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The Syrian crisis will continue until one side is defeated

By Paul Davis
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The Syrian peace talks ended before they began, mostly because there is no hope of peace and no one wanted to talk. What was proved by the attempt was that there must be a driving desire on both side to want peace. This desire may come from the knowledge that force will not achieve the end state that is being sought. It may come from fatigue, that the fighting has cost too much. It cannot however come from outside forces that merely want the fighting to stop but have no true tie-in with the result.

As the talks began Russian aircraft increased attacks on the opposition while Syrian Army forces began a new offence on Aleppo. Kurdish forces pushed into new territory and Turkey is reportedly building up forces on the border to push into Syria. Saudi Arabia announced it would join a ground campaign if a US coalition was formed. All of this happened while the UN was trying to start peace talks.

There is no prospect for a negotiated peace in Syria. When the Russians got involved many a pundit said it was too late and that Assad was going to lose in any case. Had the rest of the world done what they should have this might have been true. Had the world done what they should have when Russia invaded Ukraine, this would not be the situation we have now in the Middle East. The problem with attempting to negotiate away what both sides see as victory, is that a lot

of innocent people are dying. The people who claim they want to help are the people that are the cause.

Beyond Russia and Turkey, the EU and the United States are most responsible for the continuing crisis. Russia and Turkey see a national interest in supporting the fighters, which has brought those countries to the brink of war because of two egotistical and out of control leaders. The west on the other hand see the problem as an existential threat to their own national security. The refugees caused by the continuing conflict are arriving at Europe's door step or dying while making the attempt. This has forced Europe to take notice of what has been going on for the last few years. This human calamity is testing the United States as it faces prejudices verses its national values.

The current crisis in Syria will not be solved diplomatically until there is a high price for the actors directly involved to pay. With Russia and Iran shoring up what was a crumbling Assad regime there is no reason the "legitimate" government to bargain with the opposition, and sees no reason to stop attacking them. The opposition holds out hope of western intervention and will not negotiate while being attacked.

The US and the EU want to end the strife so that, for Europe, they can return the refugees, and for the US so they can comfortably continue to ignore the problem. What the west must face is the need to increase the price paid by the combatant's. This will only happen when the weight of military force is so great that peace becomes a viable alternative.

Unless both sides can be compelled to the peace table the Syrian crisis will continue until one or the other is defeated. This seems unlikely and the fact is lacking a serious change of fortunes on the ground this fight could go on for years.