

Western Arms in Syria Would Go to Terrorists, Foreign Ministry Says

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Weapons delivered to Syrian rebel forces fighting the government of President Bashar Assad will inevitably fall into the hands of terrorists, a Foreign Ministry spokesman warned on Thursday.

Commenting on Western nations' intention to consider arming the Syrian rebels, Alexander Lukashevich said Russia was concerned that such arms would be acquired by Islamist militants among the anti-Assad forces.

"It is easy to figure out who will be the 'end users' of this aid," Lukashevich told journalists in Moscow, Interfax reported.

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said Thursday that France and Britain want an urgent European Union meeting, possibly this month, to persuade their allies to lift an embargo on supplying arms to the Syrian opposition.

The two countries accuse Assad of gambling on a military victory and hope the threat of arming the rebels will force him into talks and a transition of power after a two-year-old conflict that is destabilizing the region.

Late Wednesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said arming Syria's opposition would be against international law, a day after Britain said it might bypass the EU embargo to do just that, and accused the rebel side of failing to provide negotiators to find a political solution to the conflict.

"International law does not permit the supply of arms to non-governmental actors, and our point of view is that it is a violation of international law," Lavrov told a news conference in London via a translator.

The meeting of Lavrov, British Foreign Minister William Hague and the British and Russian defense ministers was aimed at improving the often frosty ties between the two countries.

Hague reiterated his wish for UN Security Council-backed measures against Assad, but said he had not reached agreement on the issue with Lavrov, whose country has repeatedly blocked such action in the past.

Russia has been a major supplier of weapons to the Syria state and insists that Assad's departure should not be a precondition of any peace talks, as demanded by rebels.

Lavrov insisted that the only way to solve the crisis was through dialogue and pointed to a UN communique issued in Geneva last year that called for the formation of a transitional governing body and for all Syrian factions to engage in talks.

"The opposition has not yet accepted the communique as the foundation for the negotiations. The regime has said that they shaped a committee for negotiations. ... The opposition has not shaped such a team yet," Lavrov said.

Germany has warned that arming the rebels could destabilize other countries in the volatile region.

Lavrov said the "most dangerous and effective" anti-Assad group in Syria was the al-Qaida-linked al-Nusra Front.

"The Americans have included this group in the list of terrorist organizations, and this decision ... provoked indignation in one of the National Coalition members of Syria. Let us just keep that in mind when we are discussing Syria," he said.

The two-year-old conflict started out as a pro-democracy movement but has descended into an increasingly sectarian war. Some 70,000 people have been killed, and more than a million refugees have fled the violence.

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