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Russia Should Choose Between Assad and Saving the Syrian State, Says Obama

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The U.S. president's comments came on the heels of Russian President Vladimir Putin announcing that Russia is ready to support the opposition military squads fighting with terrorist groups in Syria.

Russia and Iran should choose between supporting Syrian President Bashar Assad, who "cannot regain legitimacy," or "[saving] the Syrian state" by finding a truly legitimate Syrian government, U.S. President Barack Obama said Thursday, The Associated Press news agency reported.

According to Obama, it is unimaginable that Syria's civil war could be stopped without Assad leaving power. Recent diplomatic efforts are aimed at creating space that could eventually lead to a "pivot" and political transition, he said during a meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during the APEC summit in the Philippines.

The U.S. president's comments came on the heels of Russian President Vladimir Putin announcing that Russia is ready to support the opposition military squads fighting with terrorist groups in Syria.

"Part of the armed opposition [in Syria] contemplates starting a military operation against IS [the Islamic State] with Russia's support, and we are ready to supply that support from the air," Putin was cited by the TASS news agency as saying at the G20 summit in Turkey on Monday. "It might be grounds for later work on resolving political issues [in Syria]," the Russian leader added.

The Islamic State terrorist organization is banned in Russia.

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