

# Syria Will Likely Suffer as Russia Seeks Vengeance for Ambassador's Murder

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**Far from sparking World War III, the Ankara assassination will probably spur a Russian escalation against 'terrorists' in Syria and exacerbate internal divisions in Turkey.**

**R**ussian ambassador to Turkey Andrey Karlov died Monday after [a gunman fatally wounded him](http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/russian-ambassador-turkey-shot-ankara-article-1.2916158) (<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/russian-ambassador-turkey-shot-ankara-article-1.2916158>)

during a speech at a photo exhibition in Ankara. The gunman shouted in Turkish: "Don't forget Aleppo! Don't forget Syria! As long as our brothers are not safe, you will not enjoy safety." Karlov's murder comes a day before a major Syria meeting in Moscow with Russian, Turkish, and Iranian officials.

It may be tempting to conclude that the assassination of the Russian ambassador may escalate into a world conflict. But this is unlikely. Russian President Vladimir Putin instead is more likely to escalate in Syria, while Turkey may face growing domestic challenges. Both Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan quickly made it clear they see "terrorism" as the enemy, rather than each other.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Maria Zakharova said that Russia considers the murder an act of terrorism, as reported by RIA Novosti. She added that there will be a careful investigation, the guilty will be punished, and Russia will raise this "issue" at the UN Security Council.

Other senior Russian officials too rushed to describe the murder as an act of terrorism, and some directly linked it to Syria. "Our answer is the destruction of terrorists in Syria," said Russian senator Vladimir Dzabarov, according to *Parlamentskaya Gazeta*, the official parliament newspaper.

He added that Russia is the only country truly fighting terrorism right now, unlike Western nations. Turkey, in Dzabarov's view, failed to protect the Russian diplomat, but Turkey itself is a victim of terrorism, and therefore it too

needs protection.

Another Russian parliamentarian -- Irina Yarovaya, leader of Putin's United Russia party and co-author of a recent Soviet-style anti-terrorism surveillance law -- said that it is Russia that "understood and understands" the dangers of terrorism and called on the world to "consolidate in the fight against terrorism." Chairman of the Duma (parliament) committee on foreign affairs Leonid Slutskiy suggested the attack could have been a "provocation" carried out by someone who wishes to disrupt the newly-restored Russia-Turkish ties. Erdogan himself said as much Monday.

In this context it is difficult to see how this situation is likely to escalate into World War III. Instead, comments from Russian officials suggest Syria is likely going to be the victim of this tragedy. But Turkey will face tough times. The country expected three million Russian tourists in 2017. This is unlikely to happen now, and the Turkish economy, already in decline, will continue to suffer.

Erdogan, for his part, may have won Putin over, but Karlov's murder shows that the Turkish people are not as easily convinced. There is much we don't yet know -- and the man who murdered Karlov can no longer speak, but his last words suggest he may have been motivated by anger over Putin's murder of Sunni civilians in Syria, and by Erdogan's collusion with Putin.

If so, this tragic event underscores the divisions within Turkish society, as did the recent coup in Turkey. Putin for his part may also use this situation to gain further leverage over Turkey to push it even closer to Russia's position on Syria.

Murders of Russia diplomats are rare, but they have happened before, and the Kremlin is bound to retaliate. To give one example, Hezbollah murdered one Soviet diplomat and kidnapped several in Beirut in 1986. In response, the KGB castrated a relative of a Hezbollah leader involved and sent him his relative's body parts. We don't yet know what Putin's response will be, but we can expect a strong one. And Syria, in the meantime, will continue burning.

*Anna Borshchevskaya is the Ira Weiner Fellow at The Washington Institute.* ❖

*New York Daily News*

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