

French President Hollande proposes anti-ISIS alliance in Syria to Russia

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French President François Hollande arrived Thursday night in Moscow for a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin to discuss fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militia, two days after Turkish fighters shot down a Russian bomber along the Syrian-Turkish border.

This was part of a diplomatic offensive planned by Paris in response to the November 13 terrorist attacks by ISIS in Paris, attempting to rally Russia and other European powers to French foreign policy goals in Syria. Hollande was accompanied by Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius.

Hollande's diplomatic campaign had been undermined by the Turkish downing of the Russian Su-24 bomber on Tuesday, as Hollande traveled to Washington and prepared talks with top German and Italian officials this week.

Obama moved quickly to back the Turkish government, making clear that the US opposed the Russian bombings supporting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's forces in western Syria.

After his meeting with Obama, Hollande said, "Any escalation would be extremely harmful to the only appropriate response, which is to fight terrorism and ISIS."

Putin, who had traveled to Tehran for talks with the Iranian government, stressed his opposition to making Assad's overthrow the precondition for negotiations, emphasizing the "total coincidence of views" between Russia and Iran on the Syrian crisis.

When Hollande met with Putin in the Kremlin, however, Putin greeted him with open arms, declaring: "You are making immense efforts to create a vast anti-terrorist coalition. Russia is ready for such cooperation. ... We think that such a coalition is absolutely

necessary."

Hollande, for his part, also declared that he wanted to collaborate with Russia in a "large coalition ... so that all the countries together act against terrorism and against ISIS."

Later, Putin ordered Russian military forces who are engaged in Moscow's campaign of air strikes in Syria to establish "direct contact" with their French counterparts and "to treat them as allies."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also welcomed the French government's proposal that the Syrian-Turkish border be closed. This measure—which would mean that most Syrian refugees would be blocked from fleeing the war—is ostensibly aimed to block the flow of money and weapons from Turkey to Islamist opposition militias in Syria. However, it is opposed by the Turkish government.

Key points discussed at the Hollande-Putin meeting reportedly included: increasing intelligence cooperation between France and Russia; that any force fighting ISIS in Syria should not be targeted; and increasing strikes against ISIS, particularly on its oil shipments via Turkey for sale on international markets.

Hollande's attempt to cobble together a closer relationship with Russia is utterly reactionary and shot through with political contradictions. The French government, in line with all the major powers of the NATO alliance including Washington, has made clear it intends to pursue regime change in Syria. In the final analysis, Hollande's call for a grand "coalition" is trying to rally the Russian capitalist oligarchy to the policy of French imperialism and to some sort of compromise acceptable to the most bellicose factions inside NATO.

The Putin regime's enthusiastic response to such proposals—even after Turkish forces backed by

Washington downed one of its bombers—testifies to the bankruptcy of the post-Soviet capitalist oligarchy, and its constant search for an accommodation with imperialism.

Washington's support for Turkey's act of war against Russia on Tuesday is a clear signal, however, that it views the strategy of limited cooperation with Russia proposed by Hollande as unacceptable. The policy now being pursued by NATO involves constantly threatening Russia, a major nuclear-armed power, with war—a reckless course of action threatening to unleash global nuclear war.

It is by no means clear that sections of the European bourgeoisie will begin seriously implementing the policies discussed between Putin and Hollande—which would involve closer ties with Russian security services and with the Syrian regime. However, US support for the Turkish downing of the Russian jet makes clear that if the European powers did so, it would very rapidly involve them in a serious clash with Washington.

This points to the enormous international tensions, both diplomatic and military, underlying the discussions between the European powers themselves. As part of his diplomatic blitz that culminated with his meeting with Putin on Thursday, Hollande also met several European heads of state: British Prime Minister David Cameron on Monday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel Wednesday, and Italian premier Matteo Renzi Friday.

Hollande and Cameron quickly came together around intensified military operations in Syria and police repression at home, with measures like the state of emergency in France. After meeting Hollande and giving French warplanes the green light to operate from British airbases in Cyprus, Cameron returned to London to propose billions of pounds of military spending increases.

Meeting Merkel, Hollande pressed for a further escalation of German intervention, declaring, “if Germany could go further, it would be a very good signal in the struggle against terrorism.” Since then, the German government has decided to send Tornado fighters and a warship to Syria.

Renzi, while supporting France's diplomatic and military measures against ISIS, was notably cooler, pointing to the need to resolve the bitter civil war that has followed NATO's 2011 war for regime change in

Libya. A former Italian colony with massive oil reserves, Libya has collapsed into bloody fighting, and tens of thousands of refugees are streaming out of the country.

“We are following with a great deal of interest the [negotiations] process in Vienna on Syria, and we are particularly working for this diplomatic window of opportunity which has opened to be extended to include Libya,” Renzi said.



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