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Putin Orders Yet Another "Humanitarian Ceasefire" In Aleppo

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Aleppo Media Center / AP

Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered his forces in Syria to open another series of humanitarian exit corridors from besieged east Aleppo, an opposition stronghold, into areas outside of the city, the RBC news outlet reported Wednesday, citing a Defense Ministry statement.

The humanitarian ceasefire, as Russian officials are calling it, represents the latest in a series of apparent attempts by Moscow to give rebels fighting in the city and civilians caught in the crossfire an opportunity to leave Aleppo. The city has been encircled and under siege since the summer.

"In order to avoid needless casualties, Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu on President Putin's orders has decided to introduce a 'humanitarian ceasefire' in Aleppo on Nov. 4 from 9 am to 7 pm," the statement was quoted as saying by RBC.

According to the statement, the ceasefire has been approved by the government of Syrian President Bashar Assad, who Russia supports. Last year, Russian air forces deployed to Syria to reinforce his beleaguered military, which has been fighting opposition forces for five years.

Two weeks ago, a similar short ceasefire collapsed, with forces on both sides downplaying the possibility for future attempts to halt the fighting and give civilians time to leave the city. The breakdown was marked by renewed fighting.

Moscow and Damascus have blamed Washington for the continued failure of ceasefires. In their view, the U.S. has been unable to distinguish opposition groups from extremists.

"In view of the inability of our American colleagues to separate terrorists from opposition forces, we appeal directly to the leaders of all armed groups: cease hostilities and withdraw from Aleppo with your weapons," the Defense Ministry statement said. "To do this, two corridors will open."

According to the Defense Ministry, the two corridors will be specifically aimed at rebel forces, allowing them to leave without dropping their weapons. Six other corridors will reportedly be opened during the same period for unarmed civilians to escape.

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