



Russia and Turkey Broker Ceasefire in Syria

The Syrian government and rebel groups agreed to a nationwide ceasefire that commenced at midnight local time (5:00 p.m. EST) on December 29. Peace talks are to follow.

The Russian and Turkish governments announced that they had brokered the cease-fire agreement in Syria that they hope will pave the way to a peace settlement ending six years of civil war.



“Turkey and Russia strongly support the cease-fire and will monitor it together,” the Turkish Foreign Ministry said in an e-mailed statement.

“A very great deal of work was done together with our partners from Turkey,” Russian President Vladimir Putin stated at a televised meeting on December 29 with his foreign and defense ministers. This was something they had “been waiting a long time for,” he added.

Putin announced in Moscow that three documents had been signed: an agreement between the Syrian government and the armed opposition on a ceasefire, measures for overseeing the ceasefire, and an agreement to start peace talks.

The Russian government said in an announcement that Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had spoken by phone about the truce and upcoming peace talks in the Kazakh capital, Astana.

Though the United States did not play a role in brokering this agreement, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said President-elect Donald Trump’s administration would be welcome to join the Syrian peace process once he takes office.

The Syrian military posted to the state-run Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) that it had declared a “comprehensive” cessation of hostilities following “victories and advances” by the nation’s armed forces. The Syrian army said that the so-called Islamic State (IS) and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly the Nusra Front) “and the groups affiliated to them” were not part of the agreement.

In a statement made just prior to the announcement of the ceasefire, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavusoglu said Turkey and Russia would be the guarantors of the agreement. He also stipulated that foreign fighter groups, including Lebanon-based Hezbollah, needed to leave Syria as well. This demand may not be received favorably by Iran, which, in addition to supporting the Assad government, has been a steadfast supporter of Hezbollah. (The Arab League, the United States, France, the Gulf Cooperation Council, Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, and Israel have all classified Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.)

However, observed a Fox News report, Hezbollah is not likely to withdraw from Syria in the near future because its leader has repeatedly claimed that their presence there is primarily to prevent attacks by extremists deep inside Lebanon. The report noted that Hezbollah has sent thousands of fighters to support Assad, and has been a key player in Syria’s civil war since 2013, mostly in areas near Syria’s border with Lebanon.



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on December 29, 2016

Fox News also cited a statement from Syria's Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem noting that fighters from more than 80 countries have joined insurgent groups trying to remove Assad from power while the Syrian government is backed by fighters from countries including Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Russia.

Since the role of the United States in negotiating or guaranteeing this latest ceasefire is notably absent, we should consider just what the U.S. role has been and will be. Previous ceasefire deals brokered by the United States and Russia in February and September failed to hold, with the most recent one lasting only a week. This time around, the U.S.-backed Free Syrian Army announced that it will honor the ceasefire, according to an e-mailed statement from the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. Bloomberg reported that Nasr Al-Hariri, a coalition spokesman, said his group signed the agreement and all opposition forces are committed to the truce. Al-Hariri told Al Jazeera TV that he "hoped this will pave the way for a new political phase" despite "very bad experiences" with previous cease-fire agreements.

Just two days before the ceasefire was announced, Russia's RT reported that Turkish President Erdogan made some harsh accusations against the United States, saying, "it's very clear" that the U.S.-led anti-Assad coalition is supporting terrorist groups in Syria, the Islamic State (also known as ISIS/ISIL) among them.

Speaking at a press conference on December 27, Erdogan said that while the United States has accused Turkey of supporting ISIS, the U.S.-led coalition has assisted terrorists themselves.

"We have confirmed evidence, with pictures, photos and videos," he added.

Commenting on the Turkish leader's accusations, U.S. State Department spokesman Mark Toner said Erdogan's claims were "ludicrous."

Stating that there is "no basis for truth" in Erdogan's statement, Toner added that Washington is "100 percent behind the defeat and destruction of Daesh [ISIS], even beyond Syria and Iraq."

Whether Erdogan's accusations are accurate or not, there is ample evidence that U.S. aid to the rebels attempting to overthrow the Assad government has served to aid terrorists, including ISIS.

As we noted [in September](#), one of the earliest voices against providing U.S. aid to the rebels attempting to overthrow the Assad government was Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.), who strongly opposed President Obama's request of Congress to give him authority to arm and train supposedly "moderate" Syrian rebel groups.

"It's a mistake to arm them," declared Paul on CBS's *This Morning* on September 15, 2015. "Most of the arms we've given to the so-called moderate rebels have wound up in the hands of ISIS, because ISIS simply takes it from them, or it's given to them, or we mistakenly actually give it to some of the radicals."

A major objection Paul had to aiding the rebels was that they were focused on overthrowing Assad's regime, rather than fighting the terrorist group ISIS. During his interview, Paul pointed to reports of a truce between some "moderate" Syrian rebels and ISIS over the prior weekend.

"I would say one insightful piece of news from the last week is, some of the moderate rebels, so-called moderate rebels have now signed a cease-fire with ISIS," he said. "So, really their enemy is really Assad. They don't really care what ISIS does."

As we noted in [September of 2015](#), the U.S. government knew that supporting jihadists fighting against



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Assad would produce a fundamentalist Islamic State in Eastern Syria — and that “Obama’s supposed ‘anti-ISIS’ coalition knowingly backed ISIS and other Islamic terrorists for precisely that purpose.”

A 2012 Defense Intelligence Agency report clearly revealed our government’s objectives. “The West, Gulf countries [the Islamic regimes ruling Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, etc.], and Turkey support the Syrian opposition,” it explained. The report went on to note that al-Qaeda supported the Syrian uprising from the beginning as well. “There is the possibility of establishing a declared or undeclared Salafist [fundamentalist Islam] principality in Eastern Syria (Hasaka and Der Zor), and *this is exactly what the supporting powers to the opposition want*, in order to isolate the Syrian regime.” (Emphasis added.)

Vice President Joe Biden, during a question-and-answer session following a speech at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government in 2014, admitted that there was no “moderate middle” among the anti-Assad rebels:

“The fact is, the ability to identify a moderate middle in Syria, um, was, uh — there was no moderate middle,” Biden said, acknowledging that history was likely to record the facts. “What my constant cry was, that our biggest problem was our allies — our allies in the region were our largest problem.” Specifically identifying the Islamist rulers of Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia, along with unspecified others such as Qatar, Biden noted that “they were so determined to take down Assad and essentially have a proxy Sunni-Shia war.”

While Biden admitted that the rebels were not moderate, he placed the blame for aiding the non-moderate (i.e., extremist) rebels on “our allies,” naming specifically the Islamist rulers of Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia, while ignoring our own government’s role in aiding rebels who were often allied with ISIS.

Moreover, that role was significant. A *Washington Post* article on September 11, 2013 reported that the CIA was sending weapons to the “moderate” Syrian rebels though Saudi Arabia and Qatar — nations that Hillary Clinton said in an e-mail on August 17, 2014 were providing clandestine financial and logistic support to ISIS and other radical groups.

Considering that our interventionist policies in aiding the anti-Assad rebels in Syria served only to help ISIS and other terrorist groups which had joined forces in the fight to remove Assad, it may be just as well that Russia and Turkey have taken it upon themselves to broker a ceasefire. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov may have invited the Trump administration to join the Syrian peace process once Trump takes office, but we would be better off avoiding anything to do with Syria or its neighboring countries entirely.

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