing events on the ground or advancing their goals in Syria. The missiles launched were directed against the agreement made by Putin and Erdogan.

For Turkey, the next possible steps are very much based on the American presence in the northeast of Syria alongside SDF troops as well as on American monetary and financial

attacks against the country. The US and Turkey are clearly on a collision course. Putin and Assad's gambit was done in order to avoid attacking Idlib, thereby forcing Erdogan to an agreement with the US. But in this way, the agreement between Trump and Erdogan remains impossible, as Ankara cannot reconcile with Washington. Erdogan cannot grant the release of Pastor Bronson, and the pastor happens to be an excellent excuse for Trump to energize his evangelical base, critical to the midterm elections in November. Moreover, Ankara considers the US presence on the border between Syria and Turkey to be illegal, because the US favors the SDF, which Turkey considers to be a terrorist group that threatens the territorial integrity of Syria and Turkey.

The situation does not change immediately for the US. There is no intention to move away from the northeast of Syria, given that this presence is considered strategic in a country where the US does not have direct relations with the central government and aims to prolong the chaos as long as possible in lieu of being able to control the country. In this sense, the SDF are essential for allowing the US a presence on Syrian territory. Erdogan's unofficial proposal to replace the SDF with their preferred FSA in the area under US control north of the Euphrates will not be taken seriously. Although the US does not intend to betray the Kurds for now, it is nevertheless clear that some branches of the SDF are in contact with Damascus to lay the groundwork for a Syria without the US. It could be said that in the very short term the Kurds are aligned with US interests, but in the medium to long term, there is no possibility of a prolonged US presence in Syria, and the Kurds are aware of this. It is therefore not surprising that draft negotiations between the SDF and the central governing authority in Damascus are already underway.

Undoubtedly the agreement between Erdogan and Putin puts the US on the spot, with Damascus considering an advancement towards Al-Tanf or other areas illegally occupied by US troops. The offensive against Idlib would have, among other things, given more time to the US and her allies to cement their presence in Syria.

Ultimately, Syrians and Russians have plenty of time to proceed with the liberation of Idlib and the rest of the country. Erdogan is increasingly isolated and without allies, under siege from multiple directions and by multiple means, namely, financial, economic, political and diplomatic.

Russians and Syrians will be able to patrol the demilitarized zone, gather intelligence, strike terrorists, and Erdogan will be left with little option than to register his protest but nothing more. This time, the agreement will allow Russia and Syria to gather all the information necessary for precision strikes, with the primary objective of wiping out the jihadist command center.

It is worth remembering the previous example of an agreement between Turkey, Russia and Iran. The ceasefire of more than a year ago, with the creation of deconfliction zones, was interpreted with skepticism by many friends of Syria. There were assumptions at the time that Syria would be partitioned. But a year and a half later, the reality is completely different. The areas of deconfliction no longer exist, and only one is left in Idlib itself.

With the diplomatic, economic, military and political skills and astuteness of China, Russia, Iran and Syria, Idlib will also be freed from the jihadist plague, in spite of Western and Israeli interventions to protect their proxies in the country.

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