
I. Britain Goes for War

‘You Are Afraid that Russia Might Be Working Together with the United States’

The following is an edited transcript taken from the official, simultaneous voice-over English translation of remarks delivered by Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Vladimir Safronkov, to the UN Security Council on April 12, 2017.

The statement of the representative of Great Britain, Mr. Rycroft, showed that the only thing he’s thinking of is to prevent the political process from unfolding, is to bring into the Security Council a confrontational attitude, and the essence is—and everyone in the UN knows this very well—[turning to personally address the British Representative Matthew Rycroft]—that *you are afraid, you are losing sleep over the fact that we might be working together with the United States, cooperating with the United States*. That is what you fear. You are doing everything to make sure that this type of cooperation be undermined. This is precisely why—Look at me when I am speaking! Don’t look away! Why are you looking away?—This is precisely why *you* today didn’t say anything about the political process. You didn’t even listen to Mr. de Mistura’s briefing,¹ on purpose. You make insulting demands of the guarantor of the Astana process.² What have you done for a ceasefire? You welcomed various opposition groups in London and Paris, illegal armed groups. You suddenly were afraid that things seemed to be moving toward peace and a political solution. Basically, you support the interest of armed groups. Many of them have been murdering Christians and other minorities in the Middle



UN Photo/Manuel Elias

Vladimir K. Safronkov, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the UN, addresses the Security Council emergency meeting on the situation in Syria.

East. They have been committing terrorist acts in churches on Palm Sunday. That’s whose interests you are advancing. What are you doing?

It turns out that regime change for you is more important than the positions of the majority of the member states of the United Nations. Mr. Rycroft, you, today, were speaking not on the topic on our agenda, today. You insulted Syria, Iran, Turkey, other states. Mr. President, I would ask you to make sure that the rules and procedure of this meeting are respected. If some of the members speak insultingly, I cannot accept that you insult Russia. Nevertheless, Mr. de Mistura, we are very grateful to you for your work, and in the run-up to the next round further work will be required to make sure that intra-Syrian dia-

1. Staffan de Mistura, special UN envoy to Syria.

2. Syrian peace negotiations, taking place in Astana, Kazakhstan.

logue is truly representative and broad.

The Peace Process

All patriotically motivated Syrian parties should have an opportunity to take part in the negotiations on an equal footing in order to engage in discussions of maintaining Syria as a unified and secular state, where all historical communities would live in peace and take part in rebuilding the country, as has always been the case. From the side of the opposition, there should be an inclusive, consolidated delegation, the members of which should have a common position, bearing in mind the views of the key factions in these delegations. There is no room for arrogance! We need to think not about pride or arrogance, we need to think of the future of Syria. That is the substance of your conceptual document, your note. The idea is to think of the future of their state and for that we shouldn't interfere in their affairs. Let them conduct their dialogue calmly, and please don't interfere with the work of Mr. de Mistura in seeking a formula for a political solution. And I know that, Mr. de Mistura, this is your position. We cannot allow an interruption in the work of state institutions. This applies to security institutions that bear the main burden in combating the terrorist threat. Look at the other countries of the Middle East and Africa and other regions. We can't even greet the state institutions on paper, and what you want is to destroy the ones that are still there in Syria, which is the most important country in the region.

We insist on discussions being held without any preconditions, and we know that that is your position, obviously against the backdrop of political efforts. It is unacceptable that opponents of the government in Damascus have tried to achieve military progress or advances. We recall, on the eve of the previous negotiations, the opposition tried to make an advance in various parts of the front, including near the capital, and we hope that such hot-heads will be condemned and their reckless activity will not be allowed.

This is what we're talking about: You say one thing



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United Kingdom Permanent Representative to the UN Security Council, Matthew Rycroft.

in the Security Council, but you think something else, whereas in fact what you're doing is a third thing. So you think one thing, you say a second thing, and you act a third way. So please, do your work. London and Paris work with various opposition groups. Call them and talk to them and say, "you need to support the Astana process. You cannot fire on the Russian embassy in Damascus."³ And then you don't agree even to publish an ordinary communiqué, a press release, condemning the attack on the Russian embassy in Damascus, in a situation where tensions have mounted due to the missile strike of the United States.

The importance of the political efforts is becoming more important. Obviously provocations, such as the one that occurred at Khan Sheikhoun,⁴ will only strengthen the positions of those who favor a military solution. We need to find out the facts, conduct a comprehensive investigation. I was quite surprised to hear that French experts have already reached the conclusion that Damascus is responsible. I'm amazed that this was the conclusion. No one has yet visited the site of the crime. How do you know that?

The fate of the country should be determined by the Syrians themselves, and not by someone else. That is absolutely clear. We, together with other guarantors, together with Turkey, Iran, and I want to also warmly thank the leadership of Kazakhstan, we are ready to continue working on the Astana platform. Russia is ready to fulfill its obligations in strengthening the cease-fire. But you need to also do your part in working with the various groups, opposition groups. Astana cannot become a panacea in a situation where others are working to undermine it. Significant progress has been made in terms of local truces, which have made it possible to ease the situation and normalize the lives of

3. A reference to the Feb. 2 and 3 terrorist attacks on the Russian Embassy in Damascus.

4. The site of the alleged chemical attack, used to justify the subsequent U.S. airstrike.

people from a humanitarian point of view.

Many have said today that the problem of access to besieged areas should be resolved. But let us be fair. Why isn't food supplied to areas that are controlled by the government? Are they just different kinds of people there? Again? Different kinds of people? Let's be honest. We know the situation. We need support from capitals who, for the time being, are just engaged in empty rhetoric and useless criticism. The Astana process has a unique and special value. It is aimed at achieving, in practice, an end to violence, and what's most important is that it is a direct support to the Geneva process, that Mr. de Mistura is leading. We see that Mr. de Mistura and the overwhelming majority of UN member states greatly value the Astana process.

Providing a Future for People

We would like to draw the attention of the international community and the United Nations to significant contamination of the territory of Syria by mines, unexploded ordinance, IEDs, and we regularly inform you of the significant activity by Russian experts to deal with this problem. We call on establishing an international coalition on de-mining Syria. Any kind of black-mail, saying that, "well, we'll de-mine once the regime changes," is unacceptable, it is hypocrisy; it is a completely hypocritical and unacceptable position. I think the specialized UN service could play an important role in this.

Obviously the humanitarian component here is very important. People need to feel safe and secure when they return to their homes, when they return to economic activity, so that children don't explode because of mines, so that civilians don't suffer. We need to clear mines from the world heritage site in Palmyra. These are the kinds of issues that we need to work on. When you discuss the issues of solving the problem of migration, that is what we need to discuss, not regime change,



The International Meeting on Syrian Settlement in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Voice of America/public domain

but de-mining, mine clearance, resolving conflicts. People will return to their homes by themselves. They don't need to be forced to do anything. These are the kinds of issues that need to be tackled. We need to work together on improving the social conditions in which people live.

Instead of that, international and regional forums are convened where billions are pledged—virtual billions are pledged!—without even the Syrian representatives being present. How is this related to statements made here in the Security Council that the fate of the Syrian people is in their own hands? Many are seriously thinking about the future, of the post-conflict future of Syria, the return of IDPs [Internally Displaced Persons] and refugees. That would be the most meaningful response to the activity of the terrorists, the most important response. But to exclude Damascus, to exclude the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic from this process, is unprofessional, unacceptable, unethical, and arrogant.

Political settlement, Mr. de Mistura, is the only way of returning Syria to peace and to easing the tensions in the Middle East.... That is the path toward normalizing the situation in many countries of the Middle East. There is an opportunity of making Syria a model of cooperation for a settlement. But, the very destructive geopolitical projects will not contribute to that. At least, we will not give them a free pass in the Security Council. Thank you very much, Madame President.