

Turkey and Syria Are at War Without a Declaration of War

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Although Turkey has supported anti-Syrian government forces, especially terrorist organizations [like ISIS](#) and the Al-Qaeda affiliated [Al-Nusra](#) and [Turkistan Islamic Party](#), since the very beginning of the Syrian War in 2011, no declaration of war has ever been announced between the two neighboring countries. Russia became militarily involved in 2015 and its intervention saw the quick defeat of ISIS and the recovery of large swathes of the country back into Syrian government control, as well as a partnership emerging with Turkey to discuss the Syrian crisis.

However, this now appears to be well and truly over. Oleg Zhuravlyov, chief of the Russian Center for Reconciliation of the Opposing Parties in Syria, said on Sunday that the Syrian government was forced to declare the closure of airspace over Syria's northwest Idlib province. However, it was his following comment that sent social media into a frenzy with speculation that Russia would begin attacking jets illegally operating in Idlib.

"In such conditions, the command of the Russian taskforce cannot guarantee safety of flights by Turkish planes over Syria," said Zhuravlyov.

Many people have interpreted this as Russia threatening Turkish jets. This is not the case, and rather, Russia is warning Turkey that it will not restrain the Syrian Army in attacking the Turkish military, especially after Turkey downed two Syrian jets yesterday. It was a tense day, even though no Syrian pilots were killed.

The day saw six Turkish drones downed and then in the early morning, [Turkish ambulances were seen](#) at the Syrian-Turkish border point to retrieve dead and wounded Turkish soldiers after a Syrian Army attack on a military convoy at Qamenas near Sarmin in Idlib countryside. All this happened yesterday on the first day after a deadline set by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan ended which demanded the Syrian Army to withdraw to positions it held earlier in the year. Although Turkey has not declared war on Syria, there is little doubt that the two countries are now at war and Russia will do little to restrain the Arab country from defending its territory.

The Syrian army command announced on Sunday that the airspace over the northwestern part of the country is now closed. The situation in Idlib escalated after Turkish-backed and Al-Qaeda affiliated Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham launched a large-scale attack on Syrian government forces on February 27, with the Syrian army striking back in retaliation and

killing 36 Turkish soldiers and wounding another 30. Immediately afterwards, Russia took steps to ensure a short ceasefire to enable Turkey to recover the bodies of their fallen and wounded.

Moscow has expressed concern over Ankara's support for terrorist organizations in Idlib. In addition, Russian President Vladimir Putin first conducted trilateral talks with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and then with Erdoğan, who described the implementation of the agreement with Sochi as the main condition for the settlement in Idlib. This has been problematic as Erdoğan has refused to stop supporting terrorist organizations in Idlib as set out by the Sochi agreement. In turn, Putin expressed concern over the increase in terrorist activity in the province, while also noting the need for unconditional respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

[Turkey has blamed Russia](#) for the at least 50 Turkish soldiers killed in February alone, testing Moscow's patience with Ankara, especially with Erdoğan showing his arrogance after asking Russia to step aside and allow Turkey to engage against Russia's Syrian allies directly. Although Ankara has received verbal backing from Washington, it is unlikely that Turkey would receive backing from NATO because of the asymmetric weaponization of illegal migrants that Erdoğan unleashed against Greece.

Greece on Friday blocked a joint communique from NATO being announced on Friday night that intended to support Turkey in its war against Syria. This came to the anger of the U.S., UK, Germany and France, pushing the case further that [Russia needs to prioritize Greece](#) as relations rift with Turkey. This is especially necessary as relations have broken down so badly that the Turkish military are writing "[With Love for Putin](#)" on Turkish bombs destined for Syria.

Although NATO wanted to show a united front against Russia and support Turkey against Syria, it was unable to do it because of Greece's veto. Despite not having international legitimacy or making a declaration of war, there is little doubt that Turkey is at war with Syria directly now, rather than in an indirect manner like in previous years.

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