



SIA Blog
Dr. John Bruni
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Darkness before the dawn? *The fall of Aleppo & a Russian/Iranian role in a possible peace settlement for Syria*



The end seems nigh for rebels holed up in the divided and besieged Syrian city of Aleppo. Once known for its cultural and artistic [magnificence](#), the city now lies in ruins, victim of the ongoing civil war that has wracked Syria for more than five years.

And while the West looks on in shocked disbelief that the fighting has gone on so long and has taken such a toll – some [400,000](#) people killed; 4.8 million having fled Syria as [refugees](#) so far and with another 6.6 million [internally displaced](#) by the fighting, the West’s ability to shape events on the ground in favor of the rebels has entirely evaporated.

On the other side of the ledger, Syrian government forces together with their Russian, Iranian, and Hezbollah backers, have demonstrated strength in the face of the West’s ‘absence of effort’. [They](#) are far more committed to save the Alawite-dominated government of Bashar al-Assad than the [West](#) is to seek the emergence of a functional multi-sectarian/multi-ethnic post-Assad Syria.

But it should be noted that it is likely that Moscow and Tehran's backing of Assad is conditional. They would not want to be caught up in Syria's internal struggles forever. They are in Syria to showcase to the world that both Russia and Iran are serious military powers, worthy of respect at home and abroad.

Consequently, it is unlikely that their support for Assad will go beyond the Syrian Army's recapture of Aleppo. Indeed, it is highly likely that once this objective is achieved, Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov and his Iranian counterpart, Javad Zarif, may well pressure Assad into accepting a ceasefire and a more permanent peace accord.

Would this be considered a victory for Assad?

Well, having fought back against rebels and retaining control some two-thirds of Syrian territory, (including its major cities), gives Assad the upper hand in any peace settlement. It may not be what Assad's inner circle considers an outright victory over all of Syria, but it would be enough to ensure the Alawite dominated clique in Damascus can consider its options.

It is unlikely that the Syrian Army is strong enough to launch unilateral strikes against remaining rebel held areas, post-Aleppo, without the logistical and combat support of Russia and Iran, and these powers know that. Furthermore, the West's less than tepid support of their local proxies are unlikely to change, leaving Syria and any peace process in the hands of Moscow and Tehran. Probably more so now that US President-elect Donald Trump has suggested that he and Russian President Vladimir Putin could 'get along'.

While the bloodshed and sheer human misery in Syria has been gruesome to witness, ironically, it looks as though peace may be in sight. It won't be a peace based on Western norms and conditions and as such, may not be considered legitimate in the eyes of some because Assad and his forces fought so remorselessly to get themselves to this position. And we have to remind ourselves, that the battle for Aleppo is far from over. With Aleppo on the verge of falling to Syrian government forces, it is impossible to conceive of Assad accepting any peace overtures at this critical juncture, as the latest Sino-Russian veto against a UN initiated [ceasefire](#) plan for Aleppo has shown.

Dr. John Bruni

Founder & CEO

SAGE International Australia

Image Credit:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e0/Wounded_civilians_arrive_at_hospital_Aleppo.jpg