

Beat: Politics

## **ABOUT SYRIAN CRISIS - JOURNALISTS QUESTIONS TO SERGEY LAVROV AND JOHN KERRY**

### **HOW DO THEY VIEW THE COALITION**

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**USPA NEWS** - In Moscow (Russia), on December 15, 2015, international journalists had the opportunity to ask questions to U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov about the Syrian crisis and the 'global coalition' against Daesh (ISIS, IS....)

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QUESTION: RT International. I got two questions for both Secretary Kerry and Minister Lavrov, if I may. Let me start with Mr. Kerry.

So just about a year ago, your President said, and I'm quoting, that: It is America that currently stands strong and united with the allies, but Russia is the one that's isolated. And I'm just wondering, when international leaders are talking intensively with Russia and you are here on Russian soil talking with the Russian president, where is that isolation? And was it premature to proclaim that isolation back then ?

And Mr. Lavrov, I have a question to you. How do you view the coalition announced by Saudi Arabia, and what progress was made on the terrorist list and the opposition list? Thank you.

U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE JOHN KERRY: Well, let me answer the question by saying this "" that when the President spoke, he was speaking at a time where, in reaction to the events that took place in Ukraine "" the annexation of Crimea, which we opposed and continue to, and the situation in Ukraine itself "" the United States, rather than choosing to go to war or choosing to enter into a series of more dangerous or other kinds of confrontational efforts, took steps to register our disapproval of what had happened and those were the sanctions.

Now, we don't seek to isolate Russia as a matter of policy, no. At that particular moment of time, there was an effort to try to make a statement about what had happened. But we have consistently said that the world is better off when Russia and the United States find common ground and an ability to be able to work together. And I think it's a sign of the maturity of both leaders and their understanding of the importance of the role they play, that despite the differences over Ukraine, we were able to work effectively to remove chemical weapons from Syria during the conflict.

That has never before happened in time of war. And the decision that was made by our presidents and that Sergey and I worked on as an approach to solving a problem wound up with the OPCW winning the Nobel Prize for Peace as a result. So we cooperated.

We also cooperated on the joint efforts on Iran. And we believe the world is better because of that cooperation. We are cooperating now on Syria because Daesh is a threat to all of us and it is vital to the world that nations don't just hunker down in opposition but that they engage and find a way through communication to try to not be isolated and try not to go down predetermined roads but find a way to be able to solve the problems.

Today, we met here as a matter of good diplomacy to try to solve problems, and I believe we will continue that effort in New York on Friday. And there is no policy of the United States per se to isolate Russia. There is a policy of the United States to stand up for our principles and our values, but to try to work with Russia to join together in as constructive a way as possible to, as I said a moment ago, find the common ground.

RUSSIAN FOREIGN MINISTER SERGEY LAVROV : As for the coalition that was announced today that is formed by Saudi Arabia,

as far as I understand, we all learned about it from media reports just like you. We expect that we'll get some detailed information from the sponsors of this process but also want to learn more about the discussions in Paris. John talked to this. This was a meeting of some countries that gathered in French capital to exchange views on the developments in Syria and on the tasks ahead of those who intend to settle the situation.

In principle, we assume that everybody should make their own contribution on the anti-terror track and on political track, but we want these efforts to be collective in the format that was formed in Vienna that comprises all the key stakeholders that can influence various parties to the Syrian conflict in the format that was endorsed by the UN Security Council in its recent resolution.

This process applies to the terrorist list that is coordinated by Jordan, and our colleagues from Jordan have already gathered the information and asked for this information from all the ISSG members. They got information on the view of terrorist structures by various members. And currently, Jordan is circulating this information to all the members. That is the work that is underway.

It is clear that ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusrah are considered terrorist organizations. They should not be part of negotiations. They should not be part of ceasefire. As soon as the conditions are ripe, there are some other organizations that were recognized as terrorists by the majority of the ISSG members but we are to agree on this list on Friday, I hope "" on Friday in New York. And we will also continue our efforts to facilitate the UN work in its efforts to form the opposition delegation for negotiations with the government. The Vienna documents stipulate that all the ISSG members are invited to help the UN to form this delegation. And the meeting we had several days ago in Riyadh contributed to this work.

Not all the opposition groups were represented during this meeting, but let me highlight this was one of the stages of the work coordinated by the UN. The UN take account of the results of all the meetings in Moscow, in Cairo, in Astana, and recent meeting in Damascus where internal opposition met in Hasakah. So all this information will be generalized, will be analyzed by the UN, and the Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura will make its "" his ideas on the makeup of the delegation that should be representative and that will cover the whole range of opponents to the regime that stand ready for the dialogue with the government based on the Geneva document.

Let me highlight that the key principle here is that it is up to the Syrians to shape the future of their country. This principle is enshrined in the Geneva communique of 2012 and it is endorsed in the Vienna documents adopted in Fall 2015.

And another aspect, talking about the need to build our efforts in a collective spirit, in an inclusive spirit. Today we met not like Russia and the U.S., excluding all other ISSG members, but we met as co-chairs of the International Syria Support Group that didn't do anything secretly from other members of this group that was established after the Vienna process.

We came up with an initiative to pass the UNSC resolution that will enshrine everything that was arranged in Vienna with the support of all the ISSG members. And I think that it is the approach that should be based on a collective effort, and this can lead us to success.

QUESTION : Thank you. Mr. Kerry, you both talked about working together to find common ground. Did you feel today that there was any specific progress on narrowing the gaps on some of the most contentious issues, such as the terrorist blacklist, the composition of the opposition ?

And I know you decided to defer differences over Mr. Assad for now, but can you just respond to the decision by the opposition last week, which was that he should go right at the start of a political transition process? Is that something you think that can allow negotiations to even begin on that basis ?

And Mr. Lavrov, the UN Humanitarian Coordinating Committee has said that the humanitarian crisis in northern Syria is growing because of increased Russian bombing, which is hitting civilians and disrupting aid flows and causing a humanitarian crisis. Can you respond to that, please ?

U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE JOHN KERRY: Yes, we did reach some common ground today and agreement with respect to the complexity of this issue of terrorist groups. But it's not appropriate for me to announce anything that we may have agreed to together on a bilateral basis. Because as Sergey just said, we really need to have the whole group take part in that discussion. And so it's appropriate for everybody to contribute to whatever decisions and outcomes there are. But we certainly narrowed down our own thinking about the complexity of it and how one can manage that. We obviously agree that ISIL and "" ISIL/Daesh and al-Nusrah are absolutely outside of this process no matter what.

Everybody has agreed to that; that's unanimous. And beyond that, we look forward to the discussion in New York on Friday.

With respect to the announcement or proclamations of the people who came together in Riyadh, that is not the position of the International Syria Support Group. It is not the basis of the Geneva communique; it is not the basis of the UN resolution. And we are assured by the members of the International Syria Support Group who were attending that meeting and helping with that meeting and hosting that meeting that that is not, in fact, the starting position, because it's a non-starting position, obviously.

So for those people who are going to participate, they understand we are participating under the Geneva communique, and the transition process is geared to try to be taking effect within about a six-month period. That's the current target that has been approved by the International Syria Support Group.

**RUSSIAN FOREIGN MINISTER SERGEY LAVROV:** Let me adhere to what John has just mentioned. The mandate to form the opposition delegations to provide assistance to those delegation in order to shape out the platform for negotiation with the government was given to the UNSC Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura.

And the meeting that took place in Saudi Arabia is one of many contributions into the work of the United Nations. The frameworks for this work are the Geneva communique and two Vienna documents, which, as I mentioned, have clearly stipulated for the Syrian people to be able to define the future of their country by themselves as a result of negotiations between the government and the whole range of opposition based on mutual consent.

As regards the UN reports on the humanitarian situation in Syria, I believe you are referring to one of the latest reports, which stated that Russia's operation in Syria allegedly (inaudible) to create a suffering for the civilian population. In these statements, there were no references to concrete facts. We have asked for these facts and they weren't able to provide for such facts. And we asked the UN secretariat to be more precise in their assessments so that it could provide assessments behind which there are concrete facts and sources. Since then we haven't heard any accusations of us.

Thank you.

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