
KERRY MAKING [REDACTED] EFFORT' TO SAVE SYRIAN REBELS FROM TRUMP, RUSSIA CONFIRMS

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US Secretary of State John Kerry has significantly intensified contacts with Russia on Syria, the Kremlin has confirmed, substantiating a report that Kerry wants to seal a deal with Moscow before Donald Trump assumes the US presidency in January.

The report by Washington Post columnist Josh Rogin says Kerry is making a last-ditch effort to stop the Syrian operation in eastern Aleppo, because the Trump administration may end up being squarely on the side of dictator [Syrian President] Bashar al-Assad.

Russian presidential aide Yury Ushakov confirmed that Kerry has intensified contacts with his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, to discuss the situation in Syria as of late.

This [effort] could be called unbelievable, in terms that there have never been so many phone calls between the Secretary of State and Russias FM which were focused on discussing a single issue □ Syria, he told journalists. Ushakov refrained from commenting on whether there was had been any progress.

According to the Post piece, which cites four unnamed US officials with the knowledge of the situation, Kerry hopes to secure a localized ceasefire in Aleppo by offering to separate members of the so-called moderate opposition from terrorist groups like Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (formerly Al-Nusra Front). The report says that Kerry has brought in other nations, including Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and, at times, Iran, in a bid to seal the deal.

Officials acknowledge that a frustrated Kerry still has not been given authority by the White House to bring any meaningful pressure to bear against Assad or Russia, placing him in a weak negotiating position. The prospect of Hillary Clinton being elected president gave Kerry some leverage, because she was expected to pursue a more hawkish Syria policy, Rogin wrote.

A ceasefire in Aleppo on Kerrys terms may be hard to sell, as Russia insists that the US failure to separate moderates from the terrorists, which was a key point in the truce agreement negotiated by Moscow and Washington in September, was the reason that the ceasefire collapsed in the first place.

The Syrian governments operation to retake eastern Aleppo from armed groups also appears to be progressing, with the latest reports saying that the militants have lost a third of their territory to the advancing army. Stopping the siege now could give those fighters time to regroup, rearm, and mount a counteroffensive.

Moscow appears to be reluctant to strike any significant deal with the outgoing administration and is waiting for the Trump administration to take power.

We will patiently wait for that team to take their seats and then we are interested in having intensive dialogue with them, Ushakov said.

Kaynak/Source: