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**TURKEY PM BINALI YILDIRIM PLANS TO DEVELOP CLOSER RELATIONS WITH SYRIA, IRAQ**

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Turkey is aiming to develop good relations with Syria and Iraq, and both countries need to be stable for counter-terrorism efforts to succeed, Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim says.

Turkey has long been one of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's staunchest opponents, arguing that only his departure could stabilise Syria.

That has set it at odds with Mr Assad's ally Russia and distanced it from a US-led coalition more focused on fighting Islamic State militants.

Since taking office in May, Mr Yildirim has repeatedly said Turkey needs to "increase its friends and decrease its enemies" □ an apparent tacit admission that past policies have left Ankara sidelined.

"It is our greatest and irrevocable goal: Developing good relations with Syria and Iraq, and all our neighbours that surround the Mediterranean and the Black Sea," Mr Yildirim said in comments broadcast live on television.

"We normalised relations with Russia and Israel. I'm sure we will normalise relations with Syria as well.

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Kaynak/Source: