The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russians Prepare for Evacuation from Yemen as Consulate Attacked

By Jennifer Monaghan

April 02, 2015



Boys stand on a tank burnt during clashes on a street in Yemen's southern port city of Aden.

The Russian Consulate in the Yemeni port city of Aden has been attacked and looted by rebel fighters, a news report said Thursday, as the crisis in the Middle Eastern country continues to intensify.

A group made up of Houthi rebels and supporters of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh stormed the Russian Consulate on Wednesday and seized documents and equipment from the building, TASS reported, citing local news site Huna Aden. There were no diplomats inside the building at the time of the attack, the report cited sources as saying.

Earlier reports suggested that the consulate had first been damaged by a bombing mission over Aden conducted by a coalition led by Saudi Arabia, which last week ordered airstrikes to be carried out against the Houthi rebels, TASS reported.

The Russian Embassy in the Yemeni capital of Sana'a refused to comment on the Aden attack, but told TASS that its diplomatic mission to the Middle Eastern country had been operating in a state of emergency for the past three days.

Meanwhile a Russian-lead mission to evacuate its citizens and diplomats from war-torn Yemen was due to begin on Wednesday but is now expected to take place on Thursday, the Kommersant business daily reported.

The airborne rescue could see between 900 and 2,600 people evacuated from the country as Russia has extended its offer of help to all citizens of the Commonwealth of Independent States, including Ukrainians, Kommersant cited unidentified sources as saying.

Yemen has been thrown into turmoil in recent months as forces loyal to former President Saleh and those backing incumbent President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi — who was driven out of the capital in February by Houthi rebels — battle to take power in the country.

A number of Islamic fundamentalist groups are also angling for control in the area, further complicating the situation in Yemen.

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