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Syria's Western-Backed Opposition Due in Moscow Next Week – Source

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A Nusra Front fighter carries weapons in the town of Safsafa after clashes with forces loyal to Syria's president Bashar al-Assad in the Hama countryside, Aug.

The main Western-backed Syrian opposition, long distrustful of Russia over its backing of Syrian President Bashar Assad, is due to visit Moscow next week amid a renewed diplomatic push to settle the conflict, a source and Russian wires said.

The National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (SNC) boycotted Syria peace talks held in Moscow in January and April, distrustful of Russia and critical of the Damascus rivals who attended, whom it described as token opposition.

The SNC's Moscow visit next week comes as international and regional players seek a response to the growing threat of the Islamic State in the Syria conflict, which has killed some 250,000 people over the last 4 1/2 years.

A Russian source familiar with preparations for the visit said an SNC delegation was due

in Moscow Aug. 12 and 13 and would be led by its recently re-elected head, Khaled Khoja.

The source said they were due to meet Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, his deputy and President Vladimir Putin's special Middle East envoy, Mikhail Bogdanov, and Vitaly Naumkin, a Russian academic who served as moderator during two rounds of Syria peace talks in Moscow in January and April.

The January and April talks failed to yield any breakthroughs.

The source said the Russians next week will want to discuss with the SNC holding another round of Moscow consultations and will push the group to commit to taking part in those talks.

Russia's RIA news agency on Wednesday quoted senior SNC member Badr Jamous as saying the group received an invitation for Aug. 12-13 and was deciding on the make-up of its delegation.

Interfax also quoted an unnamed Russian Foreign Ministry source on Wednesday as saying the SNC was expected in Moscow.

Lavrov said after meeting U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry earlier this week that Washington, which backs the Syrian opposition, and Moscow have not been able to overcome their differences and agree on how to fight the Islamic State together.

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