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Multinational Deal May Allow Assad to Stay

By Jason Ditz
September 27, 2015

The “official” positions of myriad Western nations on the Syrian Civil War have been demands for the unconditional surrender of the Assad government. This has been the US position as recently as a few days ago, when the State Department reported US and British officials met and agreed Assad has to go.

But they seem to be getting flexible on that matter suddenly, with British Premier David Cameron now reportedly in favor of keeping Assad in power for the sake of forming a “unity government,” which is the exact same Russian plan that the US and Britain have been repudiating for months.

US officials, after spending the past couple of weeks railing at Russia for still being on board with this plan, today report that Secretary of State John Kerry met with Russian FM Sergey Lavrov to discuss a “political transition” which US officials were insisting just days prior was totally impossible.

It’s unclear where this sudden momentum is coming from, but the UN has been working at getting some local ceasefires in place, and a deal whereby secular rebels would get on board with a power-sharing deal and President Assad would remain in some form seem to have found respectability anew as officials head to the UN General Assembly.

It may reflect the worsening of the war prospects of the secular rebels, or the virtual lack of “pro-US” rebels who didn’t turn out to be in that program simply to loot the weapons and give them to al-Qaeda, but as ISIS continues to grow, this sudden shift suggests a deal could finally be possible.

The question then becomes if it is “too late.” ISIS has held over half of Syria since late spring, and al-Qaeda is also growing in power in the north. The secular rebels, barely existent at this point, are unlikely to significantly bolster the Assad government, and that government’s ability to fend off defeat after defeat is in increasing question.