

Russia Hosts Talks with Iran, Syria, Turkey

By [AFP](#)

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Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu with Turkish counterpart Hulusi Akar. **Vadim Savitsky / Press Service of the Russian Defence Ministry / TASS**

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu on Tuesday hosted four-way talks aimed at normalizing ties between Ankara and Damascus, which were severed at the start of Syria's civil war in 2011.

"Practical steps were discussed in the field of strengthening security in the Syrian Arab Republic and normalizing Syrian-Turkish relations," the Russian Defense Ministry.

Moscow stressed the importance of countering "the fight against all extremist groups in Syria."

Shoigu, who hosted counterparts from Syria, Turkey and Iran, also held a number of bilateral talks.

The Kremlin has sought to mend ties between Damascus and Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Successful Kremlin mediation would give President Vladimir Putin diplomatic clout with Russia isolated internationally over Moscow's offensive in Ukraine.

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In a similar statement, the Turkish defense ministry pointed to the "constructive atmosphere" of the meeting during which the parties discussed "the issue of intensifying efforts to return Syrian refugees to their lands."

All participants "reaffirmed their respect for Syria's territorial integrity," the Turkish ministry added.

In Damascus, the Syrian defense ministry said in a statement carried by state media that the "quartet meeting of the defense ministers" had discussed "the withdrawal of Turkish forces" from Syria.

Erdogan and Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad had amicable relations in the 2000s after years of tensions between their countries following the breakup of the Ottoman Empire.

But Syria's civil war, which has left 500,000 people dead and displaced millions, strained relations between Damascus and Ankara, which has long supported rebel groups opposed to Assad.

Damascus is a staunch ally of Moscow, which intervened in the civil war in 2015, launching air strikes to support the government's struggling forces.

With Russian and Iranian support, Damascus has won back much of the territory it lost in the early stages of the conflict.

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