Lavrov: Syria ‘safe zones’ possible if Damascus agrees

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Russia may support the US initiative to establish so-called ‘safe zones’ for refugees in Syria, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said. The plan would require close cooperation with the UN and approval from Syrian President Bashar Assad’s government, he added.

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Lavrov said the American proposal to create secure areas for refugees within Syria was put forward in the context of migrant flows to the neighboring countries, the Middle East, as well as Europe, and “*at the end of the day, the US*."
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“*If this is about the people who were forced to leave their homes by the conflict, […] getting their basic needs covered, […] then I think that the idea to create areas within Syria for those internally displaced could be discussed with the UN’s High Commissioner for Refugees and other organizations*,” he said.

Though promising, the proposal would require negotiations with Damascus to agree on the principles of creating such safe zones on Syrian territory, Lavrov added.

Hours after his interview, the state-run Sana news agency published a statement from the government saying that any attempt to install safe zones without its consent would constitute a *"violation of Syria's sovereignity."*

He noted that the US initiative is completely different from what Western countries proposed at various stages of the Syrian war.

"*There have been ideas of creating some areas where an alternative Syrian government could sit, and use those areas for regime change*."

Such a scheme was seen in Libya, where the establishment of an alternative government in Benghazi was used as a pretext for the Western-led invasion to topple the regime of Muammar Gaddafi, Lavrov explained, adding that the Libyan intervention went ahead despite no green light from the UN Security Council.

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On Thursday, US President Donald Trump said on ABC that he will “*absolutely do safe zones in Syria for the people*.”

He did not elaborate, but did say that Europe has been profoundly wrong to allow "*these millions of people to go into Germany and various other countries*."

Commenting on the statement, the Kremlin said that the White House did not consult Russian authorities on the initiative. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said it was “*important to make sure that this does not further aggravate the situation with refugees.*"