

Lavrov Snubs U.S. Offer to Facilitate Assad's Ouster

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has turned down a U.S. offer to act as an intermediary in efforts to convince Syrian leader Bashar Assad to step down voluntarily, a news report said Tuesday.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton asked Lavrov for diplomatic assistance in facilitating Assad's departure and forming a coalition government in Syria during their recent meetings in Phnom Penh and Dublin, according to Kommersant.

The U.S. is concerned that the Assad regime could use chemical weapons against its opponents and that these weapons could fall into the hands of Islamist terrorists, the report said.

Although Moscow has repeatedly backed the idea of creating a coalition government, Russian officials have refused to pressure Assad by calling for his resignation or voting for additional sanctions against the Syrian government in the UN.

Russia also downplays the possibility that Assad's supporters would use chemical weapons. On Sunday, Nikolai Patrushev, secretary of the Security Council, said that Syrian authorities had assured Moscow that they wouldn't embark on chemical warfare with their own people, Itar-Tass said.

More than 40,000 people have died since the Syrian civil war erupted in March 2011, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said Friday, adding that half a million Syrians had sought refuge in other countries and nearly 3 million had been internally displaced since the fighting broke out.

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