

# Erdogan Wants to Solve the Kurdish Problem with Assad

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*Turkish **President Recep Tayyip Erdogan** said on Thursday,*

"We have launched a process as Russia-Turkey-Syria," and added, "We will bring our foreign ministers together and then, depending on developments, we will come together as leaders."

Last week, the Foreign Ministers of Turkey, Syria and Russia met together in Moscow for the highest-level talks since 2011. Prior to the conflict in Syria, Erdogan and Syrian **President Bashar al-Assad** were close enough to refer to each other as brother. All that changed after Turkey participated in the US attack on Syria for regime change, which has left thousands dead, and millions of refugees, and utilized thousands of Radical Islamic terrorists as foot-soldiers inside Syria.

**The US has imposed a stalemate in Syria, but Erdogan has decided to create a solution to Turkey's National Security** issue by working in conjunction with Assad.

Steven Sahiounie of MidEastDiscourse interviewed **Hamide Rencüzoğulları**, Educator and Researcher, specialized in the Middle East. Published books: AKP's Syrian War, Bloody Spring in Libya, All at Once: the ISIS and Women in the Claw of Jihad. Her articles were published in various newspapers and magazines, and she prepared and presented the TV Program "Agenda: Middle East". Nine lawsuits have been filed against her for her books and articles and she is still on trial by the Turkish judiciary.

**Steven Sahiounie (SS):** Recently, it is apparent that Turkey is trying with all means to repair their relationship with Syria; however, Turkey had participated in the US/NATO war on Syria. Now, they can see that attack has failed. In your opinion, what does Turkey want to get out of Syria?

**[Hamide Rencüzoğulları](#) (HR):** Turkey can no longer bear the burden of militants

## **trained and equipped by NATO and Arab countries in the region.**

Everyone withdrew their hands and this burden is only on Turkey's shoulders. On the other hand, Western countries no longer pay for refugees. The economic crisis has already deepened. The postponement of Russia's natural gas debt relieved the Turkish Government. He wanted Damascus and Ankara to get closer in return for this election gift that Putin gave Erdogan until the election. In fact, because Putin put pressure on Erdogan, he sought a formula to reconcile with Assad, but the reason is not just Putin's will. Turkey is in a stalemate on Syrian territory. It has both economic and political reasons. Investing in infrastructure and wages of militants in the regions controlled by Turkey is now challenging. On the other hand, Erdogan presents the position of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the PYD in Syria as a justification for national security, but neither Russia nor America gave permission for the final operation. Erdogan's intention is for the Kurds to withdraw to a depth of 32 kilometers and, to place the jihadist militants and their families there instead. Rather than failing in the wars against the SDF, he wants to solve the SDF problem with Damascus. Of course, if Damascus is going to give Erdogan an election gift, he will accept this condition, but this is not an easy issue.

**SS:** President Erdogan has made sending back the Syrian refugees a national policy. Isn't this the same policy of all Turkish opposition parties?

**HR:** The problem of refugees started to put the ruling party in a difficult position. Because a large part of the society wants the Syrians to return. The authority lost the vote when it said that we will not send power. Especially after the leaders of the nationalist opposition started to turn the Syrian refugees into election material against Erdoğan. **Erdoğan also announced that he would send the Syrians back.** The main opposition party, the Republican People's Party, already has the subject of deportation of Syrians to their country on their agenda, but it does not say "we will expel them". "Honorable and voluntary return", they are saying instead, which means reconciliation with Damascus and creating a common political solution. Erdogan was first talking about occupying an area 32 kilometers deep and relocating Syrians there. Now he has aligned with what the main Opposition Party, CHP, said. For that reason, he says he wants peace with Damascus. He wants to make peace with Damascus despite the reactions of the opponents he protects and feeds. Therefore, he needs propaganda before the election: the propaganda of "We solve the refugee crisis and the Kurdish problem together with Syria".

**SS:** We hear through media reports, that **Turkey and Syria are meeting and that Turkey is willing to give up the Radical Islamic terrorists. In your opinion, where will terrorists go including the Uyghurs?**

**HR:** He can't go anywhere with those terrorists. More precisely, the Justice and Development Party-AKP has no power to solve it. First of all, the "Syrian National Army" established by the AKP includes over 100 thousand militants, but it is not homogeneous. There are many different groups and not all of them give unconditional allegiance to Erdogan. If he says he will lay down arms, not all of them will. Second, there is Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) and the Turkistan Islamic Party, which the AKP does not undertake as a guarantor. He can never speak to them. But Turkey seems to have a secret agreement with HTS for several months. Groups close to Turkey started to act with HTS, and HTS took Afrin together with these pro-Turkey groups. Turkey neither spoke out, nor took any steps to prevent it. On the contrary, when HTS launched the Afrin operation, senior officials from

Turkey went to Azaz to meet with opposition leaders and returned. In this meeting, I think that Turkey gave the green light to HTS and warned the opposition not to engage in conflict. Why is Turkey paving the way for HTS? There was already a secret alliance from the beginning, now the Hamza, Suleyman Shah and Sultan Murad Brigades, who are closest to Turkey, joined HTS and took over the areas under Turkish control. AKP probably has an account like this: It wants to withdraw from Syria and leave this area to HTS. Groups in the Syrian National Army that refuse to lay down their arms also join HTS in this way, so the AKP can say that it has withdrawn its hand from Syria, but on the other hand, it will continue to deepen the conflict in Syria with this growing jihadist army. I guess they have such plans. But this is too dangerous. Because the muzzle of the abandoned jihadists may return to Turkey.

**SS:** Media leaks have said America is offering Syria a deal if Syria will not repair the relationship with Turkey. In your opinion, why is America against a new relationship between Ankara and Damascus?

**HR:** Although the USA withdrew its hand from the Syrian opposition, it actually continued to manage the conflicts through Turkey. Even though it has a position in Syria only through the Kurds, the USA has support for the Turkish invasions. The USA wants Turkey to maintain its position in the Syrian territory it has entered. However, it does not want to offend Turkey, which highlights the SDF as a security issue. In particular, the USA never wants Ankara to get closer to Damascus. We have read in some media that the USA has offered a different proposal to Turkey in order to disrupt this, which is that, the USA will pull the SDF back one kilometer, but it will revive the Suvvarül Raqqa (Raqqa Revolutionaries) group and place it on the Turkish border. This group of Raqqa Revolutionaries is a jihadist structure and the USA thinks that Turkey will not be bothered by them. As long as Russia and the Syrian army do not replace the Kurds... I guess this is the formula of the USA.

**SS:** We have heard media reports that the Syrian opposition in Turkey has been asked to leave Turkey immediately. In your opinion, is the break with the Syrian opposition signaling that the rapprochement with Damascus is more important?

**HR:** I don't think there will be a complete break. The persuasion process continues. There are those who accept unconditionally. Turkey may close a few of the opposition channels broadcasting in the country as a formality. Or, objecting leaders can be expelled from the country, but I think this is all a formality. Because it cannot completely confront the opponents, it is very risky...

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