

Russia's Foreign Minister Lavrov Spearheaded Efforts to Help Assad Flee Syria – Reuters

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An anti-government fighter tears down a portrait of Syria's ex-president Bashar al-Assad in Aleppo.

Mohammed Al-Rifai / AFP

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov spearheaded efforts to ensure former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's safe escape from Syria as Damascus fell to Islamist rebels, Reuters [reported](#) Friday, citing anonymous Russian, regional and Western security sources.

Lavrov was said to have held talks with Turkey and Qatar in Doha over the weekend, leveraging their unofficial connections to rebel groups to facilitate Assad's departure.

Russia then coordinated with neighboring countries to ensure a Russian plane carrying Assad would not be intercepted or targeted as it left Syrian airspace, Reuters added.

Lavrov did "whatever he could" to guarantee Assad's safe exit, a Western security source told the news agency.

Assad flew to Russia's Hmeimim air base on Sunday with his plane's transponder switched off to avoid detection, Reuters said. From there, he traveled to Moscow, where his wife, Asma, and their three children were waiting.

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Russia, widely credited with saving Assad's regime during its 2015 military intervention, was unwilling to abandon Assad entirely but refused to intervene militarily this time, according to a Russian diplomatic source.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said earlier this week that Russia's focus was now on its war in Ukraine, which is nearing its third anniversary.

Assad's appeals for further military support "fell on deaf ears" during his visit to Moscow on Nov. 28, Reuters reported. Hours before fleeing, Assad reportedly assured about 30 army and security chiefs at a Syrian Defense Ministry meeting that Russian reinforcements were en route.

"He was lying to them," exiled Syrian opposition leader Hadi al-Bahra claimed, citing a source within Assad's inner circle and a regional official.

Russian intelligence agents reportedly organized Assad's escape after persuading him that he could not win the fight against the rebels.

Bloomberg, citing anonymous sources, [reported](#) Thursday that Moscow offered Assad safe passage "if he left immediately."

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