

## Headlines:

- **Al-Assad Guilty of Chemical Weapons Use**
- **Russia Talks a Failure**
- **Al-Nour Backs the Dictator**

## Details:

### Al-Assad Guilty of Chemical Weapons Use

The Syrian government's chemical weapons stockpile has been linked for the first time by laboratory tests to the largest Sarin nerve gas attack of the civil war, diplomats and scientists told Reuters. Laboratories working for the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons compared samples taken by a UN mission in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta after 21 August 2013 attack, when hundreds of civilians died of sarin gas poisoning, to chemicals handed over by Damascus for destruction in 2014. The tests found 'markers' in samples taken at and at the sites of two other nerve agent attacks. Amy Smithson, a US non-proliferation expert and other sources familiar with the matter said it would "have been virtually impossible for the rebels to carry out a coordinated; large-scale strike with poisonous munitions, even if they had been able to steal the chemicals from the government's stockpile." Hamish de Breton-Gordon, independent specialist in biological and chemical weapons said: "I don't think there is a cat in hell's chance that rebels or ISIS were responsible for the August attack."

### Russia Talks a Failure

The Russian backed talks in the Black Sea resort of Sochi regarding a political resolution on Syria, went ahead, but without any representation from any of the major opposition groups. The groups backed by Turkey refused to leave the Russian city's airport in a last-minute protest. Aljazeera reported: "They apparently didn't want to come out of the airport buildings because they had seen Syrian government flags plastered all over the airport for this Sochi conference and that upset them. The Sochi event, officially known as a Syrian Congress of National Dialogue, aims to foster an agreement between the government and the opposition to form a commission to write a new constitution. But that seemed unlikely to happen without backing from major opposition figures. An al-Jazeera reporter from Sochi said, "The belief among the opposition has always been that the Sochi conference, and probably this commission as well, is essentially representing Moscow and Damascus interests."

### Al-Nour Backs the Dictator

Egypt's Islamist party has decided to support President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in his bid to be re-elected in March, the party said on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup>. Sisi, who has been in power since 2014, is set to run unopposed after all other presidential hopefuls announced they would not take part in the election on March 26-28. Al-Nour's chief spoke at a news conference of his party's policies on the economy, corruption, human rights and fighting terrorism, among others. "The current president, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, is the most capable to carry out these heavy responsibilities, and to bring cooperation between all the state's institutions of the armed forces, police, and parliament," said Al Nour spokesman. Al Nour was formed in 2011, months after an uprising overthrew Hosni Mubarak, it now has representation in a parliament elected in 2015, and is now officially a pro-Sisi rubberstamp legislature.