

Foreign Ministry Denies Diplomat Said Assad Ready to Step Down

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The Foreign Ministry, pictured, denied that Deputy Foreign Minister Bogdanov had given an interview to Saudi newspaper al-Watan. **Andrei Makhonin**

The Foreign Ministry denied a Saudi Arabian newspaper report on Tuesday that cited Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov as saying Syrian President Bashar Assad was ready to step down.

"Mikhail Bogdanov gave no interview to the Saudi newspaper al-Watan," RIA-Novosti reported, citing an unidentified source in the Foreign Ministry's press department.

The ministry said Bogdanov had not given an interview to the Saudi paper by phone or in person.

Watan, which said it spoke to Bogdanov in a phone interview, reported him as saying Assad had agreed to step down, but it gave no further details.

It also reported that Bogdanov had said Assad's brother Maher Assad lost his legs during

a bombing in Damascus that killed senior security officials and he was "struggling for survival."

The newspaper did not say when the interview took place, and the only direct quotes it attributed to Bogdanov were on the subject of Russia's position on the crisis.

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