

Foreign Ministry Official Acknowledges Assad Is Losing Control

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Syria's most powerful ally, Russia, said for the first time Thursday that President Bashar Assad is losing control of his country and that the rebels might win the civil war, indicating a shift in the diplomatic landscape at a time of enormous momentum for the opposition.

While Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov didn't issue any immediate signal that Russia could change its stance and stop blocking international sanctions on Assad's regime, his remarks will likely be seen as a betrayal in Damascus and could persuade Syrians to shift their loyalties and abandon support for the government.

It could also strengthen the hand of the rebels, who have made significant gains in their offensive, capturing two major military bases and mounting a serious challenge to Assad's seat of power, Damascus.

"We must look at the facts: There is a trend for the government to progressively lose control

over an increasing part of the territory," Bogdanov, the Foreign Ministry's point man on Syria, said during hearings at the Public Chamber. "An opposition victory can't be excluded."

Bogdanov's statement could represent an attempt by the Kremlin to begin positioning itself for Assad's defeat. He said Russia is prepared to evacuate thousands of its citizens from Syria, although he didn't say when that might happen.

At the same time, Bogdanov reaffirmed Russia's call for compromise, saying that it would take the opposition a long time to defeat the regime and that Syria would suffer heavy casualties.

"The fighting will become even more intense, and you will lose tens of thousands and perhaps hundreds of thousands of people," he said. "If such a price for the ouster of the president seems acceptable to you, what can we do? We, of course, consider it absolutely unacceptable."

Bogdanov repeated that Russia would stick to an agreement reached in Geneva in June calling for negotiations involving the government and the opposition.

Russia has joined with China at the United Nations Security Council to veto three resolutions that would have imposed sanctions on Assad's regime over its bloody crackdown on the uprising, which began in March 2011.

Moscow also has continued to provide the Syrian government with weapons despite strong international protests.

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