

A Tactical -- Not Strategic -- Ceasefire in Syria

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The post-Aleppo lull on the western front is likely just an excuse for Russia to rotate new forces and equipment into Syria and prepare for the next major offensive.

The agreement between Turkey and Russia stipulates a halt to the fighting throughout Syrian territory from midnight on December 29, with the exception of areas with a Fatah al-Sham (formerly the al-Nusra Front) or Islamic State presence. In addition, the agreement provides for President Bashar al-Assad to remain in power until the end of his presidential term in June 2021. The other actors in the conflict (USA and Arab Gulf countries) and the entire Syrian opposition are invited to join the negotiations to be held in Astana, Kazakhstan planned for next month.

The UN, the United States, and even the opposition umbrella Syrian National Coalition welcomed the agreement. But make no mistake; the inclusion of Bashar el Assad's eventual departure is only a simple way of attracting the Syrian opposition to the negotiating table while allowing the Western and Gulf countries to save face by adhering to this peace process...

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