

Astana Peace Talks: West Losing Its Influence in Middle East

By [Mehmet Ersoy](#)

Global Research, January 28, 2017

[Inside Syria Media Center](#) 28 January 2017

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

In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

On January 25, *The Financial Times* [published](#) an article on the role of Western countries at the Astana negotiations.

Author Erika Solomon writes that Western diplomats could do absolutely nothing to influence the negotiations and “found themselves relegated with journalists to the plaid-carpeted Irish Pub of a hotel in Kazakhstan.”

Astana showed one evident thing: Moscow, Tehran and Ankara firmly took the roles of guarantors of peace in Syria. And it’s no wonder that this has happened as even the Syrian opposition noticed that U.S. diplomacy’s dominance in the Middle East has faded. “I’m not feeling so sorry for the U.S. or the west losing its role. They never really pushed for us,” one opposition delegate said. “Look where they are now - literally in a corner.”



“We’re like party crashers . . . And we’re completely out of the loop,” one of the Western diplomats told *The Financial Times*.

It appears evident that the anti-government militants in Syria decided to negotiate with those parties which can really affect Middle East policy and whose opinions are respected in the international arena. Russia, Iran and Turkey did what the United Nations has failed to do during the past six years, which is to bring the Syrian government and the armed opposition

to the negotiations table.

Another important thing is that the three guarantors took concrete steps. The Astana conference decided on a ceasefire control mechanism, and certain measures to separate the opposition from terrorists will be created and implemented.

The negotiations that took place in Geneva in 2015 left participants feeling rather hopeless, which even the militants acknowledge. “[In Geneva, there was] no plan, no nothing. Here [in Astana], you feel things are planned, you feel the influential parties in Syria are trying to reach a specific objective, whatever it is,” said Nasr Hariri, an opposition delegate.

Another point proving the parties are up to solving the Syrian crisis is a draft of a new Syrian constitution worked out with the close participation of Russia. It has been handed over to the opposition. During the entire conflict to date, neither the UN nor any Western state has attempted to make such a leap to achieve peace in Syria.

A huge difference between Astana and Geneva is a shift in the attitude of the opposition towards the Syrian government. Waddah Abd-Rabbo, owner of the Watan newspaper, noticed that in Switzerland, the opposition was always stuck on discussing ‘dictator Assad’, whereas in the Kazakhstan capital, the opposition was ready to negotiate a peace process.

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