

## John Kerry says partition of Syria could be part of 'plan B' if peace talks fail

by Patrick Wintour vial gail - The Guardian *Thursday, Feb 25 2016, 6:05am*

international / prose / post

Plan 'B' my sweet fanny, it has always been plan A. Carving up the Middle East has been the plan [all along](#). Now an excuse, the failure of designed to fail 'peace talks', really, who does America think it's kidding, its fly has been undone on this issue for [decades](#)?



### ***Errand boy for the corporate-banker elite, John 'dunce' Kerry***

*US secretary of state tells committee it 'may be too late' to keep Syria whole and suggests Washington would support partition if ceasefire is unsuccessful.*

John Kerry, the US secretary of state, has said he will move towards a plan B that could involve a partition of Syria if a planned ceasefire due to start in the next few days does not materialise, or if a genuine shift to a transitional government does not take place in the coming months.

"It may be too late to keep it as a whole Syria if we wait much longer," he told the US Senate foreign relations committee on Tuesday.

Kerry did not advocate partition as a solution and refused to specify details of a plan B, such as increased military involvement, beyond insisting it would be wrong to assume that Barack Obama would not countenance further action.

He also admitted it was possible Russian-backed forces could capture Aleppo, but pointed out that it has been very hard to retain territory in the five-year civil war.

Kerry said he will be meeting with Russia and other world powers in Geneva in the next few days to discuss the modalities of the ceasefire that was agreed on Monday and is due to come into force on Saturday.

Both the Syrian government led by Bashar al-Assad and Syrian opposition body the High Negotiating Council have said they will conditionally abide by the ceasefire, including the identification of territories and groups that would be included in the ceasefire.

The cessation of hostilities, agreed in a phone call between the US and Russian presidents, Obama and Vladimir Putin, specifically excludes Islamic State, al-Nusra Front and other terrorist groups identified by the United Nations security council.

There are serious doubts that the ceasefire will hold or be jointly enforceable by the US and Russia because of complex alliances in the opposition and the way in which terrorist groups are intertwined with legitimate opposition forces.

Kerry suggested partition could form part of an eventual solution, saying "this can get a lot uglier and Russia has to be sitting there evaluating that too. It may be too late to keep it as a whole Syria if it is much longer". It is the first time Kerry has spoken of partition, although some believe Putin would be content to see this happen.

On the broader progress of talks, Kerry said: "Assad himself is going to have to make some real decisions about the formation of a transitional government process that is real ... there are certainly plan B options being considered".

He said it would be clear in the next few months - possibly three - whether Assad was willing to compromise, insisting all sides wanted a secular, not sectarian, Syria in which all minorities are protected and the people have the right to choose their leader and future. He continued to insist that Assad could not remain leader because he was not acceptable to those who have fought him over the past four years.

Pressed on whether Russia was serious about the ceasefire, Kerry said: "In the next few days we will know more. It is step by step. There are no illusions. Eyes are open."

He claimed Russia had shown cooperation in recent days and pointed to an increase in humanitarian aid to as many 80,000 Syrians.

Kerry appeared more aware than before that a solution of some kind was needed because Putin was using the refugee crisis to undermine European unity. He said: "Europe is deeply threatened by what is happening. They are talking about different border measures that might be taken. I think it is imperative that America be prepared to help Europe as much as possible."

Kerry was speaking after the Assad government said it would work with Russia to define which groups and areas would be included in the cessation of hostilities plan, which is due to begin on Saturday.

The Syrian government said opposition groups could not be allowed to use the ceasefire to strengthen their military positions and this would be regarded as a breach of the agreement.

The US and Russia's joint statement on a ceasefire on Monday would not have been issued unless the two countries had relatively clear indications that its terms would be accepted by the key players, including the Syrian government, the opposition forces sponsored by Saudi Arabia, and Syrian Kurds.

Assad's recent military advances around Aleppo - Syria's second city - have largely been enabled by the ferocity of Russian airstrikes against opposition positions.

There is scepticism that the ceasefire will hold due to the difficulties in marking out what territory is covered, and the way in which some opposition groups are interwoven with al-Nusra Front.

The Syrian government stressed the importance of sealing the borders, halting foreign support to armed groups and "preventing these organisations from strengthening their capabilities or changing their positions", in order to avoid wrecking the agreement.

Assad believes Turkey has acted as a supply line for foreign fighters supporting both the “moderate” opposition and Isis.

Turkey has welcomed the ceasefire plan, but is under pressure from the UN to allow entry to tens of thousands more refugees massed on the Syrian border. They are fleeing from the fighting in the Aleppo area.

The High Negotiating Council – the main umbrella organisation for Syrian opposition groups backed by the west and Saudi Arabia – said late on Monday that it accepted the terms of the ceasefire. However, it added that the plan was dependent on ending all sieges, allowing in humanitarian aid, releasing all detainees and ending bombardments by ground or air.

The British foreign secretary, Philip Hammond, expressed scepticism about the ceasefire. Speaking to the House of Commons, he said: “Whatever the technicalities, the big picture is this: unless the level of Russian airstrikes dramatically decreases, this ceasefire will not hold because the moderate armed opposition cannot lay down their weapons and will not lay down their weapons while they are being annihilated from the air.

“The ceasefire agreement will allow continuing operations against Daesh [Isis] and al-Nusra, and no one would disagree with that. The problem is the Russians claim to date that all of their action has been against those groups, so on the face of it the Russians could be entering into this arrangement on the basis that they are not going to change their behaviour at all. If so, it will fail before it gets off the ground so everything hinges on Russia’s good intentions.”

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