

The Syria Peace Talks in Astana. Will Trump Administration Participate?

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

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During six years of Obama's war, three rounds of Geneva talks failed – because of US obstructionism.

Neocons infesting Obama's administration wanted endless war for regime change, not peace; mass slaughter and destruction, not conflict resolution; chaos, not calm.

Will Trump go a different way? It'll take a while to find out. Much depends on what he decides. Sunday is his third day in office.

Though active pre-inauguration, Friday and Saturday, he won't hit the ground running until Monday – even though working days are every day for presidents.

Russia extended an invitation to his administration to participate in Astana, Kazakhstan Syria peace talks – specifically National Security Advisor Michael Flynn. Delegations from Syria, Russia, Iran, Turkey, an umbrella group representing opposition terrorists (excluding ISIS and al-Nusra), and pro-Western UN special envoy Staffan de Mistura are attending.

According to acting State Department spokesman Mark Toner, “(g)iven our presidential inauguration and the immediate demands of the transition, a delegation from Washington” won't be participating.

Trump's secretary of state designee Rex Tillerson hasn't yet been confirmed. On Monday, Senate Foreign Relations Committee members will vote on his nomination.

Republicans hold a one seat majority. Neocon senators Marco Rubio (FL) and John McCain (AZ) haven't said if they'll support or oppose him.

With or without majority Foreign Relations Committee approval, he's likely to get the needed 50 or more full Senate votes to become Trump's chief foreign policy official.

Until then, the office of secretary of state is being run by lower-level bureaucrats, including Obama holdover Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Shannon, Jr.

US ambassador to Kazakhstan George Krol will attend Syria peace talks as an observer. On February 8, follow-up discussions will be held in Geneva, hopefully with full US participation, committed for conflict resolution – not rage for endless war like Obama.

Astana talks will focus on confirming ceasefire terms agreed to by Russia, Iran and Turkey,

based on the provisions of Security Council Resolution 2254 – effective midnight December 29, ISIS and al-Nusra excluded.

According to an unnamed source close to the talks, no new initiatives are planned. “The key task is to confirm” ceasefire agreement terms.

From the opposition’s side at the talks will be exclusively representatives of armed groups, who can undertake straight obligations to observe truce.

For the first time, Syrian officials and opposition group representatives will hold face-to-face talks. Whether success is possible this time, unlike earlier, remains to be seen.

Astana was chosen as a neutral venue. Talks are scheduled for January 23 and 24, maybe longer if necessary – to be followed by a news conference when completed.

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago. He can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net.

His new book as editor and contributor is titled “Flashpoint in Ukraine: How the US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III.”

<http://www.claritypress.com/LendmanIII.html>

Visit his blog site at sjlendman.blogspot.com.

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About the author:

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago. He can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net. His new book as editor and contributor is titled "Flashpoint in Ukraine: US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III."
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