

Beat: Politics

SERGEY LAVROV AFTER TALKS WITH WITH U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE JOHN KERRY IN ZURICH

STATEMENT AND ANSWERS TO MEDIA QUESTIONS

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Our main achievement on the Syrian issue has been the unanimous conclusion that Resolution 2254 adopted by the UN Security Council in December remains the main foundation for our progress. In connection with this resolution we discussed a number of specific moves that must be made to ensure the conditions for announcing a ceasefire.

Needless to say, this does not apply to terrorist organisations, such as the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra, which cannot be covered by truce agreements. They remain our enemies and all of us will continue fighting against them ““ this is a war of annihilation.

Second, we reaffirmed the need to resolve humanitarian problems in Syria. We described how in planning their operations the Russian Aerospace Forces consider the programmes conducted in Syria by UN humanitarian agencies, the ICRC and other NGOs. We expressed our readiness to coordinate more closely our actions in this area with the US coalition. But the main point that we discussed is the coordination of anti-terrorist actions.

The American side had a number of proposals, some of which were made during telephone conversations of President Vladimir Putin and US President Barack Obama, my contacts with John Kerry and contacts between the Russian Defence Ministry and the Pentagon. In principle, these proposals are in the right direction but we believe that the practical implementation of joint actions, the 'division of labour,' if you will, still remains our task and we can find much better agreements than simply a memorandum on avoiding unforeseen incidents. Thus, anti-terrorist struggle remains a major task on the Syrian front.

It is no less important to launch the political process as soon as possible. We agreed that when it starts, it will be possible to talk about the afore-mentioned ceasefire (but not as regards terrorist organisations). We hope that the political process will start very soon ““ in January. Different dates are mentioned but the final decision will be made by the UN secretary-general on the recommendations of his Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura who is holding active contacts with the Syrian sides: the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and various opposition groups in the country and beyond.

The UN Security Council has charged Mr Mistura with a mission to issue invitations to the Syrian participants in these talks. We hope he will do this in the near future and the negotiating process will start this month. Let me emphasise that this is just the beginning. It will take much time: the sides will have to resolve many highly complicated tasks that are formulated in the UN Security Council resolution and decisions of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) that met in Vienna and New York.

Naturally, Russia, the United States and other ISSG members will not take part in the talks between the Syrian Government and the opposition but we'll accompany these talks in a way that will help Syrians in reaching agreement on how to resolve jointly the tasks of the transitional period, what constitution to adopt, how to prepare for early elections and deal with many other issues.

We discussed the Ukraine issue and reaffirmed the central role of the Contact Group and its working groups. Our American partners

confirmed the positive assessment of the Normandy Four's performance. Our dialogue partners "" Mr Kerry and member of his delegation Victoria Nuland, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, confirmed their readiness to help reach an agreement in the Contact Group and the Normandy format rather than replace these mechanisms that proved to be useful in Ukraine.

Source : Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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