



[Turkish and Syrian Forces Clash in Idlib](#)

Turkish and Syrian forces exchanged fire this week in Syria's border province of Idlib. Six Turkish soldiers were killed by artillery strikes carried out by the Syrian government, and Turkey responded with airstrikes, inflicting 35 casualties on Syrian government forces. Idlib is the last remaining province under rebel control and winning it back would mean victory for the government in Syria's long civil war. Russia, who works closely with Turkey in other areas of foreign policy but is aligned with the Syrian government, said that the Syrians were targeting al-Qaeda militants with their strike, and inadvertently hit a Turkish convoy instead. Turkey has long backed Syria's rebels, and has sought to delay a joint Syria-Russia offensive to retake Idlib, as any operation would push thousands of refugees toward the Turkish border.

Turkey maintains observation posts throughout Idlib as part of a de-escalation pact signed with Russia. A convoy was moving to resupply the soldiers stationed in the observation posts when it was struck by Syrian artillery. Russia and Syria insisted it was an accident, but the Turkish government released information saying the Russians had been made aware of the convoy's plans prior to the attack, and it was unrealistic that it was accidental. Syrian forces have often used the excuse of targeting terror groups when conducting strikes, and blamed Turkish forces for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Despite coordinating with each other on various projects in the Middle East, Turkey and Russia are on opposite sides of Syria's civil war. Russia backs the Syrian government and has a stated goal of returning all Syrian territory to government control. Conversely, Turkey has supported Syria's rebels as a result of long-term distrust of Bashar al-Assad. Russia has sought to find a position between Turkey and Syria instead of directly confronting Turkey, and Vladimir Putin was a key figure in negotiations that agreed upon de-escalation in Idlib.

The fate of Idlib is strategically important for Turkey because of the civilians living there. As the Syrian government has retaken towns from rebel forces, civilians in those towns have fled toward the Turkish border as refugees. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said that Turkey is unable to accommodate anymore refugees from Syria, and he fears that a government offensive in Idlib could drive thousands of more people toward the border. So far, 700,000 people have been forced out of Idlib, and most of them fled toward the Turkish border. With Turkey unable to hold any more refugees, the situation for those fleeing the conflict is dire. Turkey is keen to see the rebels remain in control of Idlib, but an escalation by the Syrian government in the province appears inevitable.