

What Should We Expect from the Talks on Syria in Astana?

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At the beginning of March 2017, it will be exactly six years since the beginning of the conflict in Syria. Some journalists even make unfavorable forecasts wondering about the very possibility of reconciliation. Complicated by the foreign intervention on the part of Israel war in Lebanon, for example, had been for about 15 years. But even a six-year term it is too long.

That is why we may hope that the meeting in **Astana scheduled on January 23** will eventually lead to a positive result. And then there will be an occasion to consolidate the success of the negotiations in Geneva under the auspices of the UN. So what the negotiations in Astana may lead to?

THE LATEST STATEMENTS OF THE MAIN ACTORS

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev [backed the initiative](#) to conduct the negotiations and announced its [readiness](#) to provide a platform and to support unconditional assistance to the peace process.

Syrian President Bashar al Assad considers [the possibility](#) of reaching the agreement on the Syrian crisis settlement and is ready to discuss with the anti-government forces [any questions](#) regarding fixing the conflict up to the referendum on the new constitution of Syria.

Russian President Vladimir Putin hopes that it is possible to give birth to the idea of Syrian-Syrian talks in Astana and that a [nationwide](#) cease-fire will be signed as a result. Then practical negotiations on a political reconciliation might be launched.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu [expresses concerns](#) about the violations of the ceasefire agreement because the talks planned could not take place as a result of that. Therefore Russia and Turkey are working on the issue of implementing sanctions against those violating the ceasefire.

UN Special Envoy for Syria **Staffan de Mistura** also [said at the briefing](#) that the meeting in Kazakhstan is very important and depends on the truce observance in Syria. The UN expects that Russia and Turkey will influence the parties of the conflict to stop violence. The UN guess to have positive results which might be used in Geneva talks scheduled on February 8.

Some opposition members expressed strange attitude. They have repeatedly stated about the [termination](#) of the preparations for the meeting despite their [commitments](#) to form a

delegation for the talks with the Syrian authorities in Astana.

So it's strange in this context to hear the words of John Kirby, the press secretary of the US State Department. The United States won't object if the UN secretary general's special envoy for Syria [Staffan de Mistura abandons the meeting](#) on Syria in Astana. It turns out in fact the U.S. opposes UN involvement and tries to distance from the talks, isn't it? It may benefit the meeting's participants. The cooperation of Russia, Turkey and Iran without the US has proved its effectiveness: more than 100,000 people were evacuated from Aleppo during the largest humanitarian campaign in history.

REASONS WHY ASTANA COULD WORK OUT

First, Ala'a Arafat, a member from the Change and Liberation Front opposition party, expected commitment from the parties involved in the current cease-fire, despite breaches each side accuses the other for. According to CCTV, [he pointed out](#) that the recent deal was concluded between Russia and Turkey only, excluding the U.S. and other regional players, such as Gulf States, at least for now, which means two of the most influential powers from each party of the conflict are directly involved.

The absence of the U.S. involvement in the deal will have a positive impact because Americans and Europeans were behind the failure of previous deals, either directly or indirectly. And the current Turkish-Russian agreement seems better than the one struck between Russia and the United States late last year, Arafat said, noting that the U.S.-Russian deal was criticized by the U.S.-led strike on Syria's army posts in Deir al-Zour last September, killing over 90 Syrian soldiers, enabling IS to benefit from the Syrian army's losses.

Second, it's also worth noting that Russia and Turkey named themselves as "[guarantors](#)" of the cease-fire, and stated that the next step will be holding talks in Astana. Both pledged to monitor the deal and prevent any potential breach, which translated into a strong guarantee for both the government and the opposition forces.

Third, Syria's Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem said last week that the cease-fire is [a potential starting point for a political process](#), speaking highly of the chances of success, due to what he called the "strong guarantees" from Moscow. The opposition rebels hold the same view, as they have unwavering trust in Ankara due to Turkey's support of the rebels in Syria which was crucial for their survival when facing the Russian-backed administration of President Bashar al-Assad.

Forth, in the new talks, armed factions are going to be present and they agree on the political negotiations. The main obstacle was the representation of the opposition groups, particularly the Saudi-backed Higher Negotiations Committee, which played an "obstructionist role," seen by many as an adamant stance, demanding the departure of Assad as a prerequisite to any negotiations, which of course was the stance of the supporters.

CONCLUSION

Although Russia and Turkey seek different goals in the Syrian conflict but the sides [were able to broker](#). The large-scale operation of evacuating militants from Aleppo, the successful cooperation between the two sides may hold on. Moreover, on January 9, 2017, the Turkey will witness the start of consultations between Iranian, Russian and Turkish diplomats held

to discuss the Astana meeting.

Thus, the Astana meeting is highly demanded, and it has to be expanded. A road map of regulating the Syrian crisis in short terms. It could envisage the form of power transition and the date of the referendum on Constitution, and amnesty for the opposition. Moreover, the full ceasefire agreement is expected to be fully implemented during the meeting in Astana. The sides should also draft the further peace process and the issues to be discussed in Geneva.

The Astana talks could be a historic opportunity to end the crisis and should succeed.

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