

Russia Condemns Western Help for Syrian Opposition

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The Foreign Ministry said Friday that a decision by Western nations to support the Syrian opposition in its battle to oust President Bashar Assad would only intensify the two-year-old conflict.

Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said that moves announced in Rome on Thursday “in spirit and in letter directly encourage extremists to seize power by force, despite the inevitable sufferings of ordinary Syrians that entails.”

U.S. President Barack Obama’s administration has said it would provide nonlethal aid directly to Syrian rebels, and it announced an additional \$60 million in assistance to Syria’s political opposition.

Britain and France, which U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry visited earlier this week as part of his first official trip as secretary of state, have signaled that they want to supply rebels with

defensive military equipment.

The European Union still bars the provision of weapons and ammunition to anyone in Syria, but it is expected to issue new guidance in the near future.

In Moscow, a onetime close confidant of Assad who defected last year said Friday that Russia and the United States could act as co-guarantors of a cease-fire in Syria.

“We need Russia and the U.S., which would support the Syrian people and could put pressure on the regime,” Manaf Tlass, a former elite army commander in town for talks with senior Russian officials, said outside the Foreign Ministry.

“If that happens, it will be the way out and will be good for the Syrian people,” he said.

Tlass added that Assad’s resignation was not up for discussion, saying, “there should be no dictatorial regimes in the modern world.”

Throughout the two-year conflict, during which more than 70,000 have died, Russia has shielded Assad’s regime at the UN Security Council from sanctions.

Moscow also has rejected calls for Assad to quit, saying his government and rebels should pursue talks.

Despite criticism from Western and Arab powers, Russia says that it is not in violation of UN Security Council resolutions and that weapons sold to Syria include anti-missile systems but no attack weapons, such as helicopters.

On Friday a top Russian arms trade official complained that weapons deliveries to Syria had been disrupted.

“We are respecting our contracts with Syria, but a real war has been declared against us. I would say a secret one. Our shipments, both by sea and by air, are being detained. ... Our insurance is being canceled,” Alexander Fomin, the head of the Federal Service for Military and Technical Cooperation, told Ekho Moskvyy radio. “This blockade exists, although Russia has not violated any international obligations.”

He said payments for arms shipments had been frozen by Western financial institutions, with losses to Russia of hundreds of millions of dollars.

Material from Reuters is included in this report.

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