



UN Invites Iran to Attend Geneva II Peace Conference

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon [announced to reporters](#) in New York on January 19 that Iran had been invited to the Geneva II peace conference, a conference between Syrian government representatives and opposition leaders, meant to transfer power from Syria's ruler, Bashar al-Assad (shown with wife), to a transitional government. As a condition for the invitation, Iran has agreed to support the full implementation of the Geneva communique, including the establishment of the transitional governing body, overturning Iran's Syrian ally.



The [Washington Post reported](#) that conflicting statements were made both by an Iranian official, who said Iran had not agreed to the terms, and by Assad, who indicated in an [interview with AFP](#) that he considered himself to be a viable candidate for reelection.

AFP: After nearly three years of devastating war and the big challenge of reconstruction in the country, is it likely that you will not be a candidate for the presidency?

President Assad: This depends on two things: It depends on personal aspirations or a personal decision, on the one hand, and on public opinion in Syria, on the other. As far as I am concerned, I see no reason why I shouldn't stand; as for Syrian public opinion, there is still around four months before the election date is announced. If in that time, there is public desire and a public opinion in favour of my candidacy, I will not hesitate for a second to run for election. In short, we can say that the chances for my candidacy are significant.

The *Post* reported that the [Syrian Opposition Coalition](#) (a coalition of opposition groups in the Syrian civil war founded in Doha, Qatar, in November 2012), which had voted on January 18 to attend the peace talks after eight months of debate, issued an ultimatum Sunday afternoon demanding that the UN rescind the invitation or the opposition will not attend the conference. One goal of the conference is to host the first direct talks between the government and the opposition since the Syrian civil war began three years ago.

"We cannot attend if Iran is there, and the coalition is united on this point," the *Post* quoted coalition member Hadi al-Bahra as saying.

Russia and Iran are Assad's chief supporters, and have never embraced the position shared by the United States and its European and Arab allies that the [conference](#) should be used to negotiate an end to Assad's rule.

The Syrian government issued a statement on November 3, 2013, saying that comments made by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry that day (i.e., a handover of power by Syrian President Assad "can give the people of Syria the opportunity to choose their future") could cause the peace talks to fail, because they "are a flagrant violation of Syrian affairs and an aggression against the Syrian people's right to



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decide their future.”

Jen Osaki, U.S. State Department spokesperson, issued a [press statement](#) on January 19 commenting on Secretary-General Ban’s announcement that stated that the invitation was conditional:

The United States views the UN Secretary General’s invitation to Iran to attend the upcoming Geneva conference as conditioned on Iran’s explicit and public support for the full implementation of the Geneva communique including the establishment of a transitional governing body by mutual consent with full executive authorities. This is something Iran has never done publicly and something we have long made clear is required.

We also remain deeply concerned about Iran’s contributions to the Assad regime’s brutal campaign against its own people, which has contributed to the growth of extremism and instability in the region. If Iran does not fully and publicly accept the Geneva communique, the invitation must be rescinded.

The statement said nothing about U.S. support for the rebels fighting in Syria. As [noted in *The New American*](#) last August 26:

The U.S. government has actually been supporting the opposition with millions of taxpayer dollars since long before open conflict erupted in Syria, according to official documents released by WikiLeaks. As *The New American* has also been reporting for a year, the Obama administration [set up camp in Jordan](#) close to the Syrian border to train rebel fighters in the use of advanced military weapons and tactics.

When AFP, in its interview with Assad, noted that “the opposition that will participate in Geneva is divided and many factions on the ground don’t believe it represents them,” and asked him: “If an agreement is reached, how can it be implemented on the ground?” Assad replied:

This is the same question that we are asking as a government: when I negotiate, [whom] am I negotiating with? There are expected to be many sides at Geneva; we don’t know yet who will come, but there will be various parties, including the Syrian government. It is clear to everyone that some of the groups, which might attend the conference, didn’t exist until very recently; in fact they were created during the crisis by foreign intelligence agencies whether in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, France, the United States or other countries. So when we sit down with these groups, we are in fact negotiating with those countries. So, is it logical that France should be a part of the Syrian solution? Or Qatar, or America, or Saudi Arabia, or Turkey? This doesn’t make any sense.

The [Jerusalem Post](#), which provides extensive coverage about events in the Middle East, on January 20 cited a statement made to Reuters by Anas Abdah, identified as a member of the Syrian opposition National Coalition’s political committee. Said Abdah: “We are giving a deadline of 7 p.m. GMT [2 p.m. EST] for the [UN’s] invitation [to Iran] to be withdrawn.”

Abdah stated that the coalition would accept Iran’s participation only if it “publicly states that it is withdrawing its forces, committing to the Geneva 1 agreement in full and committing to implementing any results of Geneva 2.”

The *Post* also cited a spokesman for Ban who told reporters last week that the UN would extend an invitation to Iran only if Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov and Secretary of State John Kerry deemed it appropriate. Kerry made a statement last month saying that Iran might be able to help “on the sidelines.”



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“As I have said repeatedly, I believe strongly that Iran needs to be part of the solution to the Syrian crisis,” Ban told reporters, adding,

I have spoken at length in recent days with Iran’s Foreign Minister, Mr. Javad Zarif. He has assured me that, like all the other countries invited to the opening day discussions in Montreux, Iran understands that the basis of the talks is the full implementation of the 30 June 2012 Geneva Communique, including the Action Plan.

Ban stated that he and Zarif had agreed that the goal of the talks should be to establish a “transitional governing body [in Syria] with full executive powers ... by mutual consent.”

[Reuters](#) quoted a statement from Zarif: “Not to ensure that all those who may directly influence the situation are present [at Geneva II] would, I think, be an unforgivable mistake.”

While there is little doubt that Assad is a harsh strongman, the militant rebels from the opposition offer little promise for positive change in Syria. The rebel coalition opposing Assad’s secular regime includes elements of al-Qaeda, who since 9/11 have been the poster boys for Islamic terrorism. For all his faults, Assad has provided a safe haven for Christian refugees fleeing from Iraq — another place where U.S. involvement in taking down a secular Muslim tyrant made life unbearable for Christians. As was noted in the article, “[Rebel Atrocities in Syria Escalate, Sparking Alarm Over Obama Plan](#)”:

Also sparking alarm was news that al-Qaeda-linked opposition forces had seized control of an ancient Christian town. The “rebels” reportedly burned down and looted churches while killing and terrorizing local Christians, ordering them to convert to Islam or die, following [a long pattern of atrocities aimed at Christians](#).

The long track record of U.S. involvement in destabilizing governments in the Middle East demonstrates that — aside from the unconstitutionality of such actions — the people in such countries would be far better off if we would simply leave them alone.

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