



## The Turkish-Russian Alliance in the Middle East

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Turkish and Russian alliance passed the test, for now, over the looming Syrian al-Assad regime operation in Idlib. The accompanying excerpted articles, one from the pro-government Turkish daily *Yeni Şafak* and the other from the Turkish daily *Hürriyet*, argue that the alliance not only survived what has been called the Idlib test, but also extended its reach beyond Syria to include Iraq and the broader Middle East.

The first article outlines, through several quotes from Russian and Turkish officials and newspapers, signs of a likely agreement between the two to expand their influence in Iraq, even though there is no current official agreement. According to the author, Russia already has a presence in Iraq through its energy companies (Lukoil, Rosneft and Gazprom) and it is only a matter of time before it deploys its military. Additionally, it appears Turkey and Russia will welcome Iran into the alliance because of Iran's strong influence and presence in Baghdad.

The second accompanying article states that there are several indicators pointing to Turkish and Russian military cooperation. First, frequent visits of the Turkish Ministry of Defense and the head of the National Intelligence Agency to Russia show the intensity of talks regarding Turkish and Russian cooperation in defense and intelligence. The second is the expansion of the functions of the joint Iranian, Russian and Turkish coordination center to possibly include military cooperation. Third, Turkey's decision to purchase the S-400 air defense system from Russia will increase the likelihood of the Turkish-Russian cooperation. Ultimately, as the *Hürriyet* article notes, Turkey continues expanding its cooperation with Russia after "years of contention." **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

**Source:** Nedret Ersanel, "Türkiye ve Rusya, Irak'ta da anlaştı (Turkey and Russia reached an Agreement in Iraq as well)," *Yeni Şafak*, 6 October 2018. <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/nedretersanel/turkiye-ve-rusya-irakta-da-anlasti-2047584>

*Things in Idlib and Syria have not ended just yet, but Turkey and Russia reached an agreement in Iraq...The likelihood of troops combatting each other in the region formed of "quicksand" is no longer about "power," but the totality of forces.*

*You can put Russia, Turkey, Iran and even Damascus, as well as some Iraqi elements on one side, and the U.S., Israel and the "countries" that are told, "you will not last 15 days if we stop protecting you" on the other...*

*Signposts..."The Iraqi parliament elected Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) candidate Barham Salih as the president. Salih designated Adil Abdul Mahdi, the independent candidate of Shiites as prime minister. The appointment led to tensions between the two big Kurdish parties." (Oct. 5)...*

*"The chaotic independence outburst of the regional government in northern Iraq was negated by the clear stance demonstrated by Turkey. Iraq was saved from a great problem with the dominance of the central administration. Our hope is that the PKK presence in the country is eliminated." (President Erdoğan, Oct. 1)*

*"On Sept. 30 the Iranian military targeted Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI) camps on the Arbil-Iran border area. Iranian forces organized an attack on the KDPI's camp operating in Erbil on Sept. 8 and 16 KDPI members, including top-level figures, died." (Oct. 1)...*

*"Our objective is to clear the entire Syrian territory of terrorists, starting from Manbij. It is to completely clear Qandil, which is the source of the trouble, and Sinjar which is headed toward being the new Qandil, from the separatist terrorist organization [PKK]." (President Erdoğan, Sept. 26)*

*"Iranian President Hassan Rouhani prior to Erdoğan's outburst at the UN, followed by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's messages criticizing the U.S. presence east of the Euphrates and its operations there, is a noteworthy aspect of the matter. In this respect, a trilateral challenge against the U.S. is in question." (Sept. 27, S. Ergin, *Hürriyet*)*

*"We are in very close and rapidly developing relations with Russia in every area. Similarly, we are in close contact with Iran regarding our Syria and Iraq policies. We attach special importance to including Iran in decisions regarding the future of the region." (President Erdoğan, Oct. 1)...*

*Finally...It is clear that thwarting the others from Iraq is slowly giving confidence.*

*Moscow is present in Iraq with "star" energy names such as Lukoil, Rosneft and Gazprom. According to a frequently repeated claim, the S-400s are going to play a role in the "new rapport period."*

*...Mikhail Bogdanov, the most powerful Russian diplomatic character in the region said yesterday: "Iraq is one of Russia's main partners in the region."...Moscow's official stance is to protect Iraq's sovereignty; it is on the same page with Ankara regarding Barzani's "independence referendum," which was dubbed "chaotic..." ('Russian presence in Iraq - a matter of time', Oct. 3, TNA.)*

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(continued)



## Continued: The Turkish-Russian Alliance in the Middle East

**Source:** Sedat Ergin, “Türk – Rus Askerî İşbirliği: İki hasımdan iki ortağa doğru (Turkish – Russian Military cooperation: From two foes to two partners),” *Hürriyet*, 21 September 2018. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/sedat-ergin/turk-rus-asker-isbirligi-iki-hasimdan-iki-ortaga-dogru-40963060>

*One of the most important points of the agreement reached last Monday [on 17 September 2018] in Sochi is that the functions of the joint Iranian-Russian-Turkish coordination center will be enlarged...*

*The fact that a NATO country, another that has positioned itself in a historical and ideological framework as an opponent of NATO and a third that carries the identity of the Islamic Republic came together to enter into cooperation in a military framework is a situation worth focusing on...*

*The resulting bilateral cooperation axis between Russia and Turkey was one of the most interesting developments of the recent past, especially at a time when Idlib came to the top of the international agenda.*

*The fact that Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, accompanied by Hakan Fidan, the head of the National Intelligence Agency went to Moscow twice in one week last August to meet his Russian counterpart is self-explanatory in terms of the intensity of talks in this field...*

*It is possible now to add the military dimension to the web of cooperation between Russia and Turkey, which has recently entered into a meaningful political and economic rapprochement. We can equally guess that similar cooperation patterns have been established between the intelligence services of the two countries. The current level of cooperation in the defense field... could not have been imagined... after the Turkish Air Force downed a Russian war plane in Turkish airspace on Nov. 25, 2015.*

*No doubt Turkey's decision to purchase the S-400 air defense system from Russia has given additional momentum to this rapprochement. In the end, the emergence of close cooperation between Russia and Turkey following years of contention marked by the Cold War and the addition of Iran to this formula is an unprecedented formation brought to the international relations system by the 21st century.*



Vladimir Putin met with President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Sochi to discuss bilateral relations and current issues on the international agenda (2017).

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