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Turkey, Coalition Partners, Call on Russia to Cease Syria Attacks

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Russian Navy's large landing ship Korolev sails in the Bosphorus, on its way to the Mediterranean Sea, in Istanbul, Turkey

Turkey and its partners in the U.S.-led coalition against Islamic State called on Russia on Friday to cease its attacks on the Syrian opposition and focus on fighting Islamist militants, expressing "deep concern" over Moscow's airstrikes.

In a joint statement with the United States, Britain, France, Germany and Gulf Arab allies, Turkey said Russia's actions constituted a "further escalation" of the conflict and would only fuel more extremism.

"We express our deep concern with regard to the Russian military build-up in Syria and especially ⊠the attacks by the Russian Air Force on Hama, Homs and Idlib since yesterday which led to civilian casualties and did not target Daesh," it said.

Daesh is another name for the Islamic State group. Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday assertions that civilians had been killed in Russian air strikes in Syria were an "information attack."

Russia's decision to join the war with airstrikes on behalf of Syrian President Bashar Assad this week, and the increased military involvement of Iran, could mark a turning point in a conflict that has drawn in most of the world's military powers.

Hundreds of Iranian troops have arrived in Syria to join a major ground offensive in support of Assad's government, Lebanese sources said on Thursday, a sign the civil war is turning still more regional and global in scope.

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