

Issues at Stake in Syria's "Peace Talks"

By [Eric Zuesse](#)

Global Research, March 01, 2017

[Strategic Culture Foundation](#) 28 February
2017

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

Syria's peace-talks are about settling a horrific six-year-long war, but this is more of an international war that's being waged on the battlefields of Syria, than it is a civil war within Syria itself.

This fact is often ignored by the press, but the peace-talks are really more between the foreign powers than between their proxies who are killing each other (and Syria's civilians) within Syria. These peace-talks are international because the principals in this war are international. And, because the principals are international, the principles that are being fought over are, too — they are so basic that the end-result from these talks will be not only some sort of new peace, but some sort of new Constitution for Syria: really a new nation of Syria.

The main issues which are being negotiated at the Syrian Peace Talks that resumed on February 23rd in Geneva, are constitutional in nature: whether Syria is to be governed under Sharia (or Quran-based) law, or whether instead it is to be a multi-ethnic democracy. The Sharia-law side is supported by the United States, Turkey, and the Arabic royal families, who own Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Oman, all of which royal families are fundamentalist Sunnis. The multi-ethnic democracy side is supported by Bashar al-Assad (Syria's current leader), Russia, and Iran.

Some proponents of the Sharia-law side are advocating that Syria be broken up into at least three separate ethnically-defined nations, which then would be Kurdish, Sunni, and Shiite, each of which would be ruled only by its majority ethnicity, just as Israel is ruled by its majority ethnicity, which in Israel's case is Jewish. (Another prominent recent example was apartheid South Africa, except that in that particular case, it was the White minority who ruled over the Black majority. Of course, those racial laws ended when Blacks there became allowed to vote.)



In essence, the contested polarity is between whether the future of Syria will be as a religious-ethnic dictatorship, versus as a multi-ethnic (including multi-religious) democracy.

[All polling of the Syrian people, even during the current war and even performed by Western polling firms, shows a strong preference by the Syrians for a multi-ethnic, entirely non-sectarian, democracy.](#) Moreover, when questioned as to whether they believe this still to be possible for Syria, solid majorities of the Syrian people respond in the affirmative. Generally speaking, they blame, above all, the United States government, as being behind the influx of tens of thousands of jihadists from around the world into Syria to overthrow and replace

the Assad government. (Perhaps they don't so much blame America's Islamist allies for this invasion by jihadists, because the Saudis etc. are Muslims and mainly Arabs, as Syrians themselves are.)

(In recent years, those findings by the main polling-firm, WIN/Gallup, can be seen here:

2014: <http://www.orb-international.com/perch/resources/syriadatatablesjuly2014.pdf>

2015: <https://www.orb-international.com/perch/resources/syriadata.pdf>

2016: <https://www.orb-international.com/perch/resources/2016-syria-tabs-weighted.pdf>.)

Syrians are the most secular nation in the entire Middle East. The effort by the U.S. and its allies to impose a jihadist government there is not popular with the Syrian people.

In preparation for the current round of U.N.-sponsored Syrian Peace Talks, there was [a preliminary peace conference in Astana Kazakhstan](#), in which the participants were Russia, Iran, Turkey, and Syria; and it produced a strong statement in favor of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, democracy in Syria. Russia also produced there, for future consideration by the Syrian people, a draft Constitution of that type, to be discussed and ultimately voted on by the Syrians.

[Agence France Presse reported, on February 12th](#), that (boldfaces and links here are by me):

Syria's opposition on Sunday announced its 21-member delegation, including 10 rebel representatives, for a new round of UN-sponsored peace talks in Geneva scheduled for February 20 [subsequently rescheduled for the 23rd].

The delegation will be headed by [Nasr al-Hariri](#) (pictured), a member of the [National Coalition](#), replacing Assad al-Zoabi, who led the opposition at several previous rounds of talks in Geneva last year.

The delegation's chief negotiator was named as Mohamed Sabra, a lawyer who was part of the opposition's technical team during negotiations in Geneva in 2014.

He replaces Mohamad Alloush, a rebel from the powerful Army of Islam faction.

Alloush served as negotiator during three rounds of peace talks in Geneva as well as negotiations in the Kazakh capital Astana in January organised by Turkey and Russia.

Neither Alloush nor the Army of Islam were listed as members of the delegation to Geneva, though it was unclear if the group was boycotting the talks or would be represented by other delegates.

No reason was given for the decision to replace either Zoabi or Alloush.

[Alloush had been selected by the Saud family](#), and so was rejected by Russia, Iran and Syria, at the Astana conference. Turkey at that conference proposed and the others accepted Sabra, who [heads the Syrian Republican Party](#), which was [created in 2008](#) simply to criticize Assad, and didn't even become active until it [received major funding from Turkey and became publicly «founded» in Istanbul in 2014, by members of Turkey's ruling Justice and](#)

[Development Party](#). So: now, instead of Assad negotiating with an agent of the Saud family (Alloush), as had been the case when the U.S. ran the preparations for the peace-process (the process that U.S. President Barack Obama [sabotaged on 17 September 2016 and thus brought to an end](#)), Assad is negotiating this time with an agent of the Erdogan family (Sabra), and [Russia instead of the U.S. has been running the preparations for the peace-process](#), which is currently under way at the U.N. in Geneva.

The National Coalition was created [on 12 November 2012](#) by the Saud family and their Gulf Cooperation Council of all of Arabia's royal families, who own (other than the Sauds' Saudi Arabia), Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Oman. Nasr al-Hariri, who thus represents those families, heads the delegation of 'Syrian opposition groups' that Turkey's Mohamed Sabra will be negotiating on behalf of. So, actually, Assad will be negotiating against representatives of, and who are negotiating on behalf of, all of the Middle East's leaders of Sunni-run nations.

Furthermore, [«Nasr al-Hariri selected 21 opposition delegates during a meeting of the Syrian opposition in Riyadh in preparation for the talks»](#), and so the entire selection-process for those 'Syrian opposition' members was done under the Sauds' watchful eyes (and money).

Magnanimously, a representative of the National Coalition, who spoke about Russia's allowing 'the Syrian opposition groups' to be selected by Turkey, the Sauds, and the other Middle-Eastern Sunni powers, [«called it a 'sacrifice' that Russia, which backs the Syrian regime, has offered to Turkey](#) in the hope that in return it would win concessions to make room for the so-called Moscow platform, named after the Syrian parties that are under the political influence of the Kremlin.» ([Those](#) are generally the strongest supporters of a secular democratic unified Syria.)

However, on February 24th was [reported](#) that, «Hariri repeated in his news conference that the opposition's priority was to begin negotiations on a political transition with a transitional governing body, suggesting it would not back down on its demands that Syrian regime leader Bashar al-Assad step down». The U.S.-Saudi alliance refused for the person whom all polls showed to be overwhelmingly the top choice by Syrians to lead their country — the [only person who was wanted by over 50% of the Syrian public to be Syria's leader — Bashar al-Assad, to be allowed onto the electoral ballot for Syria's Presidency; they refused to allow democracy in Syria](#). So, the Sunni powers (which also includes the U.S. as their core military arm) are as steadfast as always, about overthrowing and replacing Syria's non-sectarian government. And they all blame the main Shiite nation, Iran, for all problems: «'Iran is the main obstacle to any kind of political deal,' Hariri said.» To them, this is really a war to conquer Iran; it's like Christianity's [30 Years' War](#) had been in Europe, back in the 1600s. But, of course, it is also what RFK Jr. has appropriately called it — [«Syria: Another Pipeline War.»](#) It's rooted both in religion and in economics.

On January 24th, at the close of the preparatory talks, in Astana, for the current peace talks in Geneva to end Syria's war, was issued a [«Joint Statement by Iran, Russia, Turkey» asserting that they all:](#)

Reaffirm their commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, non-sectarian and democratic State, as confirmed by the UN Security Council.

Russia was the only one of those three nations that also proposed then [a specific draft](#)

[Constitution](#) for postwar Syria. Perhaps that's because Russia is the only one of these three whose own government and [Constitution](#) is entirely secular. Thus, too, Turkey's key agent at the current Geneva talks, Mohamed Sabra, was reported, back on 17 November 2016 (two months after the U.S. had ended its participation in Syria's peace process) to have — [as Egypt's Al-Ahram put it](#) — especially criticized Russia's proposals for «trying to isolate Islamic groups that disagree with the principles of a democratic and secular state, and thus exclude them from the political process. 'This will lead to a realignment of forces, change the essence of the military conflict in Syria, and sow the seeds of civil war in the country,' Sabra remarked.»

Assuming that Egypt's main newspaper was accurately paraphrasing and translating what the chief negotiator for the U.S.-and-Sunni alliance actually said, Russia was being criticized there for insisting that what follows after Syria's war must be controlled entirely by the people of Syria, and not by anyone outside the country — Sabra, the chief negotiator for the U.S.-Sunni alliance, actually was speaking publicly there, against commitment to «the principles of a democratic and secular state.» It's actually fitting: [twice in one day](#), the Secretary General had criticized the U.S. position for its opposition to democracy in Syria.

The original source of this article is [Strategic Culture Foundation](#)
Copyright © [Eric Zuesse](#), [Strategic Culture Foundation](#), 2017

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Eric Zuesse](#)

About the author:

Investigative historian Eric Zuesse is the author, most recently, of *They're Not Even Close: The Democratic vs. Republican Economic Records, 1910-2010*, and of *CHRIST'S VENTRILOQUISTS: The Event that Created Christianity*.

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca