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UK Military in Talks to Help Syria Rebels

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UK Military in Talks to Help Syria Rebels

International coalition could offer air and sea support as well as military training

Kim Sengupta, Tuesday 11th December 2012, The Independent

5 A plan to provide military training to the Syrian rebels fighting the Assad regime and support them with
air
and naval power is being drawn up by an international coalition including Britain, *The Independent* has
learnt.
10 The prospect of Western intervention comes as opposition groups, which have been disorganised and
divided, at long last formed an umbrella political group and a command structure for their 5 militias.
Their
foreign backers are said to believe that the 22-month-long civil war has now reached a tipping point and
it
has become imperative to offer help to the revolutionaries to enable them to make a final push against
15 the
regime.
The head of Britain's armed forces, General Sir David Richards, hosted a confidential meeting in
London a
20 few weeks ago attended by the military chiefs of France, Turkey, Jordan, Qatar and the UAE, and a
three -
star American general, in which the strategy was discussed at length. Other UK government
departments and
their counterparts in allied states in the mission have also been holding extensive meetings on the issue.
The commanders' conference was held at the request of the Prime Minister, according to senior
25 Whitehall
sources. David Cameron is said to be determined that more should be done by Britain to bring to an end
the
15 bloody strife which has claimed 40,000 lives so far and made millions homeless.
One key concern is the onset of winter, with 2.5 million people inside Syria needing help and 1.5
30 million
internally displaced by the fighting, according to the UN. More than 100,000, it is estimated, will be
gathering at borders with neighbouring states which are already hosting refugees and refusing to take
them
in.
35 20 There is also a growing belief among the Western backers of the opposition that intervention in some
form is
necessary now to influence the future political shape of Syria. Jihadist groups among the rebels, some
like
Jabhat al-Nusra linked to al-Qa'ida, have steadily gained in power and influence because of their access
40 to
weapons and money coming from the Gulf states putting more secular groups at a severe disadvantage.