

Iran has been “Implacable in the Rejection of Washington’s Destructive Role in Syria”

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Global Research, February 10, 2017

[Khamenei.ir](#) 9 February 2017

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

Theme: [Terrorism](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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Professor Tim Anderson is a distinguished author and senior lecturer of political economy at the University of Sydney, Australia. In an interview with [Khamenei.ir](#), he answers questions about the Syrian crisis, the Astana peace talks as well as the role of Iran, Russia and Turkey in the peace process.

The following is the full text of the interview:

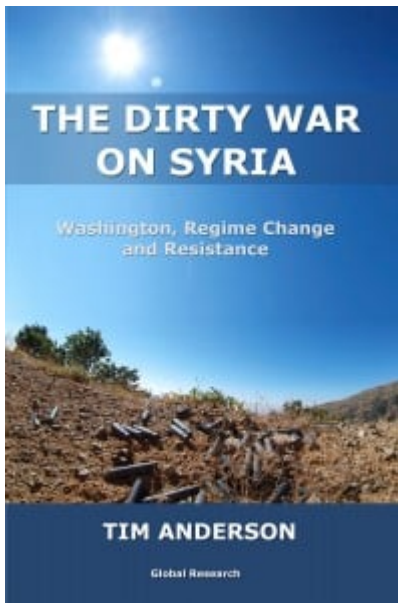
How would the “Astana Talks” help solve the crisis in Syria?

I believe the Astana talks provide another opportunity for the terrorist groups and their backers to give up their useless and destructive path. What has been most significant is that those armed groups which have chosen to attend must confront Syria, Russia, Iran and Turkey, with the USA, al Saud, Qatar, Britain and France excluded. That is a step closer to reality, as the latter group has only played a destructive role, up until now, while the former group is dominated by those in alliance with the Syrian alliance. Turkey alone at Astana represents the sponsors of the al Qaeda groups. Further, the NATO-GCC terrorists come as armed groups and not with the pretence of being a political ‘opposition’. If the armed groups (e.g. ‘Jaysh al Islam’) agree to put down their arms, that will leave the banned terrorist groups more isolated. If they do not agree, no-one can say they were not given an opportunity. What I call the Syrian Alliance (principally Syria, Hezbollah, Iran and Russia) will be seen to have made every effort to avoid bloodshed.

Has Turkish involvement been helpful in recent months?

A. The practical benefit of Turkey’s recent engagement was seen in the relatively orderly evacuation of east Aleppo. That helped a more rapid liberation of that part of the city, with the deportation of several thousand terrorists and their families to their temporary position in Idlib, and the freeing of around 90 thousand civilian hostages. Turkey’s role in that effective surrender was important, as the Turkish state had become the chief sponsor of the armed groups. On the other hand, it seems likely that Turkey’s leadership also backed subsequent attacks on Syria by DAESH (for example in Deir Ezzor) and the al Nusra-led groups (though they have been busy killing themselves in Idlib, as a result of recriminations over their defeat in Aleppo), in an attempt to strengthen Mr. Erdogan’s hand against Russia, Syria and Iran at the Astana talks. Turkey’s leadership has been forced to the diplomatic table, both by military defeats of its proxy armies on the ground and through the important strategic relationships Turkey maintains with Russia and Iran. The Syrian Government, at this stage, has no real relationship with Turkey’s Government; but some sort of relationship between these neighbors must be rebuilt. Unfortunately for the people of Turkey, the violent

recriminations seen in Idlib (it is said that almost 2,000 have been killed by the sectarian infighting) seem likely to keep passing into Turkey, as the terror groups are driven out of Syria.



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Why do Syrian negotiators in “Astana Talks” want rebels to lay down their arms in exchange for an amnesty deal? Is it legitimate?

A. It is certainly true that many Syrians resent the amnesties given to former Syrian fighters, whom they regard as mercenaries and terrorists. We know that the [Persian] Gulf monarchies and some NATO states have paid them higher salaries than Syrian soldiers, with DAESH fighters on the highest salaries. Many Syrians regard these traitors as no better than their foreign terrorist partners. However the Syrian Government’s practice, at least since 2012, has been to remove as many Syrians as possible from the conflict through a ‘reconciliation’ process, recognizing that they must address a post-war legacy of bitterness. Many thousands have already taken advantage of this process. For the same ‘reconciliation’ reasons the Syrian Army has not ‘carpet bombed’ al Qaeda held areas such as Douma in rural east Damascus. The bloodshed must be minimized. The post war ‘reconciliation’ challenge that the government of President Bashar al Assad must face is similar to, but much greater than, the healing process attempted by his father after the Muslim Brotherhood’s failed insurrection in Hama, back in 1982.

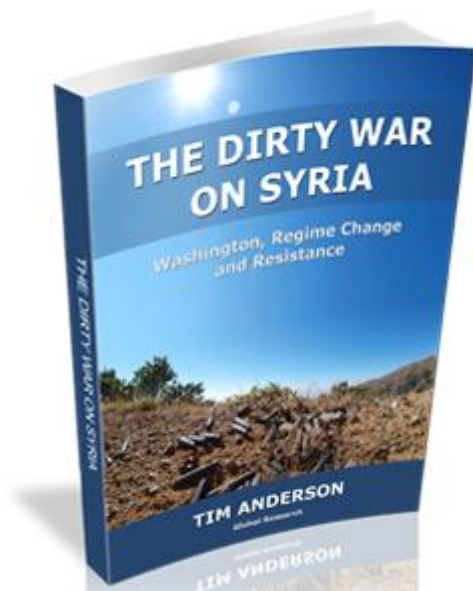
A member of the rebel delegation in “Astana Talks” told AFP on Monday that the group would agree to have Russia serve as a guarantor of the current ceasefire but not Iran; why are they so hostile toward Iran?

A. This seems a combination of the recognition of simple power politics, combined with al Saud style sectarian ideology. The sectarian groups, with little skill in politics or diplomacy, must recognize the military power of Russia, while hoping that Russia will eventually withdraw. Iran, on the other hand, is seen as central to the region and is constantly demonized in pseudo-religious terms by al Saud’s Wahhabi clerics.

There is another factor. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, since 1978, has been implacable in its support of Syria and in the rejection of the destructive role of

Washington in the region. The Government of Russia, on the other hand, while maintaining support for international law and the rejection of terrorism, has seemed more diplomatically flexible. Russia constantly refers to the USA – the chief architect of all the Middle East wars and the massive terrorism – as its ‘partner’, in an attempt to resolve wider issues of geopolitics. As part of this approach Moscow has paid perhaps exaggerated attention to armed groups which have very little support within Syria. The latest version of that effort includes the circulation of a text (apparently created with very little Syrian involvement) which appears to suggest some drastic changes to Syria’s constitution. While such ideas (removal of the Presidential system, federalization, removal of the ‘Arab’ status of the Republic) may come to nothing, if and when they subjected to a Syrian vote, the process does seem to be testing the limits of diplomacy. It is not clear to what extent the Syrian Government would accept any such proposals. At worst this might maintain unrealistic expectations on the part of the armed groups and their sponsors; at best it might encourage a face saving retreat, helping resolution of the conflict.

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Government propaganda and NGO misinformation have coloured the story of the war on Syria from its inception. Stepping in to set the record straight, Dr. Tim Anderson explores the real beginnings of the conflict, the players behind it, and their agenda in his new book, “The Dirty War on Syria: Washington, Regime Change and Resistance.”

ISBN Number: 978-0-9737147-8-4

Year: 2016

Pages: 240

List Price: ~~\$23.95~~

Special Price: \$15.00

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