

Beat: Miscellaneous

TO THE PRESS - QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH SERGEY LAVROV & JOHN KERRY

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USPA NEWS - In Vienna (Austria), on November 14, 2015, during the Press Availability with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, Questions-Answers and Exchanges between the Russian and American representatives and the Press...

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MR KIRBY: Thank you, gentlemen. Our first question today will come from Karen DeYoung, Washington Post.

QUESTION: Thank you. Secretary Kerry, you indicated earlier that you've set aside your disagreement with Russia on President Assad's future while you move toward talks on a transitional government. Some coalition members and virtually all of the opposition have said they're not interested in participating in negotiations without assurances that Assad will have no role in Syria's future.

Minister Lavrov, President Putin has said no one can demand Assad's departure.

If this is the case, how do you move forward along the lines you outlined? How confident are you that your efforts now to convince the Syrian opposition to compromise on this point will succeed?

And separately, President Assad today blamed the Paris attacks on what he called wrong policies adopted by the West, particularly but not exclusively France, and their support for terrorists fighting his regime. Secretary Kerry, how do you respond to that?

And Minister Lavrov, as Russia itself has recently been victim of an apparent terrorist attack tied to Syria, would you agree with President Assad's assessment?

Thank you.

SECRETARY KERRY: Karen "" Karen?

QUESTION: Yes.

SECRETARY KERRY: Who did you say had said they were not interested? It's news to me.

QUESTION: Many of the groups have said, and Saudi Arabia has said, other countries have said, that they would like some kind of statement on President Assad's future and that they're not interested in entering into a process unless that question is decided in advance.

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, there are some groups who feel that way. But Saudi Arabia is a partner in this communique and in the original communique, and they fully understand the rules of the road here, as do all the countries participating. The "" one of the reasons this war is now four and a half years old is that for the first couple of years the policy of a number of countries, mine included, was Assad has to go first. And we went through a couple of iterations of so-called talks which were non-talks because Assad had no intention of negotiating at that point in time.

Now, we are told through our partners in this effort "" and those at the table, that is "" that he is prepared to be serious, prepared to

send a delegation, prepared to engage in a real negotiation along the lines of the Geneva transition.

Now, the proof will be in the pudding. I'm not sitting here tonight and telling you that that's exactly what will happen. I hope it will happen. I pray it will happen. Because if it doesn't happen, this war won't end. This war can't end as long as Bashar Assad is there. That's the perception of people waging the war. It's not my perception.

If I turned around today and said to you, 'Hey, I'm okay, let's go cut a deal and Assad can be there for a while longer,' guess what? The war won't stop. No one will be there behind me following in that effort.

Why? Because over 300,000 people have been killed. Because people have been tortured. People have been barrel bombed. People have been gassed. People have been displaced. And it is the perception of many of the countries around the table that there is no way that Bashar al-Assad can be part of the long-term future of Syria because most of his country is in displaced people and many of them refugees, and they look back and see what has happened.

Now, not all of them are there exactly because of him, obviously, but the situation is such that he has become the magnet for the foreign fighters. People are coming from all over the world attracted to Daesh and Nusra and whatever "" but mostly Daesh, because of the fight against Assad. And that fight will continue. And the best way to solve this problem is for Bashar al-Assad to recognize that he could save his country by helping to be part of this transition and allow all of the countries in the region to join together and go defeat Daesh. That's the game plan and it makes sense.

But everybody is coming to the table understanding that it is the organic Syrian-led, Syrian-participated-in political process that provides the best opportunity for Assad to make a decision or for the Syrians themselves to make it clear that he cannot continue. And everybody has accepted the idea that that's not going to be dictated by us; it's going to evolve in the context of these negotiations. And if it doesn't, there won't be peace. Now, our hope is that people will take advantage of this moment, obviously.

Now, with respect to Assad's comments about other people's policies being the result "" of being responsible for Paris, I think that's another reason why he is not fit to be the leader of his country, because he really doesn't know how to tell the truth to the public. Daesh is there because Bashar al-Assad began Syria's episode of the Arab Spring. When young people went out into the streets to demonstrate for jobs and opportunity, they were met by Assad's thugs, who beat them up. And when their parents objected to the fact that their children had been beaten up for trying to demonstrate for jobs and opportunity, the parents went out and demonstrated and they were shot. And that's when the bombs began. And it has grown.

Now, are there sectarian components to this? An honest answer has to say yes, those have grown in the process. And that is the danger of this current trend that we are on. It's one of the reasons why I think the international community shares a sense of urgency. Sergey and I agree that the last thing we want to see is Daesh grow because of this. The last thing we want to see is Syria destroyed or incapable of being put together again as a unified country. We all value that.

And so the issue here is whether or not we will recognize what has happened to Syria in this process. Now, there are other aspects of it. Have outside people funded people in a way that's allowed this to happen? Yes. This is very complicated. But make no mistake "" anybody, please "" Assad has cut his own deal with Daesh. They sell oil. He buys oil. They are symbiotic, not real enemies in this. And he has not, when he had a chance over four years, mounted his attacks against Daesh. The Daesh headquarters sat in Raqqa for years. It was never bombed by his bombs. It was children and women and hospitals and schools that were bombed by his bombs.

So that is the reality here. And I think for him to try to blame what happened in Paris on anybody other, particularly the West who is trying to save his country and save his people and who is the biggest single donor to the refugees that he has created in order to safeguard them, is beyond insanity. It's insulting.

FOREIGN MINISTER LAVROV: (Via interpreter) I would also like to answer the question addressed to me alongside with John. John has said that the pudding is ""

FOREIGN MINISTER LAVROV: The proof of the pudding is in the eating.

FOREIGN MINISTER LAVROV: (Via interpreter) As for the role of the person in the history, we had a couple of experiences with Saddam Hussein and Qadhafi, and people said that without those dictators the countries will prosper. I cannot agree therefore with the logic that Assad is the cause for everything. ISIS has not appeared three or four years ago. It is 10 years old.

And I am a little concerned about the phrase that John has just said, and if I quote correctly, that if Assad goes, then all the countries of the region will unite to defeat ISIS. The UN Security Council has confirmed many faults also in its obligatory decisions according to the Chapter 7 that terrorism cannot be justified by anything. And the Paris attacks have shown, alongside with ISIS claiming responsibility for it, that it doesn't matter if you are for Assad or against him; ISIS is your enemy. So it's not about Assad.

John has also talked about Obama's goals for this region, and the number one goal was fighting ISIS and other terrorists, and only after that stabilization and political process. I vote with my both hands for that logic. And I also agree with that because some of our partners actually said that fighting terrorism should be connected and tied to political process

As for the rumors about Assad and ISIS and their oil trade, I have discussed that today with John and other colleagues. While we all know these oil fields very well and who's responsible for them, who produces oil, and where this oil is sent in Syria and outside of Syria in the region, but there was the resolution of the UN Security Council 2199, according to which all countries must break all connections with this oil trade and must report these violations to the UN Security Council. I am happy that we reiterated this resolution once again today.

The U.S.-led coalition against ISIS can put an end to this illegal oil trade. We have agreed again today that the Russian Federation is looking forward and it ready to cooperative in fighting ISIS and other terrorist groups with the U.S.-led coalition, as President Putin has said in his recent interview to the Turkish media.

Thank you.

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