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Turkey, Syria, Russia Defense Ministers Meet for First Talks Since 2011

By AFP

December 28, 2022



Russia's Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu **Sergei Savostyanov / TASS**

The defense ministers of Russia, Turkey and Syria met in Moscow on Wednesday, the first such talks since the civil war broke out in Syria, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

Russia and Turkey are involved in Syria, with Moscow supporting the Damascus regime against its opponents and Ankara backing the rebels.

The meeting came following repeated threats by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to launch a military offensive in northern Syria against Kurdish groups.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and his Turkish and Syrian counterparts, Hulusi Akar and Ali Mahmoud Abbas, discussed "ways to resolve the Syrian crisis, the problem of refugees, and joint efforts to combat extremist groups in Syria," the Russian Defense Ministry said.

The sides "noted the constructive nature of the dialog held in this format and the need to continue it in the interests of further stabilizing the situation" in Syria and the region, according to the Defense Ministry in Moscow.

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The Turkish Defense Ministry struck a similar note, saying the meeting was held in a "constructive atmosphere."

"At the meeting, the Syrian crisis, the refugee problem and joint efforts to combat all terrorist organizations in Syria were discussed," the ministry said in a statement.

On Saturday, Akar told reporters that Turkey was in talks with Russia about using Syrian airspace in a possible operation against the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia.

"We are holding discussions with the Russians about the opening of the airspace," he said.

The Turkish and Syrian foreign ministers had a brief informal exchange on the sidelines of a regional summit in 2021 and Ankara has acknowledged contact between their respective intelligence services.

In November, Erdogan said a meeting with Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad was a possibility, after cutting diplomatic ties with Damascus throughout the 11-year conflict.

In mid-December, he indicated that he could meet with Assad after the two countries' defense and foreign ministers meet.

"We want to take a step as Syria, Turkey and Russia," he said at the time.

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