



# The NATIONAL INTEREST FOUNDATION

## [Top Diplomats from Syria, Turkey, and Russia Aim to Meet Soon to Discuss Ending the Occupation](#)

Turkey is pushing for a second round of high-level talks to discuss reconciliation between itself and Syria. The two governments have been at odds ever since Turkey decided to support anti-government forces in Syria in 2011. Over the past decade, Turkey has backed multiple rebel groups and even deployed troops in northern Syria. One of the most current operations was a bombing campaign against groups in Syria in retaliation to a deadly bombing in Istanbul in November of 2021. Turkey also mounted a land operation targeting what it said was a wing of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). The PKK is an armed group that has waged war against Ankara for decades. They now occupy land in northern Syria in a so-called “security corridor.”

The Turkish and Syrian defense ministers met in Russia last month in an attempt to repair bilateral relations and to discuss counter-terrorism efforts in Syria. This was the first time in 11 years that the two countries had held open talks. One of the main subjects during this talk was Turkish military presence within Syria. During this meeting was also when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan first proposed a trilateral meeting between himself, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and Russian President Vladimir Putin. So far, this meeting has not been scheduled, though some sources indicate that it may take place sometime in February. Turkey and Syria will face major obstacles to normalization, as Turkey has rejected many of Syria’s core demands, including designating all Syrian rebel groups as terrorists. Syrians also do not appear willing to work against Syrian Kurdish affiliates of the PKK. Turkey also wants Syria to help with the return of at least one million Syrian refugees, a demand Syria has shown little interest in meeting. According to sources familiar with the planning for the meeting, Russia has been putting heavy pressure on both sides to engage with each other.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has indicated in speeches that he is open to another round of talks but emphasizes that they must be based on the aim of ending the Turkish occupation of Syrian land. A peace agreement would significantly alter the situation in Syria. Turkey has been the primary supporter of Syrian opposition forces during the decade-long war. The conflict has killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced millions. The government forces currently hold a large majority of the country, but opposition fighters still control a pocket in the northwest. These fighters heavily depend on support from Turkey and without it would likely collapse. This would allow Assad’s forces to take the rest of the land and potentially put an end to the conflict, though it is likely that some type of insurgency would persist. If lasting peace is to be achieved, Assad must be held accountable for his crimes against humanity. Another region of Syria is also controlled by US-backed Kurdish fighters, but so far, it has not been proposed that the United States join the talks.