

Beat: Politics

PARIS ATTACKS - TO THE PRESS - JOHN KERRY TO SERGEY LAVROV & UN SPECIAL ENVOY

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SECRETARY OF STATE JOHN KERRY: (In French.)

I'll just say what I said, the last part, in English. I want to make sure that it is absolutely crystal clear that the United States stands with France and the rest of the world in our resolve to eliminate the scourge of violent extremist groups from the face of the Earth. And make no mistake: that resolve has only grown stronger in the wake of this unspeakable brutality.

And I think Sergey Lavrov and Staffan would agree with me that today in the meeting there was a broad-based sense of revulsion, of horror, and a deep commitment to do more to try to bring an end to the violence of the region and of the world.

It is respect for life and for its possibilities that drove our efforts today in Vienna, and frankly, every day in our pursuit of reconciliation and peace.

The war in Syria "" now in its fifth year "" has already left one in twenty Syrians wounded or dead. It has compelled one in five Syrians to flee as refugees. It has displaced half of that country's population.

And all the while, the chaos unleashed by the war has created a haven for Daesh and other terrorist organizations to thrive.

If neither the dictator Bashar al-Assad nor the terrorists are the answer "" and they are not "" our challenge is to create the conditions under which a clear and broadly accepted, viable alternative can emerge.

In the United States, President Obama has set forth three inter-related goals: first, defeat Daesh; second, stabilize the region; and third, support a political transition to end this civil war. And those are not in order of priority or you have to do one before the other. They can be done simultaneously.

The events in Paris underscore the threat that Daesh poses to all of us "" in the region and well beyond it, unfortunately. This is a major reason that President Obama has announced new steps to take on Daesh on militarily.

But we also know that Daesh cannot be defeated in the end without de-escalating the underlying conflict in Syria, which attracts fighters to this battlefield. And that will require a political process, and that's why we are here in Vienna yet again.

Today, Sergey Lavrov and I and Staffan joined representatives from the Arab League, China, Egypt, the European Union, France, Germany, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the UAE, the UK, and the United Nations. And we did so because we all recognize the urgency of this moment. There can be no doubt: This crisis is not Syria's alone to bear.

The impacts of this war bleed into all of our nations: from the flood of desperate migrants seeking refuge within the region or in Europe or beyond; to the foreign terrorist fighters making their way into Syria to join the ranks of groups like Daesh; to self-radicalized fighters, living among us, their minds poisoned by Daesh's propaganda and lies.

Now, obviously, those of us who met in Vienna today ““ the International Support Group on Syria ““ do not agree on all the issues when it comes to Syria. We still differ, obviously, on the issue of what happens with Bashar al-Assad.

But we are relying on the political process itself ““ led by Syrians, which it will be, going forward, and with Syrians negotiating with Syrians ““ that that can help to bring a close to this terrible chapter. We do agree on this: It is time for the bleeding in Syria to stop. It is time to deprive the terrorists of any single kilometer in which to hide. It is time that we come together to help the Syrian people embark on the difficult but extraordinarily high imperative of rebuilding their country.

I underscore: We did not come here to impose our collective will on the Syrian people. Exactly the opposite; the Syrian people will be ““ and must be ““ the validators of our efforts.

The Syrians will be the first to tell you that they need help from the international community, especially a consensus about how to achieve a political transition that will allow them to ultimately shape their own destiny.

Building that consensus has been our goal here in Vienna; in fact, building the structure, the pathway to be able to achieve that. And while a lot of hard work obviously remains, we have made critical progress. Together, our nations have reached a common understanding, still beyond where we were two weeks ago, regarding a series of steps that we believe will accelerate an end to the Syrian conflict, certainly can accelerate it if people take advantage of this opportunity.

Based on our shared belief in the necessity of a ceasefire and a parallel political process pursuant to the 2012 Geneva communique, we today discussed and laid out a path towards that political process and ceasefire and towards it on as rapid a path as possible.

We agreed on the need to begin formal negotiations between representatives of the Syrian opposition and the Syrian regime, under UN auspices, with a target date of the two sides actually sitting down negotiating with each other no later, hopefully, than a target date of around January 1st. That’s pushing.

The group has agreed to work with Special Envoy de Mistura to assemble the broadest possible spectrum of the Syrian opposition ““ chosen by Syrians themselves ““ to define their negotiating positions and determine who their representatives to the talks will be.

We agreed on the steps ““ that the steps outlined in the 2012 Geneva communique present the best path forward towards an actual political transition, and we support a Syrian-led transition process within a target of six months that will: establish credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance; set a schedule and a process for drafting a new constitution; and determine eligibility for voting and candidacy in elections.

We also agreed that free and fair elections would then be held, pursuant to the new constitution, within 18 months. These elections, we believe, would take place ““ not we believe ““ we agreed would take place under UN supervision with an emphasis on transparency and accountability, and with all Syrians, including the diaspora, eligible to participate.

But, as we underscored, this political process has to be accompanied by a ceasefire that will help to end the bloodshed as quickly as possible, and I might add that will help rapidly to define who wants to be considered a terrorist and who is not, understanding that Daesh and Nusrah are clearly and inexorably in that category now.

We agreed that the ceasefire would come into effect as soon as the representatives of the Syrian Government and opposition have taken initial steps towards the UN-supervised transition. The five permanent members of the Security Council pledged to support a Security Council resolution to empower a UN-endorsed ceasefire monitoring mission.

And in coordination with our talks today, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has ordered the UN to accelerate planning for supporting the implementation of that ceasefire, and the group agreed that the UN should lead the effort, in consultation with interested parties, in order to determine its requirements and its modalities.

We also pledged to take all possible measures to ensure that all parties ““ including those currently supported by nations represented here in Vienna ““ that they will all firmly adhere to the ceasefire. In other words, each country that supports or has influence with or supplies anybody in the field will become an enforcer of the ceasefire. We also agreed to press the parties to immediately end the use of indiscriminate weapons.

Now, let me be clear: the ceasefire, as I said a moment ago, does not apply either to Daesh or to Nusrah or to subsequently some group that in the days ahead may be determined by the support group as qualifying as a terrorist organization.

So that's where we're at. And I want to thank all of my colleagues who participated in our deliberation today. I'm particularly grateful as well to my president, who has always had a vision that we needed a political process and who has licensed me to pursue this with vigor. And obviously, I want to leave time for questions, and let me just recognize Sergey, if I may. I want to thank Sergey for his cooperative input to this, his effort to help bring about the results that we achieved today. Thank you.

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