

Putin Urges Peace Talks to End Syria 'Massacre'

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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President Vladimir Putin said the civil war in Syria had become a "massacre" that must be stopped through peace talks between the government and the opposition, and repeated Russia's firm rejection of calls for Syrian President Bashar Assad's ouster.

Speaking to the German ARD television in remarks released by the Kremlin on Friday, he rejected the Western criticism of Russia for continuing to supply weapons to Assad's regime. Putin said such shipments did not violate international law, and he criticized those who send weapons to the Syrian opposition fighting a "legitimate government."

Russia has been Assad's main ally, shielding him from the UN sanctions over his crackdown on an uprising that turned into a civil war that has killed some 70,000 people.

In recent months, it has sought to distance itself from the Syrian strongman and shown a resignation to him losing power. At the same time, it has refused to back calls for Assad

to step down, insisting that the opposition should be persuaded to sit down for talks with the regime.

"What is going on is a massacre. This is a disaster, a catastrophe," Putin said. "It has to be stopped."

But he added that "when they say Assad is fighting against his own people, we need to remember that this is the armed part of the opposition."

Putin said negotiations between the government and the opposition were necessary to provide guarantees to all parties and prevent the country from sliding into chaos.

"We do not think that Assad should leave today, as our partners suggest. In this case, tomorrow we will have to decide what to do and where to go," Putin said

He said Russia did not want to see Syria plunge into a turmoil, which befell Libya, Iraq and Yemen.

"Therefore, we believe that it is necessary to bring everyone to the negotiation table so that all warring parties could reach an agreement on how their interests will be protected and in which way they will participate in the future governance of the country," he said. "And then they will work together on the implementation of this plan with due guarantees of the international community."

He said French President Francois Hollande had offered "some interesting ideas that can be implemented" on his February's visit to Moscow, but added that it would require some diplomatic work.

"We are ready to support these ideas," Putin said. "We need to try and put them into practice."

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