

Russia Denies Negotiations Over Assad to Boost Oil Price

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The  **Moscow Times**

President Vladimir Putin's spokesman denied Wednesday a report that Saudi Arabia was pressuring Moscow to drop its support for Syrian President Bashar Assad in exchange for a reduction in Saudi oil production, Russian News Service reported Wednesday.

The New York Times reported Tuesday that Riyadh has promised Moscow to decrease its oil production in a move that could reduce global supply, raising the oil price at a time when Russia's ailing economy is suffering from lost revenue.

"If oil can serve to bring peace in Syria, I don't see how Saudi Arabia would back away from trying to reach a deal," a Saudi diplomat was anonymously cited as saying by the newspaper.

Russian officials, however, were quick to deny that any negotiations had taken place.

"It is nothing more than the newspaper's fabrication," Dmitry Peskov, Putin's spokesman, was cited as saying by Russian News Service.

The head of the Duma Committee for International Affairs, Alexei Pushkov, also dismissed the report as "a rumor," tweeting that no "negotiations to reduce oil production by the Saudis in exchange for Moscow not supporting Assad" ever happened.

Russia's steadfast support of Assad has helped keep the regime in power since the Syrian civil war broke out in 2011. Russia has been criticized by the international community for continuing to sell the Assad regime arms, and for blocking several United Nations Security Council resolutions on Syria.

It has been widely reported that Saudi Arabia has been arming the Syrian rebels to strengthen their fight against Assad.

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