

Syrian Rebels Hope for US Arms in August – Reports

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Rebel forces seeking to overthrow Syrian President Bashar Assad hope to receive arms from the United States as early as next month, after two key US congressional committees approved the weapons shipments, according to media reports.

"We think August is the date," The New York Times cited a Syrian opposition leader as saying in an email Monday night.

Russia and the United States have been at loggerheads over the Syria conflict, with Moscow rejecting Washington's insistence that any political resolution preclude Assad from remaining in power.

Russia has also said that U.S. military aid to Syrian rebels may lead to further escalation of violence in the country and that such support could lead to extreme Islamist elements in the Syrian opposition seizing power in the country.

The intelligence committees in both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives last week signed off on the White House's plan to allocate U.S. Central Intelligence Agency resources to provide weapons, training, and logistics and intelligence support to the Syrian rebels, though U.S. officials only confirmed this week that the committees had approved the program.

The exact timeline of the deliveries was not immediately clear Tuesday, but the Washington Post reported that they were set to begin in the next several weeks.

Syrian rebel supporters hope the arms shipments will begin in August and will include "a large number of small weapons," including rifles and anti-tank weapons, Louay Sakka, co-founder of the Syrian Support Group, which backs the Free Syrian Army rebel forces, was quoted by Reuters as saying.

U.S. Representative Mike Rogers, a Republican from Michigan and head of the House Intelligence Committee, said in a statement Monday that the committee approved the White House's plans for Syria despite "very strong concerns about the strength of the administration's plans in Syria and its chances for success.

The Senate Intelligence Committee last week said it had reached a similar position as the House committee, The New York Times reported.

On Monday, U.S. lawmakers released an assessment by Army General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, stating that Washington could carry out a range of missions to back Syrian rebels in their fight against Assad's forces but that most of these would bear a high cost and risk of retaliation.

The United States has been providing humanitarian aid and nonlethal help to the Syrian opposition. But the White House last month said it would provide direct military aid to the rebels in the wake of fresh U.S. claims that Syrian government forces have used chemical weapons multiple times during the conflict.

Leading U.S. senators, including Democrat Carl Levin and Republican John McCain, have been pressing President Barack Obama to take a more forceful approach to defeat Assad's forces.

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