

Russia Says U.S. Not Putting Enough Pressure on Syria Opposition

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The United States is not putting enough pressure on the Syrian opposition to participate in an international peace conference and drop its demand for President Bashar Assad's exit, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Monday.

Russia and the United States announced on May 7 that they would try to bring Assad's government and its opponents together as soon as possible at an international conference to seek an end to the civil war, but no date has been set.

"In our view, the United States is definitely not working hard enough in terms of putting influence on Syrian opposition groups so that [they] will come to the international conference," Ryabkov said, according to RIA Novosti.

He said the United States "should not allow the opposition to try to issue ultimatums and impose preconditions. The main such condition ... is the demand for Syrian President

Bashar Assad's exit."

'[The U.S.] should not allow the opposition to issue ultimatums.'

Sergei Ryabkov

The opposition Syrian National Coalition said late last month that it would only take part in the peace talks if a deadline was set for a settlement that would force Assad to leave power.

Russia has been Assad's most powerful protector during the conflict that has killed more than 80,000 people since March 2011, vetoing three UN Security Council resolutions aimed to pressure his government.

Another point of contention between Russia and the West has been the arming of each side in the Syrian civil war, with Russia continuing to supply weapons to Assad's government and Western countries actively discussing whether to arm the opposition.

British Foreign Minister William Hague said in an interview published Monday that Britain would decide whether to arm Syrian rebels only after the planned peace talks.

Hague told Germany's Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung daily that the priority was U.S.- and Russian-led efforts to get the warring sides to the negotiating table, but said he was "not overly optimistic."

"A decision on whether to deliver lethal weapons will depend on how those negotiations go and other countries' attitudes," he was quoted as saying.

Hague said it was not too late to arm the rebels, despite the risks involved, given that the more than two-year-old war in Syria had no end in sight.

"We need a political solution as soon as possible," he said. "Unfortunately we don't know if there will be one. The conflict could go on for months or even years."

He said Russia agreed on the need for a political solution, but the question was "how much they are prepared to influence Assad."

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