



Kerry and Lavrov Agree to Re-Launch Geneva III Talks on Syria as Soon as Possible

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U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, in a phone conversation late Friday, agreed to re-launch the stalled Geneva III Talks on Syria as soon as possible and on further cooperation on initiatives to end the war. The re-launch of the talks under the aegis of the UN was scheduled for March 7, but was postponed to March 9 due to technical reasons and for hostilities subsequent to the launch of the ceasefire to settle down.

The Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement about the phone conversation between John Kerry and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov, noting that the sides discussed the implementation of the Russian-US initiative on a ceasefire in Syria, which excludes anti-terrorist efforts, and United Nations Security Council resolution 2268 adopted in its support and confirms the policy towards further close cooperation between our countries' military that was approved by the Russian and US presidents.



Courtesy of Alexander-Shcherback, Tass

The Ministry added that the sides spoke in favor of the soonest launch of United Nations-brokered talks in Geneva between the Syrian government and the entire spectrum of the opposition, during which the Syrians are to decide on the future of their country, and that the phone conversation had been initiated by the American side.

The two top diplomats agreed to "continue active efforts to promote all the aspects of the Syrian settlement via the International Syria Support Group co-chaired by Russia, the United States and the United Nations," the ministry said.

The two diplomats also exchanged views about the situation in Yemen. Kerry and Lavrov reportedly decided to invigorate joint efforts towards a peace settlement to end the crisis in the country. Initiatives would be supportive of actions taken by the United Nations, stated the Ministry. Kerry and Lavrov reportedly also discussed the not very encouraging results of the recent meeting of the Normandy Four (Russia, France, Germany and Ukraine). The group is working at a settlement of the dispute between Ukraine's government in Kiev and the rebelling Donbass republics in eastern Ukraine.

The ceasefire in Syria is, generally speaking, holding and expanding, as more and more of

the smaller armed groups who either have no ties or have severed their ties to Jabhat Al-Nusra and the self-proclaimed Islamic State (ISIL) and other insurgencies designated as terrorist organizations by the UNSC join the ceasefire and/or lay down their arms. Meanwhile, Turkey continues its support of Jabhat Al-Nusra, ISIL as well as so-called "Turkmen rebels". The odd NATO member Turkey also continues its cross-border shelling of Syrian - Kurdish YPG /PYG forces. Turkish special forces have been observed at several locations in Syria.

Turkey also continues its crackdown against Kurds in Turkey and the Turkish Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) which is a traditional ally of the YPG / PYG while Turkey's AKP government also intensified the crackdown on opposition media and journalists.

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