

Russia Raps Syria Envoy Expulsions

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Russia criticized Western nations on Wednesday for expelling Syrian envoys, calling the move "counterproductive," and warned them not to seek new UN Security Council action for the time being on the crisis in the Middle Eastern state.

With global anger rising over a massacre Western nations blame on the government of Syrian President Bashar Assad, Russia also signaled that it would block any effort to authorize military intervention, Interfax reported.

Russia, which has blamed both the government and its foes for the killings of more than 108 civilians in the town of Houla, said kicking out Syrian envoys closes channels of use in influencing the government to abide by a UN peace plan.

"The expulsion of Syrian ambassadors from the capitals of several leading Western states seems like a counterproductive step to us," Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said in a statement.

The United States, France, Britain, Canada, Germany, Italy, Spain, Australia, the Netherlands and Bulgaria gave Syria's envoys hours or days to leave in a coordinated move that increased

Assad's diplomatic isolation.

"They do not want to listen to Damascus, and that, from our point of view, does not improve matters in the current situation," Lukashevich said, adding that Russia maintains "intensive contacts" with the government and opposition.

Russia's warnings came after French President Francois Hollande said military intervention was not ruled out, provided that it was backed by the Security Council, and Germany said it would push for "new engagement" by the council on Syria.

Russia supported a nonbinding Security Council statement on Sunday that strongly condemned the killings in Houla, criticized the Assad government for using heavy weapons against population centers and called on Damascus and its foes to end the violence.

That statement was "a strong enough signal to the Syrian sides and a sufficient reaction by the council to the latest developments," Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov said, according to Interfax.

"We believe consideration in the Security Council of any new measures to influence the situation now would be premature," he said.

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