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Assad Govt Agrees to Peace Talks, Doubts on Rebels

By Jason Ditz

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Though there's plenty of skepticism about the chances of next month's Geneva Conference on both sides of Syria's Civil War, the Assad government has announced that it will take part. Russia announced the agreement first, and Syrian officials later acknowledged it.

The talks are the product of an agreement by the US (which has been backing the rebels) and Russia (which has been backing the government) to try to negotiate a political solution to end the stalemated war.

Syria's rebel SNC, one of the largest umbrella groups, has been debating whether or not they will take part in the talks. The latest comments include a report from one official that they will participate, and a statement from a spokesman saying they only will if Assad resigns beforehand. Russian officials have expressed concern that the rebels remain too divided and it will be difficult for them to negotiate as a single force at the conference.

Previous efforts at negotiating peace talks have failed almost immediately, usually with the rebels demanding that President Bashar Assad unconditionally resign and hand over power to them before the talks even begin. With growing international concern about the Islamist factions dominating the rebellion, however, the US backing for this sort of policy is getting noticeably shakier, and Assad's agreement to talk virtually obliged the rebels to show up, regardless of whether they plan to make any deals.