

CHAPTER III SYRIAN PEACE PROCESS

Syrian Peace process are all about the many talks that had been done by several international actors in order to put an end to Syria Crisis, whether it is for their national interests or others. Briefly speaking, the peace talks or the peace agreements that have been carried out by the international actors, that somehow decided to involve their selves in Syria crisis, to assist Syria in resolving the prolonged crisis that took place in the country, whether the agreement or the talks involving Syria as an object (as a country involved in the talks or the negotiations) or agreements or talks that only make Syria the subject of the agreement without giving Syria any loophole to vote in the talks. These peace talks on how to solve the conflict in Syria also known as Syrian Peace Process.

Syrian peace process is known to begin in the end of 2011-2012 by The Arab League (Lundgren, 2016). Then, it was followed by one of the agreements that was very well known in the international arena and one of the Syrian peace agreements that attracted too much attention and involved several international actors, such as the United States and Russia, called as Geneva Peace Talks (2012-2017). Following the Geneva Peace Talks that had ended in 2017, another peace talks that will also address the issue of resolving the problems and achieving the peace in Syria without prejudice to both sides (government and oppositions) has been agreed upon by the international actors involved, known as Astana Peace Talks (2017-presents).

So, in this chapter the writer will give a brief explanation about the most well-known Syria Peace Talks that having a similar aim; to put an end of Syria Crisis, Geneva Peace Talks and Astana Peace Talks, along with the transition period.

A. Geneva Peace Talks

A year after the start of Syrian Crisis in 2011, the talks about on finding the solutions to solve the problems in Syria which was started under the United Nations aegis, with the talks called as Geneva Peace Talks. The Geneva Peace Talks also known as Geneva Conference on Syria, from the start until the end of the conference (2012-2017) it is known had produced around 8 rounds of meeting to talk about the solutions on Syrian Crisis (Pawlak, 2017), where the major players of this talk were the United States and Russia followed by Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, United Kingdom, Turkey, Arab League, European Union, and Qatar as the international participants of the talks (al-Badawi, 2017). The name of the talks itself was came from the place where they held the first meeting, in Geneva.

1. Geneva I Conference on Syria

Geneva I Conference on Syria, or known as an “action group” conference before, was held on 30 June 2012 in Geneva, it was initiated by the United Nations peace envoy to Syria Kofi Annan (Brahimi, 2013), and was attended by the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Russia Foreign Minister Lavrov, the representative of China, British Foreign Secretary William Hague, and Kofi Annan himself (BBC, 2012). In this talks, Annan states an official statement, said that the participant of conference agreed on the need for a "transitional government body with full executive powers" which included the members of Syria government and the opposition (BBC, 2012). Later on, this talk were condemned by Hassan Abboud, the leader of Ahrar al-sham.

2. Geneva II Conference on Syria

Geneva II Conference on Syria or also known as Geneva II Middle East peace conference was the second meeting of Geneva peace talk. It was held for 16 days straight. The first meeting was held on January 22nd 2014 in Montreux, then it was continued on January 23rd – 31st 2014 in Geneva, Switzerland and the last was held on February 10th – 15th 2014 in Geneva (Biharphraba, 2014). The aim of this talk were to put an end to the crisis/ civil war in Syria by brought together the Syrian government and the Syrian opposition to discuss.

3. Geneva III Conference on Syria

Geneva III Conference on Syria are the intended peace talks between the Syrian government and the Syrian opposition under the United Nations aegis or auspices. The talks of the third round was actually prepared by the International Syria Support Group, a negotiations of foreign powers that started in Vienna in October 2015 at the level of foreign ministers with the aim to put an end to the crisis in Syria.

Geneva III Conference on Syria was actually initiated to be held on February 1st 2016 (Miles, Irish, Perry, & Mohammed, 2016), but it was suspended until February 3rd 2016. The reason behind this was there are warning came from the opposition groups, HNC, that there was possibility the meeting could be at risk if the [offensive military operations conducted by Syrian government forces went to the north of the city of Aleppo](#) (Al Jazeera, 2016).

4. Geneva Conference on Syria 2017

Geneva Conference on Syria 2017 is also known as the combination of Geneva IV, Geneva V, Geneva VI, Geneva VII, and Geneva VIII, and still with the same purpose since the day one; to find the solutions on to put an end to the Syrian Crisis, and as a platform for the Syrian government and the Syrian opposition to discuss under the United Nations aegis (UNOG, 2018). The Geneva Peace Talks were held on February 23rd and March 3rd 2017 (Syria peace talks: Sides fail to meet on first day in Geneva, 2017), and it was continued by the Geneva VII on July 10th 2017 (Geneva-7 round of Syria talks kicks off, 2017), and the last round of the Geneva Talks (Geneva VIII) was held on November 2017 with the same aim; to resolve the crisis in Syria (Moubayed, 2017).

5. The Result of Geneva Peace Talks

The Geneva Peace Talks had been initiated since 2012 until 2017 with the aim to resolving the problem in Syria as a platform for the Syrian government and the Syrian opposition to discuss under the United Nations aegis. The long talks between two parties from Syria and under several international actors was to be expected to have a great solution for Syria to put an end to the long crisis (civil war), but as sad as it could be, the long talks of Geneva Peace Talks was considered as failed. The both parties and the international actors that decide to involve in the Syria crisis cannot find any great solution to put a stop to the war.

It was said that the peace talks in Geneva had failed to hammer out any deal between the conflicted parties in Syria due to major sticking points. Seven previous Geneva Peace Talks were unable to reach a breakthrough because of the

disagreement over the Transitional Government Body that somehow became the key point that need to be reached in the previous conferences. One of the reasons of it unable to reach the goal was because the opposition group insisted on Assad departure on the governance as a precondition for them to continue the talks, which flatly was rejected by Moscow and Damascus. However, in the last round of Geneva Peace Talks, they still cannot reach any goals that had been set up before. One of the insider said that it was nearly impossible for them to reach the goals since the Syrian Government group sees no reason to engage in any serious negotiations. It just wants to crush all of the rebellion once, on the other side the opposition is as divided as ever (Moubayed, 2017).

At the end of the Geneva Peace Talks, it was decided by all participants and the conflicted parties (the Syrian Government and the Syrian Opponents) need to reluctantly agree on the mutual solutions (al-Badawi, 2017).

A. Astana Peace Talks

Whatever the results achieved on Geneva peace Talks before for both parties, it can still be said that the agreement does not produce the right thing to be achieved without harming both parties, but in reality the results achieved and forced to be accepted by both parties are more favorable for the government and harms the opposition. In the end of 2016, Russia submitted a proposal to form a new peace talks that could replace Geneva with the aim of focusing on attaining a cessation of hostilities, rather than forging of a political solution. The Russian initiative itself was actually the request of the Syrian authorities for help to immediately resolve the existing problems in the country (Priya, 2017).

Astana Negotiations was another process to save the Syria that led by Russia, Turkey and Iraq. The name of the peace talks came from the place where the process took a place in Astana, one of the cities in Kazakhstan. It was noted by the Kazakhstan, even though the peace talks was taking place in Astana, it does not want to or has any direct stakes in the Syrian crisis itself. Kazakhstan makes sure that it needs to be notified by them to the international arena. Also, in the first meeting that was held in Astana, Kazakhstan had made it clear that it only provided the platform for the meeting and it will not involve itself in the peace talks at all (Nurshayeva, 2017), similar to earlier in 2015 where Kazakhstan only hosted the talks between the Syrian oppositions, but at the same time the President of Kazakhstan said that they are willing to send the military troops or any else if the United nations told them so (Nazarbayev, 2017).

The differences between Geneva Peace Talks and Astana Peace Talks are the place where the meeting will be held, the goals of each talks, and the guard of the peace talks as it had been said that Astana Peace Talks were guarded and guaranteed by Russia, Turkey and Iraq (Porter, 2016).

1. First Round of Astana Peace Talks

The first round of Astana Peace Talks was began on January 23rd and 24th 2017, which the talks was described as the Astana-isation of the Geneva Peace Talks. It was implying a move towards the Syrian opposition directing military operations and far from the Syrian political impact (Doucet, 2017). The first day of the Astana Talks ended without any clear agreements (Abdulahim, Syria Talks in Kazakhstan Get Rough Start, 2017). On the second day (January 24th 2017), it was clear that the Astana Peace Talks was aiming to support the framework in accordance with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 –a resolution that demand all partied

immediately cease any attacks against the civilian targets, it urges all Member States to support efforts to achieve a ceasefire and requests the U.N. to convene the parties to engage in formal negotiations in early January 2016– and so, in the second meeting they reached an agreement for Russia, Iran, and Turkey to form a joint monitoring body to enforce the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 ceasefire (Wintour, 2017). Also, the trilateral mechanism involving the three guarantor countries of Russia, Iran, and Turkey to ensure full compliance with the December 2016 ceasefire was also established (Al Jazeera, 2017). The talks generated diverse reactions among the participants: while the Syrian government appreciated the outcome, the opposition refused to sign the final document. Specifically, the advisor of Syrian Opposition Group insisted that Iran needs to remove its forces from Syrian, because he thought and stated that the safe wellbeing of Syrian citizens to be the priority of this peace talks (The New Arab, 2017).

After the peace talks in 2017, Russia as one of the guarantors of Astana Peace Talks offered a draft for the future constitution of Syria, introducing the decentralized authorities, strengthen the parliament, and realize secularism by abolishing the Islamic jurisprudence as a source of legislation. Although, it was later on that the draft was getting rejected by the Syria Opposition (Meyer, 2017).

2. The Second Round of Astana Peace Talks

The second round of the Astana Peace Talks was held on February 16, 2017 in Astana, Kazakhstan which was marked by showing the expression of distrust between the Syria Government and the Syria Opposition group. The Syria Government accused Turkey of supporting any terrorist group in Raqqa (Al-Assad, 2016), while the Syria Opposition Group was protesting about the ceasefire violations done by the Syria

Government (Tatyana Kudrenok, 2017). Even though, there was no final statement or any agreement which has been signed in this round of talks, the guarantors (Russia, Iran, and Turkey) announced the formation of a joint trilateral monitoring group as part of the trilateral mechanism which established in the first round of Astana Peace Talks to make sure that all the parties complied to all the terms of the December 2016 ceasefire.

In this round of Astana Peace Talks, the mechanism for exchanging of captives and dead bodies was agreed upon as a confidence-building measure, and holding on one important thing for this round is the establishment of the relevance of Astana Talks as a precursor to the Geneva Peace Talks by providing momentum to the resumption of the latter (Bayley, 2017).

3. The Third Round of Astana Peace Talks

The third round of Astana Peace Talks was held between March 14th and March 15th, 2017 resulting in further agreement by all of the parties to the existing ceasefire agreement (Orazgaliyeva, 2017).

The third round of Astana Negotiations actually was boycotted by the rebels who accused the Syria Government for violating the rules of the ceasefire in December 2016 (Irish, Nebehay, & Miles, 2017). The peace talks, that were initiated to only have a one day meeting, needed to be extended for a day in anticipation of the representation by the North and South opposition as well as by the Syrian Army, but it ends up with no representation came from the Syria Opposition Group (Astana talks extended for one day due to opposition arrival , 2017). The significance result lay in this round was that Iran become officially one of the guarantors of the December 2016

ceasefire (Kazakh MFA's statement on outcomes of Third International Meeting on Syria, 2017).

The meeting of this peace talks ended on all parties agreed on meeting again in the fourth round of Astana Peace Talk. The guarantor countries discuss several ways to implement the goals that had been reached in the previous rounds, such as to resolve military issues, improve the humanitarian situation, and pledged to expand trilateral cooperation. This third round also reviewed the status of the December 2016 ceasefire, the modalities of establishing working group in Syrian constitution and any issues that related to the exchange of the detained and imprisoned people, the formation of a single map that showing the exact location of the terrorist and armed group, and the last is addressing the issue if UNESCO world heritage (Kazinform, 2018).

4. The Fourth Round of Astana Peace Talks

The fourth round of Astana Peace Talks took a place in May 4th, 2017. The representatives of the state guarantor (Russia, Iran, and Turkey) had signed a memorandum to create four of "de-escalation zones" in Syria. The largest and well-known de-escalation zone in Syria is Idlib Province and adjoined by the district of Aleppo, Hama, Dara, Latakia, following the three other zones that were set-up in the northern rebel-controlled parts of Homs Province, the eastern rebel-controlled Ghouta, and the last is the Jordan-Syria border (The Foreign Minister of Russia Federation, 2017). In those areas that had been mentioned, any combat operations would be halted starting from May 6th 2017 (TASS, 2017).

De-escalation zones were created as a temporary measurement for six months and could be extended by the guarantor states in consensus. This memorandum aimed was to

bring the cessation of hostilities, the promotion of rapid and safe access to humanitarian aid, and make sure the safe and voluntary return of refugees and displaced people.

Although the talks had failed to limit the safe zones as the Syria Opposition members withdraw from the talks owing to the bombing of rebel-held areas by the Syria Government, the safe zones officially come into effect starting from midnight of May 6th, 2017. And due to that, the signing of the memorandum came to a halt to the peace process in general and specifically in Astana Peace Talks (Kazinform, 2017).

5. The Fifth Round of Astana Peace Talks

The fifth round of Astana Peace Talks took a place in Astana on July 12th, 2017 until July 15th, 2017 (Daily Sabah Agency, 2017). The peace talks were attended by the representatives of three guarantor states, several observers including the United Nations Special Envoy Staffan De Mistura, the United States Acting Assistant Secretary of State, delegates from Jordan, and several representatives of the Syrian Government and nine representatives of the armed Syrian opposition. The plan of this round still related to the de-escalation zones, some activities of forces that control the zones, and confidence-building measurement. (Kazinform, 2017). The talks were held to discuss seven documents on de-escalation zones and a provision for joint working group which tasked to come up with the details of the plan.

Although, there is no documents that were agreed upon in this round, it was decided that the Joint Working Group will have a meeting in Iran in early August. This round was specifically having a result, for a first time, the participants agreeing on the presence of armed foreign monitors on the place (“Final de-escalation zones agreed on in Astana,, 2017).

Russia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Alexey Borodavkin, stated that the Syrian opposition was no longer demands Assad's immediate departure, which it was a sign of a softening of their earlier stand (Russian Envoy, 2017).

6. The Sixth Round of Astana Peace Talks

The sixth round of the Astana Peace Talks was held on September 14th 2017. The participants of these peace talks were the representatives of Russia, Iran, and Turkey. The representatives of the guarantor countries signed five documents related to the issues on the ground in the presence of the government and the opposition – Syria cannot take any control in the peace talks. The documents talks about the four de-escalation zone in Syria, humanitarian aid issues, and national re-conciliation (Omarov, 2017). There are four de-escalation zones that were established in Syria as agreed on September 8th 2017 by the Joint Working Group (Satubaldina, 2017). A Joint Coordinating Centre was established by the guarantors (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, 2017).

The guarantor countries stating their determination to continue to fight the terrorist group such as ISIS and emphasized the need to strengthen confidence-building. In addition, they also stated their determination to implement the provisions of the memorandum on the establishment of de-escalation zones that started on May 6 and reaffirmed their strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic along with their adherence to the UNSC resolution 2254. They also called the observers and the international community to support the de-escalation zones process by providing assistance to the

population, facilitating de-mining, restoring life support facilities, and helping to create socio-economic infrastructure. Sergey Lavrov, Russia Foreign Minister, mentioned after the talks that observer status shall be extended to other countries to garner additional support.

7. The Seventh Round of Astana Peace Talks

The seventh round of Astana Peace talks was held on October 30th, 2017 in Astana. This round of peace talks was attended by the representatives of the guarantor states, the representatives of observer states, and the United Nations official. Unfortunately, the UN special envoy, Staffan da Mistura did not participate in the peace talks. This round pointed out on the need to increase the confidence-building measures such as the release of hostages, exchange of prisoners, de-mining of territories and giving humanitarian aid among the parties to the conflict (Kholdorbekov, 2017). It was decided then that the National Dialogue of Syrian which seeks to expand the range of Syrian civil society participation by engaging tribal, religious, and ethnic groups including the Kurds, will be held in Sochi. However, seeing the extension of invitations to various groups as contributing to discordance and fragmentation and as an attempt to put aside the issue of political transition without the President Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian Opposition group rather chose to participate in a meeting that held in Riyadh. A member of the Syrian opposition's high negotiations committee (HNC), Mohammad Alloush, dismissed the Sochi conference as a "meeting between the regime and the regime" (Wintour, 2017).