

Turkey, Russia Discuss Joint Patrol Option in Syria's Idlib

By [Reuters](#)

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Turkey has threatened to use military power to drive back Syrian forces in Idlib unless they withdraw by the end of the month. **Baderkhan Ahmad / AP / TASS**

Turkey and Russia are discussing the possibility of joint patrols as one means of reaching a deal that will halt fighting and counter the exodus of civilians in Syria's Idlib region, a Turkish official said on Thursday. This statement came a day after Ankara threatened military action to push back Syrian government forces.

Although two rounds of talks in the past two weeks between Turkey and Russia have failed to produce an agreement, the official said the talks had not been "completely without a result."

"Various exercises are being discussed. For example, ensuring security through Turkish and Russian officials and holding joint patrols could be possible," the official said, adding that both Ankara and Moscow expected their presidents to "end the issue."

A Syrian government offensive to eradicate the last rebel strongholds in northwest Syria has led to some of the most serious confrontations yet between NATO members Ankara and Damascus, and has prompted Turkey to send thousands of troops and convoys of heavy weapons to the border area.

Turkey has taken in about 3.7 million Syrian refugees since the war started and has closed its border, saying that it cannot handle any more. The United Nations says more than 900,000 people, mostly women and children, have fled their homes in Idlib since early December.

Turkey, which backs rebels trying to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, has threatened to use military power to drive back Syrian forces advancing in Idlib unless they withdraw by the end of the month. On Wednesday, President Tayyip Erdogan said a Turkish offensive into Idlib was only a "matter of time."

Russia, which backs Assad, has said a Turkish offensive into Idlib would be the "worst-case scenario" and that Russia would work to prevent the situation there from worsening. Iran, which also backs Assad, has said it was ready to mediate between Syria and Turkey if necessary.

The official said Turkey, Russia, and Iran plan to meet in Tehran early next month to further discuss Syria, including the developments in Idlib. A Russian delegation may come to Ankara before then to evaluate progress made on Idlib.

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