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Kerry Says Willing to Negotiate With Assad

By Jason Ditz

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In an interview today with CBS News, Secretary of State John Kerry said his goal is to push the Syrian government until President Bashar Assad is willing to negotiate with him, with an eye on a post-war transition.

Though the comments were couched as being part of a “transition of power” away from the current Syrian government, the implication of such negotiations is that Assad’s ouster is not an immediate precondition.

That implication is also apparent in recent comments from pro-US opposition factions, with reports over the weekend that they intend to discuss the possibility of leaving Assad in power for at least the next two years as part of the “transition” process.

Kerry's comments put the US more directly in line with that position, though it isn't clear if the administration intended that to be the case, with the State Department quickly disavowing Kerry's comments.

State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf insists that there was always an intention to negotiate with a "representative" for Assad, but that no US government official would ever be willing to negotiate with Assad himself.

This conflict between the two statements is likely part of the administration's ongoing policy of deliberate vagueness on the war, trying to satisfy conflicting interests with conflicting statements, while their exact policy often remains very much a mystery.