

UN Envoy to Syria:

U.S. Not Serious About Ending Syria Conflict

NEW YORK (Press TV) – United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura has questioned the role of the United States in its so-called military engagement against terrorist groups in the Middle Eastern country, saying Washington's new administration is working out on its conflicting priorities in solving the six-year-long crisis.

De Mistura made the remarks in the 53rd Munich Security Conference, an annual gathering of top diplomats and defense officials, on Sunday, the last day of the summit and just four days ahead of crucial peace negotiations on Syria in Geneva, Switzerland.

He further said that U.S. President Donald Trump's administration is stuck among three incompatible priorities in tackling the conflict, its so-called war against Daesh terrorists, "how to limit the influence of some major regional players and how not to damage one of their major allies in the region."

He added that Trump needed to decide whether he was interested in just fighting Daesh or in defeating the terrorist group.

The UN special envoy also wondered how the White House was going to "square this circle," adding that Washington was practically absent in all efforts devoted to settle the crisis politically. "Where is the U.S. in all this? I can't tell you because I don't know," he said.

Under former U.S. President Barack Obama, the White House insisted that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad had to



A man waves to a member of Syrian pro-government forces patrolling a street in the newly retaken Bab al-Hadid neighborhood in Aleppo's Old City, December 8, 2016.

be ousted, making it at odds with Russia, which firmly supports the Syrian leader and launched its military campaign against Daesh and other terror outfits in Syria at the Syrian government's request in September 2015. Moscow has also called for an end to demands for the removal of Assad.

De Mistura also stressed that the ultimate resolution of the deadly conflict could be achieved only through an "inclusive" political solution.

A fresh round of UN-led negotiations

is scheduled to be held in Geneva on Thursday, involving the Syrian government and representatives from armed opposition groups.

Furthermore, Iran, Russia, and Turkey in late last year proposed to mediate new talks in Astana between the Syrian government and opposition groups. The talks were organized and held in the Kazakh capital in January this year. They were followed by technical talks attended by experts from Tehran, Moscow, and Ankara in the city earlier

in February.

Elsewhere in his remarks, De Mistura said that the Astana talks and the truce agreed created an opening that should be explored, but he warned that "even a ceasefire with two guarantors can't hold too long if there is no political horizon." He said any political solution had to be comprehensive to be credible.

He said Astana talks focused on cessation of hostilities, while Geneva negotiations must see if there is any window for political talks.

Report:

Zionist Regime, Jordan, Egypt Secretly Met for Peace



Palestinians walk past a sign painted on a wall in the West Bank town of Bethlehem on June 5, 2015, calling for the boycott of products coming from illegal Zionist settlements.

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Zionist regime Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met secretly a year ago with the leaders of Egypt and Jordan in a failed attempt by the Obama administration to convene a wider regional summit on Zionist-Palestinian peace, Israel's Haaretz daily said on Sunday.

At the White House on Wednesday, Netanyahu again raised the possibility of what he described as a "regional approach" to Zionist-Palestinian peace at a news conference with U.S. President Donald Trump, who appeared to embrace the idea.

Citing unidentified senior officials in

former U.S. President Barack Obama's administration, Haaretz said Netanyahu, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Jordan's King Abdullah and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry convened on Feb. 21, 2016 in the Jordanian Red Sea resort of Aqaba.

But the initiative to involve other Arab states in the pursuit of peace with the Palestinians ultimately fizzled, the newspaper said, after Netanyahu withdrew his initial support, pointing to opposition within his right-wing government.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas did not attend the Aqaba meeting but was updated by Kerry, Haaretz said.

At a meeting with ministers from his Likud party, Netanyahu acknowledged the meeting took place, though he said it was his own initiative to try and bring about a regional summit, according to a cabinet member present, who declined to be identified.

A spokesman for Netanyahu declined to comment on the report. No immediate comment was available from Egypt or Jordan.

Kerry launched his final peacemaking bid after U.S.-backed talks between the two sides collapsed in 2014 over issues that included illegal Zionist settlement-building in the occupied territories and Palestinian refusal to accept the occupying regime's demand to recognize it as a "Jewish state".

Prospects for a new peace push appear dim with Netanyahu in a political tight spot at home and under police investigation for alleged abuse of office, which he denies.

Far-right members of Netanyahu's coalition have been emboldened by Trump's suggestion that he was open to new ways to achieve peace that did not necessarily entail creation of a Palestinian state, a benchmark of U.S. policy for decades.

"I'm looking at two states and one state, and I like the one both parties like," Trump said.

On Thursday, however, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley said the United States still supported a two-state solution

became an FBI informant.

One of those videos showed four defendants mixing fertilizer and diesel fuel for bombs.

After a nine-month trial, Abdel Rahman and nine of his followers were found guilty in October 1995 on 48 of 50 charges.

Six people died in the attack and more than 1,000 people were injured in the attack on February 26, 1993.

Abdel Rahman did not testify at his trial, but at a sentencing hearing gave a speech of more than 90 minutes, through a translator, proclaiming his innocence and denouncing the U.S. as an enemy of his Islamic faith.

Saudis ...

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The international community needed to set clear "red lines" to halt Iran's actions, he said, calling for banking, travel and trade restrictions on the country.

Zionist war minister Avigdor Lieberman said Iran's ultimate objective was to undermine Riyadh, and called for a dialogue with Arab countries to defeat "radical" elements in the region.

"The real division is not Jews, Muslims ... but moderate people versus radical people," Lieberman told delegates.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu also criticized what he called an Iranian "sectarian policy" aimed at undermining Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

"Turkey is very much against any kind of division, religious or sectarian," he said. "It's good that we are now normalizing our relations with Israel."

Ankara is known for supporting terrorists in Syria and providing them a free pass into the Arab country which is now in the grip of the worst war of attrition being waged by Takfiri and other extremist groups in living history.

U.S. ...

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"We also urge the U.S. to refrain from challenging China's sovereignty and security and to respect regional countries' efforts to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea," he said.

The Vinson has deployed to the South China Sea 16 times in its 35-year history, the U.S. Navy said.

Washington says it does not take sides in the territorial disputes but has several times sent warships and planes to assert freedom of navigation in the Sea, sparking protests from Beijing.

Russia ...

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But in the face of growing heat over its links to Moscow, Trump's administration appears to be backing off the warmer words used earlier for the former Cold War foe.

'Greatest Ally'

Exasperated and worried by Trump's calling into question long-standing foreign policy assumptions, European leaders have warned Washington not to take transatlantic ties for granted.

On a European roadshow this week, Trump's lieutenants have sought to reassure jittery allies that the administration will hold fast to existing foreign policy, including maintaining sanctions on Russia over the Ukraine crisis.

Hours before Lavrov addressed the Munich Security Conference, Pence told the same forum that the United States will stay loyal to its old friends.

"The United States is and will always be your greatest ally. Be assured that President Trump and our people are truly devoted to our transatlantic union," Pence said.

The U.S. would also not relent in pushing Russia to honor the Minsk ceasefire accords with Ukraine, he said.

"The United States will continue to hold Russia accountable, even as we search for new common ground, which as you know, President Trump believes can be found," the vice-president said.

At NATO headquarters in Brussels on Thursday, Defense Secretary James Mattis said Russia must first "prove itself" and respect international law before there could be any improvement in relations strained by Moscow's Ukraine intervention and annexation of Crimea.

Likewise, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson indicated he would take a tough line in his dealings with Russia.

Following his first meeting with Lavrov in Bonn on Thursday, Tillerson

said the U.S. would cooperate with Moscow but only when doing so "will benefit the American people."

'Not a Word on EU'

Despite the U.S. charm offensive, European leaders gave a cautious reaction.

German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel said he "had no doubt that the American vice-president and the defense secretary will do everything to fulfill their commitments within NATO as in the past."

But tellingly, his confidence was ostensibly only extended specifically to Pence and Mattis.

When pressed for his view on Trump, he would only say: "I can only say what I have spoken about with Mr. Pence. And that I have done and on that I have no doubt."

French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault said he was "struck that (Pence) had not at any moment mentioned the EU," an institution which needs to take a bigger place in a world buffeted by a rise in nationalism and populism.

"I don't want to accuse Pence prematurely, he is going to Brussels on Monday and I hope that we will have a clear response on this question because Donald Trump gave the impression that he welcomes Brexit and that there would be more to come," said Ayrault.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel meanwhile made no direct mention of Trump in her address in Munich.

She however, championed a clear message of international cooperation rather than a policy of isolationism - in what could be a plea for the U.S. not to retreat as it seeks an "America First" policy.

"In a year in which we see unimaginable challenges we can either work together or retreat to our individual roles. I hope that we will find a common position," she said.

U.S. ...

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Iran's President Hassan Rouhani announced at that time that the country had filed a lawsuit against the U.S. with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) – the principal judicial organ of the United Nations.

Earlier this month, Iran's Presidential Office said in a statement that the lawsuit had been officially put in motion.

Washington's seizure of Iran's assets is against the Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations, and Consular Rights which was signed by the two countries in August 1955 – referred to as the 1955 Treaty – and is "still effective," the statement added.

Minister ...

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Several cabinet members, including First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri, accompanied Akhondi during the session but President Hassan Rouhani stayed away.

The embattled minister was grilled over a number of issues including a train collision that killed nearly 50 people in north central Iran on November 25, 2016. Lawmakers blame Akhondi's mismanagement for the deadly crash.

A total of 45 people lost their lives and 103 others were injured in the deadly collision of two passenger trains in Iran's north-central province of Semnan.

The head of a committee investigating the train crash, Akbar Torkan, said then that an operator in charge of the Centralized Traffic Control (CTC) of Shahroud railway station was responsible for the fatal collision.

Other controversial issues during Akhondi's tenure include a national housing project which he has called nonsensical as well as Iran's deals with Boeing and Airbus to buy about 200 new passenger aircraft.

Egyptian Jailed for 1993 World Trade Center Attack Dies

CAIRO (Al Jazeera) – Omar Abdel Rahman, who was convicted of conspiracy in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and of planning more attacks as part of a "war of urban terrorism" in the U.S., has died in a North Carolina prison.

Abdel Rahman, 78, was serving a life-sentence on several convictions when he died of natural causes at a federal prison's medical centre in Butner, North Carolina, the U.S. Bureau of Prisons said.

Abdel Rahman, an Egyptian, was blind, had diabetes and coronary artery disease.

He was jailed at the Federal

Correctional Complex in Butner for nearly 10 years.

His family in Egypt received a phone call from a U.S. representative confirming his death, his son Ammar said.

Another of his sons, Abdullah, denied all accusations against his father as he blamed the U.S. for causing his death.

"He was surprised that America was the country that falsely accused and arrested him," Abdullah told Al Jazeera, speaking from Istanbul, Turkey.

"They even became creative in the way they killed him slowly. In the

last few days of his life, they took all of his medicine.

"Is this America, the land of freedoms? Look how they treated the man who is old, blind, and ill and who came to America to call for freedom. They took the worst revenge against him, only because he used to say the truth. They conspired with the [former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's] regime against him."

Much of the case against Abdel Rahman, a preacher at a New Jersey mosque, and his followers was based on video and audio recordings made with the help of his bodyguard, who