

# Astana Peace Talks on Syria are Over, What Next? Syria's Draft Constitution. Russian Influence in the Middle East

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*Adam Garrie asked Syrian journalist Afraa Dagher to reflect on the recent Astana Peace Conference and how this impacts on Syria's long-term future.*

AG: The new draft constitution seems to have disappointed people on all sides. It's not surprising that terrorist's whose currency is blood have rejected it, but there are many provisions which seem to weaken the Syrian Arab Republic's standing as a secular, multi-national, multi-religious, tolerant republic for all citizens. What is your reaction to such provisions?

AD: Well, first of all, Syria is a sovereign country. It is not acceptable to have a constitution which was written by another country, even if this country is our ally. The real Syrians have been sacrificing themselves since 2011 against the forces of the so-called "Arab Spring", for the unity and sovereignty of Syria against the traitors, the armed mercenary forces who follow the western agenda of balkanizing Syria.

This is self-evident, as those agents replaced the flag of independent Syria with the French mandate flag, alongside with Islamic state one! So Syrians and only Syrians are qualified to make a decision about their constitution, not any other country, above all, not the traitorous "rebels". Moreover, it is a primary Israeli goal to destroy the value of our Syrian Arab Army and our armed forces! This is the same goal of the opposition fighters who in many cases have relations with the Israeli occupier.

AG: Dr. Bashar Jaafari spoke in Astana of how Kurdish people have always been integrated into the Syrian Arab Republic as full citizens and cooperative members of society. Why then should there be specifically provisions for Kurdish territories when the problems that in the past existed in Iraq and currently exist in Turkey have been largely absent in contemporary Syrian history?

AD: Let me repeat an important quote by Dr. Bashar Al-Jafari, the civilized, polyglot, open minded and real great Syrian man:

"The western countries should stop supporting those terrorists and stop wasting their people's money".

And this is the real solution to this war in Syria. So it is not by giving self-administration to the Kurds or any autonomy they want because then the other minorities will want the same

later. That way Syria would be federated into sectarian and ethnic states! When this “Revolution” started in March of 2011, there were two requests from the “Rebel” side that I can’t forget.

First of all, they asked (just like the Islamic brotherhood) to allow their women to be in full cover, ( same as “ISIS”) Secondly, the Kurds who were living in peace with us and have all the same rights as other Syrians suddenly asked to be given Syrian nationality in order to be able to participate in conferences so that they could later ask for Kurdish autonomy. It is clear that all this was well planned against the unity of Syria and against its great army.

AG: It was during the Corrective Period under the late President Hafez al-Assad that the Syrian Arab Republic as we know it today was born. What is the significance of this, especially given how the 1960s was such a turbulent decade in Syria’s history?

AD: Well, President Hafez Al-Assad was the iron leader in a region which is surrounded by neighbors such as Turkey, Israel, agent kings of the west, like in Jordan and the Arab Gulf, etc.

A strict and iron leader is the best one in this case. His Corrective Movement and also the real revolution in March 1963, were against capitalism and imperialism. It was about building Syria, building universities, and public hospitals , almost for free. It was meant to build an educated generation, not a Wahhabi state.

While the so-called “Arab Spring” intended to destroy the land and its people, that movement was one to organize people in democratic institutions to express their views on how to build a strong Syria, it was also intended to improve our economy and political life in united strong nation. I’m not saying the Syrian government is perfect, every country has corruption, but those suicide bombers backed by underdevelopment countries like Saudi Arabia and supported by the Zionist occupying entity Israel, are certainly not going to correct this.

We trust our secular leadership and we trust its wisdom and ideology, however, those who organized this war, don’t want Syrians to have such a great leader with such a great army.

AG: Prior to 1975, Lebanon was presented as the western model for a multi-ethnic, multi-religious state in the Middle East. The horrible Civil War, of course, ended this ideal in the minds of the west and beyond. How has Syria managed to avoid major conflict until the foreign interventions of 2011?

AD: On 14 February 2016, President Bashar Al-Assad — this admired voice of his people in Syria — spoke before the members of the Central Bar Association and the affiliated councils of the Syrian cities. He called the foreign-demanded call for “transition” as the attempt to destroy Syria:

The so-called “transitional governing body” is a structure that will pave the way for an inner political conflict that reaches all social levels, which ultimately means a state of utter paralysis.

This structure disassembles all basic structures, particularly the armed forces, leaving us with one choice: a sectarian constitution. When this happens, sects are pitted against each other. Each sect seeks to strengthen its own position by seeking external support until the

homeland becomes dependent on external forces. Because of the non-sectarian nature of our constitution, we have avoided such crises like the Lebanese one.

AG: Russia has had to play a precarious balancing act in bringing Turkey, an enemy of the Syrian people into the peace talks. Do you as a Syrian feel that this was the right or wrong decision?

AD: – Well, regardless of Russia, the voice of the Syrian streets always says, about each peace conference held for Syria, that there is no use of inviting the so-called rebels, they are not the ones deciding for themselves, they can't make a decisions, It would better to invite their masters from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and the US. The Russians already know that well, as they experienced this reality when fighting on the ground alongside with our Syrian Arab Army.

AG: Do you still consider Russia a friend?

AD: Syria was the gate for Russia to regain its position in the Middle East again, as a superpower. Our alliance is not modern, it is a strong and old one. Russia, for its part, supported Syria against the global plot against us.

I hope this friendship will continue regardless of the latest events including the draft constitution and the idea of accepting safe zone in Syria. Anyway, I'm not in a position power to evaluate it, however, I know that Syrians and Russians complete each other as a strong alliance and need to collaborate with each other against the US. The US is not trustworthy and I think Russia knows that more than anyone else.

AG: What is your message to Russian politicians and to the Russian people who overwhelmingly feel a sense of brotherhood and eternal friendship with the Syrian people?

AD: Much love and respect for Russia and its people, may the souls of their martyrs rest in peace. The first Russian pilot was killed by Turkish shot when he was on his jet over Syrian land close to Turkish borders. The beautiful female doctors that were killed by Turkey and the US-backed rebels who targeted them directly in Aleppo. We are one team against terrorists and their masters, and we will stay that way, brothers and sisters in two countries.

AG: As Russia has a permanent base in Syria, do you believe this assures Russia's long-term support for the Syrian Arab Republic?

AD: it is a great basis on which to secure both Syria and Russia and to strengthen Russian influence in the Middle East.

AG: Do you believe any changes should be made to the current Syrian Constitution?

AD: It is Syrians and only Syrians who can decide on their constitution by referendum. No country can forcibly replace the existing constitution of a sovereign country. Moreover, there are two red lines:

- 1 The unity of Syria and

- 2 The immunity of our Syrian Arab Army, and armed forces, they are the protectors of Syria.

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