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Kerry: Obama Has 'Plan B' if U.S.-Russian Brokered Syrian Truce Fails

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U.S. Foreign Secretary John Kerry

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said Tuesday the White House has a "plan B" in place if a recent agreement with Russia on a cease-fire for Syria fails — a claim that drew criticism from his Republican opponents who charged that Moscow could renege on the deal without fearing any response from Washington.

"There are certainly Plan B options being considered," Kerry told a hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He was commenting on an agreement announced Monday by the United States and Russia to broker a ceasefire between Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces and his political opponents.

Kerry praised Russia's role in bringing about the partial truce deal: "Without Russia's cooperation I'm not sure we would have been able to have achieved the agreement we have now, or at least get the humanitarian assistance in," he said.

The cease-fire, scheduled to begin Saturday, would extend to Russia-backed Assad forces, and opposition rebels, including groups supported by the United States. The agreement excludes the Islamic State, al-Qaida affiliate Nusra Front, and other "terrorist" groups designated by the UN Security Council.

Whether or not the deal succeeds in ending Syria's civil war and launching a transition to peace would become clear in a couple of months, Kerry said, adding that the White House had a backup plan in case the arrangement with Russia did not work.

The claim drew skeptical remarks from Republican senators.

Bob Corker, a Republican senator from Tennessee who chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said the plan would only work if "the other side knows there consequences" for failure, but "there won't be under this president."

"I think the secretary is negotiating a situation where there is no Plan B," Corker said.

John Barrasso, a Republican senator from Wyoming, said "the only thing Russia has been consistent about is failing to keep its word."Kerry insisted President Barack Obama's administration was developing alternative strategies, should Moscow fail to deliver on its part of the agreement.

"It would be a mistake for anybody to calculate that President Obama is going to decide that, if this doesn't work, there isn't another set of options," he said.

The outcome of the cease-fire agreement depends on U.S. and Russian ability to persuade their allies in Syria to observe the truce. Further complicating the matter is Russia's history of denouncing all Syrian militias that oppose Assad as "terrorists" — and terrorist groups are excluded from the deal.

Islamic State is a terrorist group banned in Russia.

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