

Russian FM Sergey Lavrov Calls John Kerry's Bluff, Demands Concrete Proposals on Syria

By [Alexander Mercouris](#)

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US Secretary of State Kerry's latest offer for all Jihadis to leave Aleppo appears to be an attempt to get the Russians to agree to a ceasefire in order to preserve the Al-Qaeda controlled pocket in eastern Aleppo until after Obama leaves the Presidency in January. However Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov called Kerry's bluff by demanding that the US come up with concrete proposals and a definite timetable for the Jihadis' withdrawal.

As news filters in of the Syrian army's [capture of another formerly jihadi controlled district of eastern Aleppo](#), and of [talks between the Russians and jihadi representatives in the Turkish capital Ankara](#), there comes news of [further discussions between Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov and US Secretary State Kerry](#) in Geneva.

That Lavrov and Kerry are talking at all may come as a surprise to many people. Just a few weeks ago – on the eve of the US Presidential election – all the talk was of the US refusing to talk to the Russians further, and of the Russians being arraigned on war crimes charges.

Now Lavrov is saying that Kerry came to Geneva on 2nd December 2016 and “finally presented proposals on Aleppo in line with Russia's stance”.

In reality, though the fact has been little reported in the media, the last few weeks have witnessed frantic diplomatic activity, with the UN repeatedly calling for a ceasefire in Aleppo to enable it to send humanitarian supplies there, further denunciations of Russia's actions by the US and other Western governments, and a further attempt by the French to propose a Resolution to the UN Security Council to impose a ceasefire.

The reason this activity has attracted so little attention is that they are action carried out by ghosts.

No one takes seriously the diplomatic manoeuvres of US and French governments that are in the last weeks and months of their respective lives, and which are likely to be replaced by new governments that take a diametrically opposite view of the Syrian conflict than they do.

There is also the factor that with the [military situation in eastern Aleppo approaching its endgame](#), no one any longer seriously believes these diplomatic manoeuvres are going to change anything.

Possibly the most surreal event of all was a bizarre debate in Britain's House of Commons, called at the insistence of a group of over 200 British MPs who [demanded that the British air force air drop supplies to “relieve the suffering” of eastern Aleppo](#).

The idea that the British air force could challenge the Russians where [even the mighty US air force refuses to go](#) is beyond ridiculous, and the whole debate – complete with the government’s failure to call the demand ridiculous, and the [heckling of a government minister when he tried \(weakly\) to explain some of the realities](#) – shows just how delusional on the subject of Aleppo and Syria some people in Britain have become.

In light of this it comes as no surprise to read in The Economist that there were even some people presumably in Britain (since The Economist is a British magazine) who apparently seriously proposed [building tunnels to eastern Aleppo to send supplies](#) there

Out-maneuvred, Western diplomats have discussed lifting the siege by digging tunnels..... (!)

As for the proposals Kerry presented to Lavrov, we have no details but Lavrov has made absolutely clear what the Russian demands are

Moscow is ready to immediately send our military experts and diplomats to Geneva to work out joint actions with our US colleagues in line with the [new] American proposals, which would ensure the withdrawal of all militants without exception from eastern Aleppo, and would provide unimpeded humanitarian supplies to the city’s residents and ensure the establishment of normal life in eastern Aleppo.

(bold italics added)

This has been the consistent Russian demand since at least the summer, [as reported by The Duran](#), but so far as I know nowhere else.

As we have also previously explained, the US appeared to accede to this demand in the Kerry-Lavrov agreement of this September. However the US failed to do what it had agreed to do, which was get the Al-Qaeda led Jihadis to withdraw from eastern Aleppo by way of the Castello road. The reasons for this was divisions within the US administration, with the hardline group in the ascendant acting in a way that was intended – as Lavrov today also said

...[to] take the heat off Al-Nusra, which directs the militants in the un-liberated parts of eastern Aleppo,...

Will this latest offer from Kerry amount to anything? The Russians are insisting that before anything happens there must be a concrete agreement on a timetable for the Jihadis’ withdrawal. Though Lavrov is offering to send experts to Geneva to work on this offer, he made it clear that any meeting must not be a meeting for a meeting’s sake

It must not be a meeting for the sake of a meeting. It is necessary to agree on a detailed timeline of steps.

These comments of Lavrov’s highlight the deep mistrust the Russians now have towards the Obama administration. Plainly what they will not agree to is a ceasefire with the terms and

the timetable of the withdrawal left to be discussed later. They are insisting on a definite commitment – one binding on the Jihadis – for them to withdraw completely from eastern Aleppo by a specific date.

In reality – as Lavrov almost certainly knows – Kerry’s latest proposals probably are a last desperate bid to get the Russians to agree to a ceasefire in Aleppo so that what is left of the jihadi pocket can be preserved intact until after Obama’s final departure in January.

That way Obama would be spared the humiliation of having the jihadi pocket fall whilst he is still President, so that the blame for its eventual fall can be passed on by him and the members of his administration onto Donald Trump.

Lavrov’s comments suggest that the Russians are in no mood to help Obama in this way, and given the appalling state relations between the US and Russia have fallen to under his Presidency, it is difficult to see why they would do so.

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