
JOHN KERRY THREATENS TO END SYRIA TALKS WITH RUSSIA OVER ALEPPO

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WASHINGTON - Secretary of State John Kerry is threatening to cut off all contacts with Moscow over the 5-year-old Syrian civil war, unless Russian and Syrian government attacks on Aleppo end.

The State Department says Kerry issued the ultimatum in a Wednesday telephone call to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

Kerry's spokesman, John Kirby, says Kerry expressed grave concern over Russian and Syrian government attacks on hospitals, water supplies and other civilian infrastructure in Aleppo.

He says Kerry told Lavrov that the U.S. holds Russia responsible for the use of incendiary and bunker-buster bombs in an urban area.

Kerry told Lavrov the U.S. was preparing to suspend U.S.-Russia bilateral engagement on Syria, including on a proposed counterterrorism partnership, unless Russia takes immediate steps to end the assault on Aleppo and restore a cease-fire.

It's not clear whether this is a new position for the U.S. or not. On Tuesday, White House spokesperson Josh Earnest said it's difficult to envision any military cooperation with Russia in Syria because Moscow has repeatedly failed to fulfill its commitments to the cease-fire deal.

Russia has largely not responded to claims it has helped kill civilians in Aleppo. Dmitry Peskov, Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesperson, said Tuesday his boss took issue with harsh criticism by the United States and Britain over Russia's actions in Syria.

He said Russia considers the tone of the criticism unacceptable and such rhetoric is capable of

causing serious harm to the resolution process in Syria.

Aleppo, Syrias largest city and former commercial center, has been fiercely contested since rebels captured several eastern neighborhoods in 2012. Those neighborhoods are now under siege, and over the past week have endured the worst aerial onslaught since the start of the war, with more than 200 people killed and several buildings flattened.

Syrian government forces captured a central rebel-held neighborhood in Aleppo on Tuesday after a week of blistering airstrikes, as a military official vowed that the offensive would continue until insurgents are wiped out.

The battle for the city □ still appears to be mired in stalemate. Government forces captured the Handarat area on the northern edge of Aleppo over the weekend, only to lose it hours later.

The contested historic quarter of Aleppo, one of the worlds oldest cities, is home to the Umayyad Mosque, a UNESCO world heritage site. The 11th-century minaret of the famed mosque collapsed in April 2013 during fighting.

Kaynak/Source: