

## **John Kerry says ceasefire in Syria potentially weeks away**

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**Paris:** A ceasefire between Syria's government and opposition could be just weeks away from reality, US Secretary of State John Kerry said today as he visited Paris to show solidarity with France after last week's attacks.

Speaking to reporters at the residence of the US ambassador to France, Kerry said the ceasefire envisioned by the political process agreed upon in Vienna on Saturday would exponentially help efforts to fight the Islamic State group, which has claimed responsibility for the Paris attacks that killed 129 people, as well as end the drawn-out Syrian conflict, which has gone on for over four years.Â

"That's a gigantic step," Kerry said. "If we can get that done, that opens up the aperture for a whole bunch of things.Â

We're weeks away conceivably from the possibility of a big transition for Syria, and I don't think enough people necessarily notice that. But that's the reality." "We are not talking about months, we are talking about weeks hopefully," he said.

Saudi Arabia is expected to host a meeting of Syrian opposition figures by mid-December, at which they are to agree on a delegation to send to talks with representatives from President Bashar Assad's government.

Once those negotiations begin, a ceasefire is to take effect, according to the agreement reached in Vienna.

Such a ceasefire would free nations supporting Syria's various factions to concentrate more on the Islamic State, which is ineligible for the truce and has come under greater military scrutiny since Friday's attacks in Paris.Â

"Out of this event in Paris will come an even greater level of vigilance and cooperation in some places that may have been a little bit less concerned about things hitting them in certain parts of the world," Kerry said.Â

Kerry began his day today in meetings with staffers at the US Embassy in Paris and French President Francois Hollande.

With Hollande, Kerry said the civilized world must boost its efforts to combat the Islamic State by going after the group at its core.

He said the Russian plane downing, along with recent attacks in Lebanon and Turkey made it clear that more pressure must be brought to bear on the Islamic extremists.Â

"We have to step up our efforts to hit them at the core where they're planning these things and also obviously to do more on borders in terms the movement of people," he said.

- AP