

## Has Bashar really Won?

### News:

UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura Commented recently in the lead-up to ceasefire talks in Kazakhstan that's it's time for the rebel forces to recognize that they didn't win the six and a half year long Syrian War. *"For the opposition, the message is very clear: if they were planning to win the war, facts are proving that is not the case. So now it's time to win the peace."* If one examines this statement with the facts on the ground, we can see that there is a long way to go yet in Syria.

### Comment:

Since the fall of Aleppo in January 2017 Bashar al-Assad has been proclaiming victory as he considered he dealt a heavy blow to the rebel groups. The people of Aleppo and the rebel groups who held out in Syria's largest city were abandoned by Turkey in their most critical hour, despite previously receiving weapons. With the months long siege fighters and residents of Aleppo had no choice but to accept the terms, especially since Turkey had abandoned them. Since the surrender, Idlib remained the only area with a concentration of rebel fighters.

Whilst the victory in Aleppo tilted the balance in al-Assad's favour the fact remains that the regime in Damascus lacks the manpower to win the whole country. Since the fall of Aleppo a new phase of the conflict began, this is where the regime attempted to consolidate its gains. Much of the fighting since the fall of Aleppo has been between the Kurdish SDF forces and ISIS in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor. The Syrian military has faced desertions, deaths and major losses and this was why it needs Iranian and Russian help. It has absolutely no capability to police the towns and cities it claims to have won. In many ways, the Syria regime has destroyed itself in attempting to win.

Knowing this reality a memorandum was signed in May 2017 between Russia, Iran, Turkey and some rebel factions. At the Fourth Astana conference 'safe zones' were agreed which were to become 'non-conflict' zones and along the borders of these zones checkpoints would be constructed to ensure free movement of unarmed civilians, humanitarian aid access and the continuation of economic activities. All these zones would be policed and governed by Iran, Turkey and Russia. From this it can be seen the Syrian regime will be unable to consolidate its position across the country, which could lead to the regime to get engaged in guerrilla attacks and once again lose these territories. This is why the international and regional powers will need to provide significant support to al-Assad if he is to win Syria from the people.

UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura has failed to achieve the West's political solution for Syria. The political solution under its various guises of Geneva, Astana and Riyadh are to completely end the uprising and maintain the regime in Damascus. But in all its guises it has never included the majority of rebel groups and this is why the talks always failed. After half a decade of providing cover for the regime the world has failed in imposing a political solution on the people of Syria.

The comments by all about the beginning of the end of the uprising in Syria are premature and belie the ground realities, where the regime has no capability to enforce its writ over the country's towns and cities.

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