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## **TURKISH TROOPS ENTER SYRIA IN JOINT MISSION WITH RUSSIA, IRAN**

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Turkey sent special forces and commandos over the border into Syria, the start of a joint mission with Russia and Iran to monitor a cease-fire agreement and pacify a stronghold for Islamic militants -- but one that also has major implications for the regions Kurds.

The operation to establish a combat-free zone in Syrias northwest province of Idlib, which is largely controlled by former al-Qaeda militants, began late Thursday, Hurriyet newspaper said without citing anyone. Thirty armored cars carrying more than 100 special forces and commandos crossed the frontier late Thursday, the report said.

The incursion is one of Turkeys biggest yet in the Syria conflict, adding to the nations geopolitical risks following an attempted coup in 2016 and subsequent political crackdown. The lira tumbled after the U.S. and Turkey suspended visa services for each others citizens on Sunday, a sharp escalation of simmering tensions between the two over U.S. military involvement in Syria and Turkeys closer ties with Russia.

### **Syrian Rebels Enter Idlib as Turkey Gears Up for Risky Mission**

Turkeys deployment emphasizes the closer ties between President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, a relationship viewed with concern by Turkeys NATO allies.

It also represents a shift in Ankaras attitude toward Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad. Turkey has long opposed any political transition under him, but Russias intervention in Syrias civil war shored up the president after years of Turkish and U.S. insistence that he must go.

Rebels from the Turkey-backed Free Syrian Army crossed into Syria on Saturday. The Turkish

troops are expected to follow them into the northwestern city of Idlib, with Russians stationed nearby.

Turkey has also threatened to clear Afrin, a city in northern Syria, of Kurdish forces it regards as belonging to a terrorist group with links to the PKK, which has long battled for autonomy in Turkey's southeast. Doing so would prevent the Kurds from linking enclaves they control along the frontier with Turkey.

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Kaynak/Source: