

Moscow Rejects Washington Pressure to Seek Assad's Exit, Report Says

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The  **Moscow Times**

Russia resisted new U.S. appeals to Moscow to persuade Syrian President Bashar Assad to quit and threaten Damascus with sanctions in hopes of ending Syria's civil war, Kommersant reported Tuesday.

The report in the influential daily, which did not name any source, added to public signals that Russia is not prepared to push for Assad's exit despite efforts to distance itself from its longtime ally and buyer of Russian arms.

"Russia does not intend to persuade the Syrian leader to leave his post voluntarily," said the report, reinforcing hints that a gap persists after two recent meetings of U.S. and Russian officials with international envoy Lakhdar Brahimi.

Brahimi is seeking a solution based on the June 30 Geneva declaration, which called for a transitional government to defuse a 20-month-old uprising against Assad.

The proposal foundered at the time over the issue of Assad's fate, with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton saying the declaration made clear he should step down but Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov saying it did nothing of the kind.

President Vladimir Putin and other Russian officials have repeatedly said that Moscow is not trying to prop up Assad but that he must not be ousted from power by external forces, citing the principle of noninterference in sovereign states' affairs.

Kommersant pointed to a more practical reason for Russia's resistance as well.

"Moscow is convinced that Assad will not go voluntarily," it said, echoing remarks by Russian officials.

The report said Clinton had made the appeals in meetings Thursday with Lavrov in Dublin, where they held talks with Brahimi, and in Cambodia last month.

According to the report, Clinton told Lavrov that Assad's government would fall sooner or later and that if a transitional government were not in place, Syria would likely be plunged into chaos and violence pitting sectarian groups against each other.

She also expressed concern that Assad's government might use chemical weapons against rebels fighting him or that his allies could do so after the government falls, Kommersant said.

Russia shares U.S. concerns about further violence and the Syrian chemical arsenal, though it believes there is a greater threat that the weapons could fall into the hands of militants than be used by the government, Kommersant said.

It said Clinton also unsuccessfully lobbied Lavrov to consider threatening Assad's government with UN-backed economic and diplomatic sanctions if it did not stop all military action.

Russia and China have resisted efforts to impose sanctions on Syria and have vetoed three UN Security Council resolutions aimed at isolating Assad over the violence, which has killed at least 40,000 people.

Foreign Ministry officials and U.S. officials in Moscow were not available for comment on the Kommersant report.

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