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## NATO Chief Says Ready to Defend Turkey Amid Border Skirmishes With Syria

By John Glaser

October 9, 2012

NATO says it is [ready to defend alliance member Turkey](#) amid continued cross-border attacks with its neighbor Syria, but Western powers continue to urge calm and avoid escalation.

Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said Tuesday that Turkey can rely on NATO-backing, and that the alliance has “all necessary plans in place to protect and defend Turkey if necessary.”

At the same time, he pressed the two neighbors, who have seen their friendly relationship disappear during Syria’s bloody civil conflict, to show restraint and avoid an outbreak of war.

Turkey and Syria have exchanged artillery fire and shelling across their shared border [since last week](#), when Syrian shells killed five Turkish civilians last week. When it happened, Syria’s Assad regime [issued a formal apology](#), taking full responsibility, and promising it wouldn’t happen again. But Turkey kept up the artillery fire for almost a week after the incident.

Turkey has experienced destabilizing effects from Syria’s conflict, and has even been aiding and arming Syrian rebel fighters trying to overthrow the Syrian regime, which could potentially prompt an outbreak of war.

Ankara may want an escalation in the stand-off with Syria, but there will be no NATO war without US backing. Although the US has been meddling in Syria’s conflict – by sending aid to

the rebel fighters and fueling the violence – many in the US still [don't see an outbreak of war in Syria as workable](#).

The sectarian nature of the conflict brings back very fresh memories of the power vacuum and subsequent descent into chaos that broke out in Iraq. Furthermore, the opposition has elements of extremism and even al-Qaeda in it, and there's no viable organized opposition for anyone to support.

Half measures like imposing a no-fly zone would also worsen the situation, given Assad's considerable anti-aircraft capabilities, which are located in urban areas, putting more civilians at risk if the US were to try to take them out. This is also likely to expand the conflict outside Syria's borders, something [even war planners aren't willing to risk](#).