

US State Department Confirms Planned “Timeline” for Syria “Regime Change”

By [RT](#)

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[Featured image: State Department Spokesman John Kirby. Source: Wikipedia]

A “working paper” written by US diplomats envisions Syrian President Bashar al-Assad ceding power to a new government by March 2017. The State Department confirmed the document was authentic, but denied that it represented official US policy.

The key points of the policy paper were published on Wednesday by the Associated Press. It envisions an 18-month political process, starting with talks in Vienna next month and ending in Assad’s resignation next year.

According to the document, by April there would be a “security committee” composed of members of the current government and opposition groups. By May, the Syrian parliament would be dissolved and a new transitional authority established, with the mission to draft a new constitution and pass reforms. The Syrians would vote on the constitution in a referendum scheduled for January 2017. Two months later, the paper says, Assad “relinquishes presidency; inner circle departs.”

At the press conference on Wednesday, State Department spokesman John Kirby acknowledged the paper was authentic, but tried to dismiss it as a working-level document written by a staff member.

“That kind of work is done here at the State Department all the time,” Kirby said, adding that it did not represent official US policy but merely laid out a potential timeline for the political process in Syria.

“All these are targets,” Kirby said. “Our hope and expectation is that the entire 18-month process will start this month.”

Does envisioning Assad’s departure next year, rather than right away, suggest that Washington wants to avoid a power vacuum that could be exploited by Islamic State, RT’s Gayane Chichakyan asked.

While acknowledging that the US wanted to avoid a collapse of Syrian institutions, Kirby said the US policy towards the Syrian president has not changed. He cited Secretary of State John Kerry as saying that “*the exact timing of his departure isn’t something that we’re fixated on.*”

In December, the UN Security Council [passed a resolution](#) endorsing the political process

that would set up “*inclusive and non-sectarian governance*” in Syria, using the 18-month timeline framework referenced in the State Department document.

Kirby’s efforts to dismiss the document, and AP’s coverage of it, as somehow irrelevant irked the agency’s chief diplomatic correspondent Matt Lee, who at one point asked: “*Are your arms a little tired, [from] the straw man you put up to knock down?*”

Earlier in the briefing, Lee needled Kirby over the statements about North Korea that made it sound as if the Obama administration rejected reality.

“We will not accept North Korea as a nuclear armed state. And yet it is,” Lee said. “You also say this about other things. You say you’ll never accept Crimea as a part of Russia. Yet it is.”

“Isn’t it time to recognize these things for what they are and not live in this in this illusion, or fantasy, where you pretend that things that are, are not?” Lee asked, to chuckles in the briefing room.

“The short answer is, no,” Kirby retorted, denying that Washington lived in a fantasy world. Rather, he argued, there was a difference between dealing with reality and officially acknowledging it.

Syria has been embroiled in a civil war since 2011, with fractious rebel groups backed by Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the US demanding the ouster of President Assad. The conflict has claimed an estimated 250,000 lives and displaced millions. Russia and Iran have resisted all efforts by outside powers to determine Syria’s future, insisting that this would be a decision for the Syrians themselves.

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