

Astana Syria Peace Talks Conclude. “Negotiating with Terrorists is Risky...”

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Negotiating with terrorists is risky under any circumstances, especially with Turkey one of the key players involved.

Throughout six years of conflict, it supported ISIS, al-Nusra and likeminded groups it now says it opposes. Has Erdogan turned a page or is he engaged in a grand deception for his own self-interest?

He's long sought annexation of northern Syrian territory. He profited hugely from sale of stolen Syrian oil. He proved many times he can't be trusted.

Saying he now seeks peaceful conflict resolution can't be accepted at face value without lots of proving on his part – much more needed than agreements reached with Russia and Iran.

Day one in Astana resolved nothing. Day two concluded with a joint statement, saying Russia, Iran and Turkey will establish a trilateral mechanism for monitoring ceasefire.

They agreed to continue combating ISIS and al-Nusra, as well as other groups breaching the ceasefire, stressing conflict resolution is only possible diplomatically.

Opposition delegation spokesman Yahya al-Aridi said “(t)here will be no signing. The guarantor countries (Russia, Iran and Turkey) will just release a document.”

An unnamed Syrian delegation source said his delegation won't sign the document. It's “being drawn up by the guarantor countries in order to present it to other talks participants.”

Astana set the stage for further discussions in Geneva next month. Three previous efforts there failed because of Obama obstructionism.

With Trump rhetorically opposed to US interventionism, hopefully a better outcome is possible this time – by no means certain given Western and regional opposition to Syrian sovereignty, Obama's war waged for regime change, wanting puppet governance replacing Assad.

If Trump follows through responsibly on what he's said, he'll focus solely on combating terrorism. Doing it requires ending US support and cooperating jointly with Russia for a common objective.

From Astana, Putin's special envoy to Syria Aleksandr Lavrentiev predicted a "good outcome" despite no direct talks between Syrian delegates and their Saudi cobbled together High Negotiations Committee counterparts, representing anti-Assad terrorist groups (excluding ISIS and al-Nusra).

Lavrentiev called day one "fruitful" – diplomatic code language for nothing achieved toward conflict resolution. Monday talks excluded discussions on "such relevant topics as the ceasefire regime, the distinction of opposition forces from Daesh and Al-Nusra Front, and the joint fight against terrorism," he explained.

On Turkey's insistence, Kurdish YPG representatives weren't invited to Astana. On Monday, a statement said they're "not bound" by decisions reached, if any.

It's too early to call Astana a major breakthrough. Key is what Trump decides, unknown so far. Tuesday is only his fifth day in office.

Senate members haven't yet confirmed his secretary of state designee Rex Tillerson. On Monday, he got Senate Foreign Relations Committee approval, assuring his confirmation in short order with Republicans holding a Senate majority.

In a Monday Astana meeting opening statement, Syrian delegation head Bashar al-Jaafari explained hordes of anti-government terrorist fighters were recruited, trained, funded, armed, and deployed cross-border from neighboring countries (mainly Turkey) to wage war on Syrian sovereignty and its people.

"Astana hosting the intra-Syrian meeting represents the mediation policy and the openness of Kazakhstan, and is the fruit of the joint efforts exerted by several parties, particularly Russia and Iran, with the aim of fixing the decision of cessation of hostilities all over Syria except for the areas where terrorist organizations such as ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra and others which rejected to join the agreement are active," he said.

He blasted the Obama administration and its rogue allies for using terrorist foot soldiers as weapons to destroy Syrian independence.

He hopes talks in Astana and Geneva next month will advance the cause of conflict resolution and peace.

"Syria which we love is the homeland of diversity in all its forms, a homeland where the Syrians believe in the basis and principles of their independent democratic secular state based upon political pluralism, the rule of law, independence of the judiciary system, equality among citizens in rights and duties, guaranteeing cultural and social variety among all spectrum of the Syrian people, as well as maintaining the continuation of the work of the state institutions," he said.

He called on all parties to work responsibly for ending six years of devastating carnage – while criticizing opposition representatives for inappropriate, undiplomatic, inflammatory remarks at the start of Monday's session.

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