

Lavrov Reaffirms Russia's Support of Assad Government

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- Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov labeled Western demands that Moscow should persuade Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to step down as 'unrealistic', RIA Novosti reports.

"We have been hearing statements that a key to the Syrian settlement is in Moscow," he told a news conference in Moscow on Monday, July 16.

"But they [the West] tell us that we should make Assad step down but it's not realistic. He will not leave - not because we support him but because a very significant part of the country's population doesn't want him to go," Lavrov said.

Lavrov also emphasized that the conflict in Syria "is gaining a religious dimension" and al Qaeda forces are making roots in the country.

"We are very concerned over the situation in Syria which is getting more and more complicated, and the conflict is gaining an inter-confessional dimension," he said.

Besides, Lavrov said, Russia would accept a technical extension of the UN observer mission in Syria. "We are prepared to accept a so-called technical extension - a resolution that will not contain any substantive evaluations," he said.

Two draft Syria resolutions are pending at the UN Security Council - one sponsored by Russia, calling for the extension of the observer mission to establish dialog between the authorities and the opposition, and the other proposed by Britain, which contains the threat of sanctions to end violence.

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