

VLADIMIR PUTIN ANSWERS REGARDING UKRAINE AND RUSSIAN PLANE CRASH

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Question: I would like to return to Ukraine, especially since you met with Angela Merkel yesterday, and Germany is a member state of the Normandy format. Was the Ukrainian crisis discussed ? And are you concerned that while the global community is focused on the topic of fighting terrorism the conflict in Donbass might reignite ?

Vladimir Putin: We believe that there is enough stamina, wisdom and responsibility among all people this depends on. And we are not going to watch the situation in southeast Ukraine getting worse; on the contrary, we will help to ensure that the actual ceasefire we managed to achieve through a great deal of effort is not broken, that it will promote the political process.

As regards the discussion on Ukraine, indeed, I think it is natural and there is nothing strange about it: after the tragic events in Paris, after the crash of our plane, a situation where much remains unclear, we spoke first and foremost about these problems. But nevertheless, Ukrainian issues did not disappear from the agenda. I discussed these issues with practically all my colleagues whom I met in the bilateral format, and this topic has not been forgotten.

Question: Mr President, we frequently hear your western partners accuse Russia's Aerospace Forces of hitting targets in Syria that are not ISIS, but are so-called moderate opposition groups. Did their opinion change over the course of the summit? What were you feeling during the discussions ?

And the second part of the question. The US-led anti-ISIS operation did not succeed in degrading ISIS. What difference do you see between Russia's actions in Syria and those of the US-led coalition, from a military standpoint ?

Vladimir Putin: In general, this criticism was practically not voiced. It's hard to even criticise us. They tell us, 'You're hitting the wrong targets!' Then we say, 'Tell us where we should strike, give us the targets!' But they don't give them to us. 'Then tell us where we shouldn't hit.' And they don't tell us that, either. How, then, can we be criticised ?

You know, I don't want to sneer at this. Strangely enough, they have their own reasons for it. And one of them, I will tell you point blank, is that they are afraid to give us a list of territories not to strike, because they fear that this is exactly where we will strike, that we will deceive them. It seems they judge us based on their own notions of decency.

But I can confirm that right now (on the battlefield, so to speak), we have established contacts with some (not all, of course) of the uncompromising, even armed Syrian opposition groups; they themselves asked us not to strike the territories they control. We have reached these agreements and are fulfilling them.

Moreover, this part of the armed opposition believes that it is possible to begin active operations against terrorist organisations "" against ISIS first of all "" with our support from the air. And we are prepared to provide that support. If this happens, it will mean that President al-Assad's army on one side and the armed opposition on the other are fighting their common enemy.

It seems to me that this can become a good foundation for subsequent work and a platform for political settlement.

Indeed, when I was in Paris recently within the framework of the Normandy format, I suggested this idea to President of France Mr Hollande. We made the first steps in this direction and overall, so far, they are positive.

We very much need the help and support of the United States, European nations, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran in order to make this process irreversible. This is another matter that I discussed with my colleagues today in a great deal of detail.

Question: A fair amount of time has passed since the Russian plane crash, and certain complications remain, which you spoke about. When can we expect a final version as regards the reasons for this tragedy ?

And second, if I may. In your view, how great is today's threat that what happened in Paris might happen again in Russian cities? What is being done to minimise these threats ?

Vladimir Putin: Unfortunately, nobody can be guaranteed against terrorist attacks. For example, France is among the nations that took a rather firm stance with regard to President al-Assad personally. We constantly heard our French friends say that their precondition for the launch of political changes should be an agreement on President al-Assad's resignation. So what "" did that save Paris from a terrorist attack ? No.

I think we should not push forward issues that are of secondary importance. What we must do is join efforts in the fight against terrorism and terrorist organisations, and based on that agree on political reforms.

As for the plane crash, this is extremely painful for all of us, for all the Russian people, regardless of the cause of the crash. A huge number of people died and this is a great tragedy for all of us. Yes, we are aware of all the possibilities, and all of them are being examined. We will be able to come to a final conclusion after all trials and expert assessments are completed. What expert assessments are those ? If there was an explosion, then traces of explosives should remain on the fuselage shell and passengers' belongings. This is certain. And we have enough equipment and good, world-class experts in this domain who are capable of discovering those traces. Only then can we talk about the reasons for this tragedy.

Your colleague asked whether the western nations were working effectively or not, whether we are working effectively in the fight against, for example, ISIS or other terrorist organisations. I do not think this is the time to talk about who is working more or less effectively. French planes have now increased the number of combat missions, but if you consider and look at how much our pilots have done recently, then you will understand the intensity of that combat operation.

But I repeat, now is not the time to assess who is better or worse, or look for reasons why the previous steps have been more or less effective. Right now, we need to look forward and join forces in the fight against this common threat.

That is the final part (three following parts) of the Interview given by Russian President Vladimir Putin to journalists' questions following the G20 summit held in Antalya (interview on November 16, 2015)

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