

# Assad says Kurdish forces are 'traitors, simple as that'

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In a press conference after a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Olgeovich Rogozin of Russia, Assad made public declarations on the current affairs of war-ravaged Syria which covered diplomacy, trade, relations with the West and Syria's Kurdish forces.

"Any who collaborate with a foreign power to fight the Syrian Army are traitors," Assad said, "it's as simple as that". Later, the official twitter account of the Syrian presidency clarified that this was "The position of the Syrian Government on the Kurds in Eastern Syria."

Assad, a staunch Arab nationalist, has long been critical of the political advancements made by Kurds in Northern and Eastern Syria. On the first of September, Assad told a crowd that "the national identity of Syria exists but its essence is Arabism", and just a month prior, Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad

called the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria a "joke".

That the office of the Syrian Presidency chose to mention the Kurds in Eastern Syria, as opposed to the North, might also be indicative of future relations in the Eastern Province of Deir ez-Zor, where both the Syrian Democratic Forces (supported by the U.S) and the Syrian Army (supported by Russia) have coordinated separate campaigns to rid the province from the Islamic State.

While Russia and the United States drew a de-confliction line to prevent clashes between the two forces, over the course of the operation the agreement was broken. In late September, the Russian air-force bombed SDF forces in the countryside of Deir Ez-Zor. The attack cost the lives of two SDF fighters and even compelled the U.S. Acting Assistant Secretary of State to publicly condemn Russia. "It's not a rivalry," Satterfield said at the time "It's not a contest".

The Kurdish forces holding territory in Northern and Eastern Syria have also been a target of the opposition in Syria, especially from Turkish backed FSA forces. Just on the 12th of November, FSA cofounder Colonel Riad al-Assad concluded a conference in Istanbul which brought 250 tribal figures from across Syria to vow an attack against Kurdish forces in Eastern Syria. Speaking to Zaman al-Wasl, Colonel Riad al-Assad promised to organise FSA forces to fight Assad, IS and Kurdish forces in Eastern Syria.

In the press conference, Assad also mentioned his support for the Sochi peace talks being organised by Russia, while he expressed criticisms towards the Geneva peace talks. "The big difference between the Sochi and Geneva peace talks" he said "is in the types of people in attendance. In Geneva the very individuals we struggle against are given a platform, individuals who don't represent the Syrian nation and sometimes can't even represent themselves."

In stark contrast, the United States says it is fully supportive of the UN-brokered Geneva talks. The Kurdish PYD, a key political party in the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, has not been offered a seat in the Geneva peace talks although to the dismay of Turkey, it may be offered a table at the Sochi peace talks.