
Russia, Iran and Turkey Reach Key Agreement on Syria Conflict

21/12/2016



The top diplomats of the regional powers met in Moscow and agreed to work on a successful peace deal and expand Aleppo-cease-fire to the rest of Syria.

Russia, Iran and Turkey have all agreed that the priority in Syria is fighting "terrorism" and not the removal of President Bashar Assad, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told reporters after a tripartite summit Tuesday in Moscow.

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Lavrov welcomed Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif to the Russian capital for talks on the Syrian conflict as the evacuation of the last rebel-held enclave in Aleppo continued.

"Right now the evacuation is wrapping up," Lavrov said at a joint press conference. "We hope that this is a question of one or a maximum of two days."

The three diplomats said their governments were ready to help broker a Syrian peace deal and they adopted a declaration that laid out the principles any agreement should follow.

"Iran, Russia and Turkey are ready to assist in preparing the agreement in the making between the Syrian government and the opposition and to become its guarantor," Lavrov said, citing a joint statement.

"The ministers agree with the importance of widening the cease-fire (and) of free access for humanitarian aid and movement of civilians on Syrian territory."

Russia and Iran have been Assad's main backers since the beginning of the six-year Syrian conflict, whereas Turkey has long supported many of the anti-government groups fighting to oust him.

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But Turkey and Russia have recently started working more closely, striking a complex deal that has allowed opposition groups and civilians to leave east Aleppo.

The Syrian Army broadcast messages into the last rebel-held enclave of the city Tuesday, warning that it was poised to enter the area sometime during the day and urging insurgents to speed up their evacuation of the city.

The operation to evacuate has brought out 37,500 people since late last week and the goal is to complete the process by Wednesday, Cavusoglu said.

The evacuation of Aleppo's rebel sector is seen as a pivotal moment in the nearly six-year-long war that has killed more than 400,000 people and triggered a major humanitarian and refugee crisis.

Thousands more were still waiting to be bused out, according to Red Cross spokeswoman Ingy Sedky. She said that 750 people had also been evacuated from Fuaa and Kafraya, two Shiite-majority villages in northwest Syria that have been besieged by rebel fighters.
