Turkey PM Yildirim hints at mending ties with Syria

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Turkey has said it wants to develop good ties with Syria - in an apparent reversal of its policy towards its war-stricken neighbour.

Binali Yildirim became Turkey's prime minister in May

Turkey has long said the only solution for regional peace would be for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to go.

But Turkish PM Binali Yildirim insisted good ties with Syria were needed "for the fight against terrorism" and for stability in the region.

Turkey has recently moved to end rifts with both Russia and Israel.

Separately, French diplomatic missions in Turkey are cancelling their Bastille Day celebrations on 14 July for "security reasons", the consulate general in Istanbul has said.

Turkey has been hit by a wave of violence in the past year

Turkey-Syria diplomatic ties were severed after the Syrian conflict began in 2011 and Turkey has since argued that only Mr Assad's departure could bring stability.

But Mr Yildirim said in comments broadcast live on television: "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.

"We normalised relations with Russia and Israel. I'm sure we will normalise relations with Syria as well. For the fight against terrorism to succeed, stability needs to return to Syria and Iraq."

Since taking office in May, Mr Yildirim has repeatedly said that Turkey needs to "increase its friends and decrease its enemies".

Turkey last month announced the restoration of diplomatic ties with Israel after a six-year break and apologised for shooting down a Russian warplane on the Turkish-Syrian border in November 2015.

Turkey's new initiative comes at a time of great political instability in the country, says the BBC's Katy Watson in Istanbul.

Turkey is hosting some 2.7 million Syrian migrants and refugees

In the past year, Turkey has been hit by a wave of bombings from both Kurdish militants and the so-called Islamic State.

Turkey is also playing host to some 2.7 million Syrian migrants and refugees who have fled the conflict in their homeland.

Some 10% live in more than 20 refugee camps built across Turkey. The rest reside in cities, often in poor conditions.

- BBC