

Russia to Host Assad's Opponents

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Syrian opposition leaders will visit Moscow next week in what could be a litmus test for an agreement struck by the United States, Russia and other major powers on a plan for political transition in Syria.

"We will use this coming meeting with yet another Syrian opposition group to continue work to end violence and start Syrian dialogue between the government and all groups of the Syrian opposition as soon as possible," Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Tuesday.

All parties to Saturday's Geneva agreement hailed the deal as "concrete progress" toward resolving the crisis, but there was no timeline for specific actions and no consensus on the key question of whether President Bashar Assad must step down.

The agreement brokered by international envoy Kofi Annan says a transitional governing body "shall be formed on the basis of mutual consent." An earlier draft was watered down after Russia stonewalled, adamant that Assad should not be forced out.

As soon as it was agreed, both sides immediately disagreed about what the deal meant for Assad.

Lavrov said it did not imply at all that he should step down, but U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, "Assad will still have to go."

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