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Russia Doubts Syrian Rebels' Readiness for Peace Talks

By The Moscow Times

July 09, 2013



The Foreign Ministry on Monday expressed doubt that the newly elected leader of Syria's main Western-backed opposition group was ready to engage in dialogue to find a political solution to the two-year conflict.

Syrian National Coalition leader Ahmad Jarba "needs to explicitly and unambiguously express readiness to send envoys to the peace conference in Geneva, without any preconditions, so that they could sit down at the negotiating table together with other influential opposition groups and start joint talks on specific aspects of the political settlement in Syria," ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said in a statement.

Jarba, who was elected Saturday, was quoted by Reuters as saying that "if we are going to go to Geneva we have to be strong on the ground, unlike the situation now, which is weak."

That article said the leader, who has close links to Saudi Arabia, was expecting a delivery of

advanced weapons from that country to reach rebel fighters soon.

"Initial statements by the new head of the National Coalition ... raise numerous questions about the coalition's future actions and, above all, its commitment to a political solution to the prolonged crisis in Syria," Lukashevich said.

The Foreign Ministry earlier said it was ready to enter into talks with the coalition's new leadership as part of a "broad inter-Syrian dialogue with full respect to national sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity."

About 100,000 people have died in the conflict so far, according to the United Nations.

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