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Negotiator: Obama Spurned Offer for Syria's Assad to Step Down

The former president of Finland, who served as a senior negotiator among United Nations Security Council members early on amid the crisis in Syria, said in a recent interview that the Obama administration and other Western governments ignored a 2012 offer by the Kremlin that could have seen Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad step down. Instead, Western powers, demanding that “Assad must go,” [kept showering support on jihadist “rebels”](#) waging war [against Christians](#) and the “apostate” tyrant in Damascus. If true, the explosive revelations mean that European and American officials have even more explaining to do surrounding the deaths of hundreds of thousands of innocent people in Syria since 2012.



Speaking in an interview with the left-wing U.K. *Guardian* newspaper, ex-Finnish president and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Martti Ahtisaari (shown, right) [outlined the proposal](#) he said was made by Russian strongman Vladimir Putin's UN envoy, Vitaly Churkin. According to Ahtisaari, the plan, which he believed was backed by the Kremlin, would have stopped Western arms shipments to jihadists, promptly opened talks between Assad and opposition forces, and found an “elegant” way for Assad to cede power. Ahtisaari said he presented the Russian proposal to authorities from the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, but was ignored.

“The most intriguing was the meeting I had with Vitaly Churkin because I know this guy,” Ahtisaari told the British paper. “We don't necessarily agree on many issues but we can talk candidly. I explained what I was doing there and he said: ‘Martti, sit down and I'll tell you what we should do.’ He said three things: One — we should not give arms to the opposition. Two — we should get a dialogue going between the opposition and Assad straight away. Three — we should find an elegant way for Assad to step aside.”

The Guardian reported that Ahtisaari was dispatched to meet the missions of all five permanent UN Security Council member governments in late February of 2012. Apparently he was sent by a group of former politicians and bureaucrats including Jimmy Carter and ex-UN boss Kofi Annan styling itself “The Elders.” After speaking to Churkin, who presented the proposal, Ahtisaari said he proceeded to relay the message to the UN missions of the U.S., U.K., and French governments. No response.

According to Ahtisaari, a Social Democrat and board member with the globalist European Council on Foreign Relations, Western powers spurned the offer because they were allegedly convinced that the Assad regime was on the verge of crumbling. Yet, more than three years later, an estimated 250,000 Syrians have died and millions have been displaced, and the war between Western-backed “rebels” and



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the Assad regime continues to rage on. “It was an opportunity lost in 2012,” Ahtisaari said in the *Guardian* interview, adding that the West was now obligated to take in the refugees produced by the crisis as a way of “paying the bills we have caused ourselves.”

Apparently Churkin refused to comment on Ahtisaari’s statements, saying it had been a “private conversation.” Western diplomats at the UN also declined to comment on the record, *The Guardian* reported. But Ahtisaari was reportedly adamant about it. “There was no question because I went back and asked him a second time,” the Finnish negotiator was quoted as saying. He also told the paper that Churkin had just returned from a trip to Moscow, and that there seemed to be “little doubt” that the Russian UN envoy was pitching the proposal on behalf of the Kremlin.

After the news of Ahtisaari’s comments made headlines, Kremlin officials were quick to deny the report. “This can be very easily checked by date — from the very beginning of the Syrian crisis Russia has repeated at various levels that only the Syrian people and only by means of democratic procedures can determine their future,” Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov was quoted as saying. “I can only confirm once again that Russia is not engaged in regimes’ change, and Russia has never practiced offering graceful or disgraceful stepping down scenarios.”

Despite the denial from the Kremlin, though, there were actually some hints at the time that Moscow was open to Assad surrendering power. In the summer of 2012, for example, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov mentioned a possible “Yemen scenario” in which that nation’s longtime U.S.-backed dictator stepped down amid a negotiated settlement. “Application of the so-called Yemen scenario to resolve the conflict in Syria is possible only if the Syrians themselves agree to it,” Bogdanov was [quoted as saying](#) by the Interfax news agency at the time. “If this scenario is discussed by Syrians themselves and is adopted by them, we are not against it.”

Separately, Bloomberg also [reported](#) in June of 2012 that Moscow was willing to see Assad step aside. “As Syria slides toward civil war, Russia is signaling that it no longer views President Bashar al-Assad’s position as tenable and is working with the U.S. to seek an orderly transition,” reported the news agency. Indeed, Bloomberg even cited two unnamed U.S. officials as the source for its claim that the Kremlin was willing to negotiate Assad’s departure from power, and perhaps even from Syria, with the Obama administration.

“In Moscow, they understand now that there is no chance of maintaining the status quo, they are looking at the question of a change of regime,” analyst Fyodor Lukyanov with the Moscow-based Council on Foreign and Defense Policy was quoted as saying in the report. “The only thing that Russia can do is to try and keep some influence in Syria. A managed change of regime is the only option now.” The same report also cited an unnamed official Russian source and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov as saying that Moscow had never insisted on Assad remaining in power. Even Putin at the time said his regime was not “for Assad.”

Why, then, did the Obama administration and its allies among European governments and Sunni-Islamic dictatorships continue to shower aid on jihadist “rebels” under the guise of ousting a Moscow-backed Assad? Unfortunately, the truth may remain elusive for the indefinite future, and none of the political figures commenting on the subject has much credibility. But [some clues](#) might be found in examining [what has happened since then](#) — and what those same [jihad-supporting](#) anti-Assad governments [have been demanding](#).

The Guardian also interviewed Sir John Jenkins, a former director of the Middle East department of the



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U.K.'s Foreign Office at the time, for answers. Jenkins, contradicting Ahtisaari's statements and other available evidence, claimed that he never saw "any possible reference" to Moscow expressing a willingness to put Assad's fate on the negotiating table. "The weakest point is Ahtisaari's claim that Churkin was speaking with Moscow's authority," continued Jenkins. "I think if he had told me what Churkin had said, I would have replied I wanted to hear it from Putin too before I could take it seriously. And even then I'd have wanted to be sure it wasn't a Putin trick to draw us in to a process that ultimately preserved Assad's state under a different leader but with the same outcome."

An unnamed European diplomat also contradicted some of Ahtisaari's narrative. "I very much doubt the P3 [the U.S., U.K., and France] refused or dismissed any such strategy offer at the time," claimed the diplomat, who was reportedly stationed in the region at the time. "The questions were more to do with sequencing — the beginning or end of process — and with Russia's ability to deliver — to get Assad to step down."

Today, as Obama's supposed "anti-ISIS" coalition continues to move from [alleged blunder](#) to [deadly blunder](#), Putin has stepped up his military support for the Assad regime. "We are supporting the government of Syria in the fight against a terrorist aggression, are offering and will continue to offer it necessary military-technical assistance," he declared at a recent meeting in Tajikistan with rulers of other former Soviet states. "Without an active participation of the Syrian authorities and the military, it would be impossible to expel the terrorists from that country and the region as a whole, and to protect the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Syrian people from destruction."

Putin, whose regime has an important naval base in the Syrian port of Tartus, also sought to portray himself as the noble hero in the battle [against terrorists armed by Obama's "anti-ISIS" coalition](#). "People are fleeing Syria primarily to escape fighting that has been fueled from the outside with supplies of weapons and hardware, they are fleeing to escape terrorist atrocities," he observed, correctly. "Without Russia's support for Syria, the situation in the country would have been worse than in Libya, and the flow of refugees would have been even bigger."

So, [once again](#), [ruthless ex-KGB boss](#) and ["Eurasian Union" architect](#) Putin gets to look like the only adult in the room as Obama, European powers, and their Islamic dictator allies look like fools or even criminals with the blood of innocents all over their hands. Various commentators have blasted Ahtisaari for waiting so long to come forward with his allegations. It is certainly a legitimate criticism — it is hard to imagine what purpose could be served by waiting until more than 200,000 people died to set the record straight. On both the [Left](#) and the [Right](#), meanwhile, Obama critics seized on Ahtisaari's statements to ridicule and lambaste the administration's supposed "strategy" in Syria.

Regardless of whether Moscow did or did not offer to surrender Assad to Western powers, the U.S. government has no business meddling in Syria to begin with — whether by supporting opposition forces, as it did prior to the Syrian civil war, or by arming and training jihadists to overthrow the regime or fight other jihadists. Obama also lacks the constitutional authority to wage wars without a declaration of war from Congress. Considering the [costs and the fruits of such lawless interventionism](#), the best course of action for Washington, D.C., and the rest of the world would be for the U.S. government to follow the non-interventionist advice of America's Founders.

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