

McCain: Don't Count on Russia to Force Out Assad

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WASHINGTON — The United States can't count on Russia to force Syrian President Bashar Assad from power, Senator John McCain said on a weekend news program.

It was a particularly sharp rebuke from McCain, the top Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, who said the United States would be foolish to rely on Russia, a main supplier of arms to the Syrian military.

"Here we are a year later and 10,000 killed," he told "Fox News Sunday," referring to the onset of protests across the Arab world. And "our hopes rest on convincing [Russia] to ease out Assad, comparing it to Yemen, which there is no comparison. It's really just a sad story."

The White House called for Assad's ouster as recently as Saturday, when it blamed the Syrian government for the deaths of more than 100 people, including 49 children, following peaceful protests.

The UN Security Council held an emergency meeting Sunday afternoon to hear a briefing on

the Houla massacre from the head of the UN observer mission in Syria.

Britain and France had proposed issuing a council press statement condemning the attack on civilians and pointing the finger for Friday's attack at the Syrian government.

But Russia told council members it could not agree to any statement until the council was briefed by the mission.

Earlier this month at the meeting of leading industrial nations at Camp David, Maryland, White House officials said they had hoped Russia could use some of its sway to halt the bloody crackdown and raised the possibility of modeling a regime change in Syria after Yemen.

According to U.S. Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev "did not dispute the fact that there needs to be a process of political transition" in Syria.

"I think the question is just how does that manifest itself," Rhodes told reporters at a May 19 news conference.

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