

Turkey-Russia ties not weak, Turkey's Foreign Minister

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Turkey's relationship with Russia is not so weak that it would be so easily severed as the French president claimed, according to the Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu on Monday.

Cavusoglu expressed this sentiment at a joint press conference with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in Ankara, the capital of Turkey. Cavusoglu said that Turkey's ties with Russia are not an alternative to its cooperation with NATO, France and the United States.

"Though we hold different views on some issues, our relations with Russia will not deteriorate like the President of France described. We have a very solid relationship with Russia," said Cavusoglu.

His comments came in response to an earlier remark from French President Emmanuel Macron, who claimed that the U.S.-led strikes on Syria had "separated" Turkey from Russia.

Bekir Bozdag, the Turkish Deputy Prime Minister and a government spokesperson, said earlier Monday that Turkey does not stand by any country on Syria and its policy in the region is different from that of Iran, Russia and the United States.

On Saturday, the U.S., Britain and France launched airstrikes on a number of targets in Syria in response to an alleged chemical attack in the Douma district in Eastern Ghouta last week.

During the press conference, Cavusoglu also revealed that Macron wanted to be part of a trilateral summit alongside Turkey, Russia and Iran, which was held in Ankara in early April.

Russia welcomed the participation of France, but Iran preferred to host France at a separate meeting, as a result, Macron did not attend the summit, he said.

The visiting NATO Secretary General exchanged views on issues including Syria with Cavusoglu on Monday. He appreciated Turkey for its effort in taking in Syrian refugees and transparency over its Operation Olive Branch in north Syria, while highlighting Turkey's importance to NATO in the press conference.

"I would like to underline that all NATO allies welcome Turkey as a highly valued ally and we understand the importance of having Turkey in the alliance. Turkey has been a committed ally for decades and we'd like to continue to work with Turkey," said Stoltenberg.