



## News Report 14<sup>th</sup> March – 20<sup>th</sup> March

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Image: [Mstyslav Chernov/Wikimedia](#)

- **Turkey: attack in Istanbul, TAK claim responsibility for Ankara bombing**
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### **Turkey: attack in Istanbul, TAK claim responsibility for Ankara bombing**

A terrorist attack hit Istanbul on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> March at 11am local time, [killing](#) at least four. The attack took place in [Istiklal street](#), a business area [popular](#) with nationals and tourists, and a place already [indicated](#) by authorities as a sensitive target for terrorism. The perpetrators were identified by Turkey's Interior Minister Efkan Ala as Islamic State members: as [according to](#) Ala, among perpetrators was indeed Mehmet Ozturk, a Turkish member of IS. The man was identified through blood tests carried out on Ozturk's relatives, Anadolu news agency [reported](#). After Istanbul's attack, Turkish president Erdogan renewed his claims he will defeat the recent series of attacks Erdogan [described](#) as “one of the biggest and bloodiest terrorist waves in [Turkey's] history”.

Turkey was indeed already facing an emergency situation since a similar [attack](#) hit Ankara on 13<sup>th</sup> March, the then-last of four bombings [hitting](#) the country this year. With the bombing in Ankara [claimed](#) by PKK's affiliate Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK), attacks seem then to be now [equally distributed](#) between IS and Kurdish terrorist groups.

### **Syria: Russia claim withdrawal, Kurdish parties aim to establish a federal region**

Russian president Vladimir Putin announced on Monday his decision to withdraw the majority of Russia's military forces from Syria. But for as unexpected as it came, the decision was not such to everybody: as an anonymous official [told](#) *Defense News*, Jordan knew about the upcoming announcement. The reason for this decision [was also announced](#) by Putin: it

was explained as a consequence of the fulfilment of the country's goals in military engaging in Syria; also, the withdrawal is officially meant to take place in order to support the ongoing peace process. But this didn't prevent Russian involvement in the conflict to go on: despite Putin's claims, airstrikes [continued](#) to hit Syria, albeit exclusively targeting Islamic State targets.

During the same period, Kurdish parties in the conflict jointly claimed the establishment of a "Federation of Northern Syria", as [according to](#) *Middle East Eye*. The claim – similar to the autonomy accorded by to the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government in the 1990s – is an important development in negotiations aimed at reaching a new power balance in the country. As [noted](#) by *New York Times*, Kurdish officials downplayed the importance of the statement, defined as a mere attempt to tackle the fractionalisation of Syria. Nevertheless, as Putin's move, the one carried out by Kurds takes place just as peace talks resume, the NYT [highlighted](#). Reactions [are](#) then [expected](#) to be negative, in Turkey as much as in Syria.

## **Belgium: Salah Abdeslam arrested**

Salah Abdeslam, November Paris attacks' mastermind [was arrested](#) in Brussels on 18<sup>th</sup> March. The arrest took place [after gunfire erupted](#) in Brussels' Forest area, [leading to the death](#) of Mohamed Belkaid, the man deemed a key logistical operative in the attack. Also, two other accomplices [fled](#) the scene.

A fight over the right to trial Abdeslam ensued the arrest, with France trying to extradite him, an attempt [opposed by](#) Abdeslam. Meanwhile, the jihadist's recently appointed lawyer Sven Mary sparked a debate by underlining the defendant's cooperation with authorities, which Mary [claimed](#) to be "worth weight in gold". Abdeslam's words may indeed help shedding significant light on Paris attacks, or otherwise provide important information, as done with [his declaration](#) he was planning further attacks.

## **Nigeria and Yemen: more bloodshed**

While discussions are ongoing to determine the outcome of the Syrian civil war, two other war scenarios are to be monitored carefully. Firstly, Nigeria, where another attack by Boko Haram claimed [25 lives](#) in a mosque in Maiduguri's outskirts. The attack comes as part of a particularly violent confrontation between the fundamentalist terrorist group and regional governments united in the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). Finally, as bloody and worth monitoring is Yemen, where Saudi-led airstrikes led to the killing of [41 civilians](#). The war afflicting this Gulf country is then to be looked at carefully.

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