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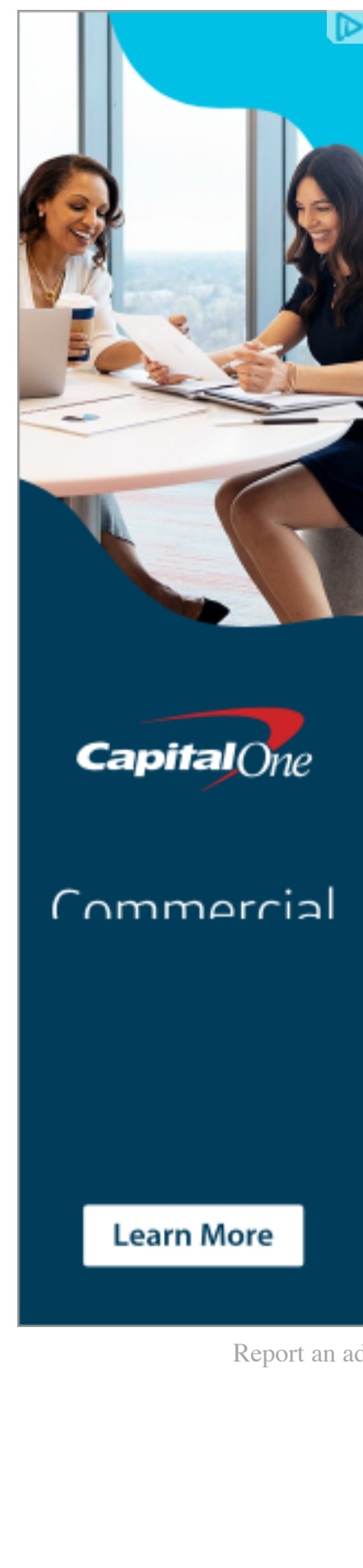
World 3 minute read - January 11, 2023 4:38 AM EST - Last Updated a month ago

# Top Turkey, Syria, Russia diplomats to meet soon -Turkish official

By Orhan Coskun



Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu attends a news conference with German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (not seen) in Istanbul, Turkey, July 29, 2022. REUTERS/Umit Bektaş/File Photo



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ANKARA, Jan 11 (Reuters) - Turkey, Syria and Russia aim to schedule a meeting of their foreign ministers this month and possibly before the middle of next week, though no date or location has yet been chosen, a senior Turkish official said on Wednesday.

Such a meeting would mark the highest-level talks between Ankara and Damascus since the Syrian war began in 2011 and signal a further thaw in ties.

NATO member Turkey has played a major part in the conflict, backing President Bashar al-Assad's opponents and sending troops into the north. Moscow is Assad's main ally and Russian President Vladimir Putin has urged reconciliation with Ankara.

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The official, who was not authorised to speak publicly, said the meeting could happen either before or after Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu is scheduled to meet U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in the United States on Jan. 18.

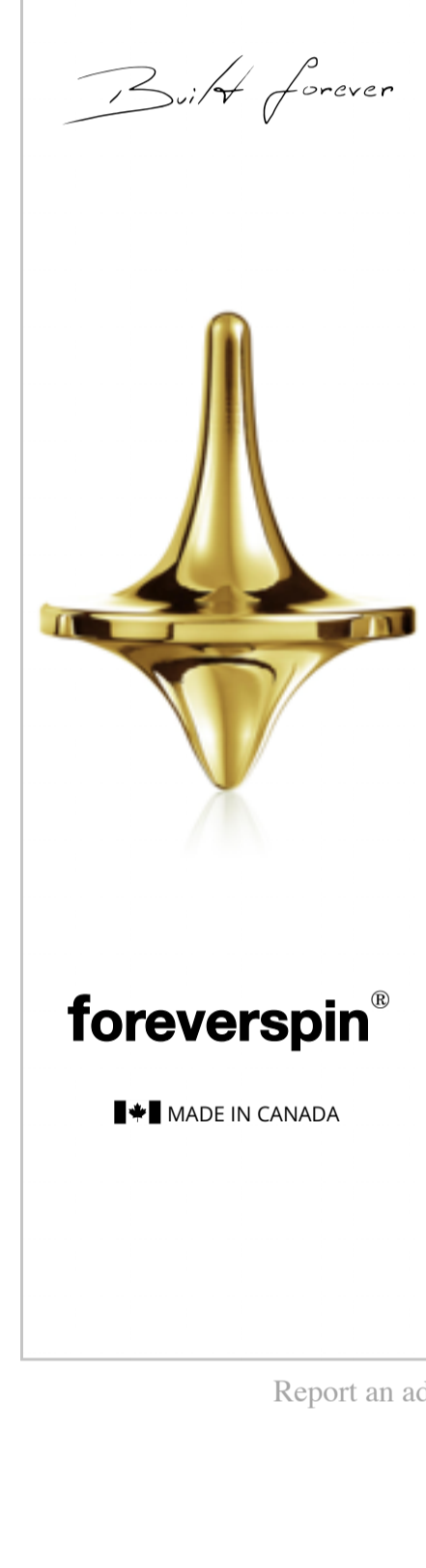
"Discussions are continuing (and) an exact date is not yet set. There are no problems with the meeting, they are just working on timing," the official said, adding it would happen either in Moscow or another location.

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The Turkish and Syrian defence ministers held landmark talks in Moscow last month to discuss border security and other issues. Last week, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said he may meet Assad after a trilateral foreign ministers meeting.

Syrian pro-government newspaper Al-Watan reported on Monday there were no specific dates set for the trilateral meeting. Moscow has not commented on meeting plans.

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The conflict in Syria, which has killed hundreds of thousands of people, displaced millions and drawn in regional and world powers, has ground on into a second decade, although fighting has cooled.

With backing from Russia and Iran, Assad's government has recovered most Syrian territory. Turkish-backed opposition fighters still control a pocket in the northwest, and Kurdish fighters backed by the United States also control territory near the Turkish border.

Washington does not support countries re-establishing ties with Assad. It has partnered with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, which includes the YPG militia, in fighting Islamic State in Syria.

The meeting of top diplomats would shift talks toward political issues and away from security, and set the stage for Erdogan and Assad to meet, the senior official said.

A second senior Turkish official told Reuters that Ankara seeks the safe return of Syrian refugees and cooperation with Damascus in targeting the YPG, the primary target of its ongoing cross-border military strikes.

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