

49 Hostages Swapped for 180 ISIL Terrorists

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Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, center right, stands with freed hostages at the airport in Ankara, Turkey on Sept. 20, 2014. (Photo: AP)

The terrorist group the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) released 49 hostages who were abducted from the Turkish Consulate General in Mosul in June in exchange for Turkey's release of 180 key figures from the jihadist group, the Taraf daily reported on Thursday.

Forty-nine members of the consulate staff were held hostage by ISIL for 101 days before being released on Sept. 20, but speculation as to how they were freed continues to occupy the country's agenda. Taraf claimed that a number of key ISIL figures were traded for the hostages.

Giving a detailed report on the hostage release, Taraf claimed that US air strikes on ISIL militants in Iraq in August resulted in wounded terrorists being sent to Turkey for treatment. The US then warned Turkey not to release those militants. But, ISIL said they would kill the hostages if those ISIL fighters were not allowed to return to Iraq and Syria. The Turkish government then developed a swap plan for the release of the hostages, simultaneously ridding Turkey of the ISIL elements and releasing the hostages.

Local tribes mediated for swap deal

Local tribal figures who are providing support to the US's campaign against ISIL in Iraq acted as mediators in the exchange process. With their help a deal was reached and the logistics were finalized. The ISIL militants would bring the hostages to the Turkish border and inform the National Intelligence Organization (MİT) of the hostages' location, the report said.

In the wake of the hostages' return, the government, in accordance with the deal, gathered ISIL militants who had been detained during medical treatment in Turkish hospitals. One hundred eighty fighters were then taken to a military post in Van. Whether the ISIL terrorists who killed a police officer, a military officer and a Turkish citizen in Niğde province in March were included in the swap deal is not clear. However, rumors circulating in government circles indicate that these terrorists were meant to be among the terrorists to be exchanged; however, the decision was abandoned, Taraf reported.

As part of the deal, the returned militants were given an undisclosed amount of money before they were handed over to ISIL.

The report also stated that the state's key bodies, the MİT, the Prime Ministry Office and the President's Office, competed against each other in an effort to give the impression that the hostage release was the result of their diplomatic attempts. In order to create this

perception, the three agencies used certain media outlets affiliated with each other to claim the result as its own success. This prompted rumors that an internal power struggle was taking place over the hostages.

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