



Joint Press Availability with German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier

Remarks

John Kerry

Secretary of State

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FOREIGN MINISTER STEINMEIR: (Via interpreter) Well, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to start by thanking you for your interest. Together with you, I'd like to extend a very warm welcome to my American counterpart here, John. I'm really delighted to have you here in Berlin today providing us with an opportunity to once again meet at this beautiful guest house at the Villa Borsig. We know there have been times this year, John, where we've spent more time together than we did with our respective families, when I think back to the negotiations in Lausanne and especially the two and a half long negotiations in Vienna. But at the same time these weeks, I believe, were weeks that set something in motion and it was worthwhile investing in that effort. And looking back at those negotiation, I would like to use this opportunity to express my greatest respect not only for your commitment but also for you iron discipline at the time, especially in the days that we negotiated in Vienna. You participated in the negotiations despite the fact that you had a bike accident, and at the end of the day we achieved a result. I think we are all delighted to see you fully recovered, back to full strength, fully operational, so to speak, as far as health matters are concerned.

I think we will think back to those days for quite some time to come. Also the signing ceremony in Vienna, when I remembered correctly all parties involved were quite aware of the fact that that was genuinely – a genuine historic moment. What we didn't know then and still do not know is whether that historic moment – historical moment will have ushered in a turning point, so to speak, in the Mideast and the perspectives that we're hoping for to result from the Vienna agreement will actually be opened up or not. We have entered the stage where we have to closely check whether all parties involved, especially Iran, comply with the commitments they entered into.

But it's not basically – or not in the first place Iran that brought us here today. If there is a country in the region where there's an urgent need for action, then it is Syria. And the talks we've had with a few Syrian refugees we had a minute ago have brought that message home to us very clearly. The Syrian tragedy, when you listen to the reports given to those who underwent it or experienced it on a personal basis, couldn't be more serious or grave than it is. Thus, it is not only a political, but as we see it, also a moral duty. After five years of civil war, many dead, 12 million people who lost their homes, we thus feel not only a political but also a moral duty to put an end to the killing on the ground in Syria.

Of course, we have to believe – both of us, we all – that the civil war in Syria can only come to an end and be brought to an end if a common diplomatic effort is undertaken by all of us, and if secondly, all take the threats seriously that emanate from this war, especially from the radical groups like ISIL. We have to take them very seriously indeed, and we have to put aside narrow national interests for the time being. We can only succeed in doing so if the international community quite clearly and with the involvement of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Russia, if all those involved adopt a common position and a common approach. That is the objective we are working towards, and we talked about this today. As far as we are concerned, we are going to do whatever we can in order to make sure that in the next few days and weeks genuine progress can be achieved.

I strongly welcome the fact – and we've had reports here in Germany – about the growing military engagement of Russia in the region. I welcome the fact thus that you, dear John, have talked to Sergey Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, and that a minimum exchange of information is provided for without that exchange of information necessarily leading to the adopting of a common position.

The people in Germany, we the politicians in Germany, also view the conflict in Syria from another angle. The great influx of refugees we've had over the last few weeks and months are mainly refugees who directly come from Syria or are Syrian refugees who had found temporary refuge in Lebanon, Turkey, and other countries in the region. Today we also talked about the situation, especially the humanitarian needs of the refugees and the situation having developed to such a degree in a negative way in the camps that they have sought to leave those camps. And we have to make sure that the underfunding of the UNHCR and of the World Food Program, if not to be done away, at least is being alleviated. To give you but one figure, UNHCR needs \$2.8 billion in addition to what they already have in order to simply keep up the level of supplies, to stay at the level that they reached last year. This is why we will meet again on the fringes of the UN General Assembly later this month. We will meet in the framework of the G7 countries. And we, those of us who are willing to provide assistance to improve humanitarian assistance, we will invite all those and try to undertake a common effort in order to improve the funding made available to UNHCR.

Syria, the refugee crisis, has been dominating the agenda of late, and it also dominated today's agenda in the talks we had. We know that the road ahead is a long one. But the situation in the Middle East, especially the situation in Syria, makes it incumbent upon us to act.

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, Frank, thank you very, very much for a generous welcome here in Berlin at this beautiful villa which I've had the privilege of being at before, and it's nice to be back here. And I particularly am grateful to you for not just your friendship but your leadership, and especially Germany's remarkable example to the world with respect to the Syrian refugee situation.

I appreciate your comments enormously at the beginning of the press conference regarding both my health, my leg, but also especially about our cooperation on Iran. It was a terrific multilateral effort. We – all of us – were surprised by the amount of time we wound up spending in Vienna, but the results are indeed very important to the world, and we will now be vigilant going forward with respect to the issue of implementation. It is critical, and no one is simply going to turn away and say oh, the job is done. The job is not done. The job in many ways is beginning.

I appreciate particularly, as does President Obama, our partnership with Germany. The chancellor's leadership, the foreign minister's leadership, in so many different fora is really an important part of all of our ability to be able to make progress with multiple crises that we are all working on simultaneously. I'm not sure there's a period of time where any group of foreign ministers have had to confront so many simultaneous explosions that are a reflection of a change in the world, a change in opportunity, a change in the workplace, a change in competition between nations and the marketplace, changes in the levels of population, and regrettably, too much corruption in certain places and certain countries which greatly complicates the ability to deliver to the people in those countries.

And so the loss of opportunity is something that has sparked revolution and change in many places. And the challenge is obviously for the rule of law and those

nations that have been working for a long time now to establish rule of law as the basis by which we operate to be able to move rapidly to make a difference in places where you have both failed and failing states.

So this is a big moment of challenge, and I appreciate Frank-Walter's very deep engagement on a personal level in all of this. We talk candidly about these issues, and today we talked candidly about the challenge of Syria and other challenges. Our nations, I'm proud to say, are good and close friends, and we have now, I think, established an ability to be able to look for the common ground very quickly and to not allow extraneous matters to get in the way of our mutual focus on finding solutions.

Earlier on the trip, I also had an opportunity to have some productive meetings with Philip Hammond, the foreign secretary of Great Britain, as well as Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed of the United Arab Emirates. And among the issues we discussed particularly was the need, raised by Frank-Walter, to all of us work together on the implementation of the Comprehensive Joint Plan of Action with respect to Iran. We were close partners in that negotiation, and we're going to continue to work closely in its implementation.

Now, we just came from a very moving meeting with a group of Syrian refugees, most of whom are very recently arrived in Germany, a few of whom came some time ago, but all of whom urged us and the rest of the world to move to find the political solution which is the only solution, ultimately, to the challenge of Syria. We have all seen the heart-rending pictures, including that of the body on the beach of the young Syrian refugee child Aylan Kurdi, who was lying there until he was picked up and cradled in the arms. And I think we've all seen the images of people being crowded into boats and some of those boats dumping their passengers into the water before they arrive on shore and people swimming desperately and others drowning in an effort to find opportunity, new life.

So we know very, very well that the frontline states – Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey – have been inundated and they have – all of them – accommodated literally millions of refugees. And more recently, we've seen countries in Europe now struggling with this wave of refugees, of migrants who are coming from the conflict areas across Eastern Europe and into Central and Western Europe. Germany particularly has set a remarkable example for its willingness to step up and deal with this challenge. The example is an important one, and I will say that America is proud that traditionally we are a nation that has always been a haven for those seeking freedom from persecution, from hunger, from oppression, from war. And it's a reminder for me personally that, obviously, we all have responsibilities to the millions who are stranded away from home. And that responsibility is not just to safeguard life; it is also to provide hope. Chancellor Merkel and the people of Germany have stepped up – almost a million people conceivably, ultimately, in one year, not over a long period of time.

We, the United States, have been engaged in this kind of a policy in large terms over a long period of time. We are the largest single program in the world in refugee resettlement on an ongoing basis. I'm not talking about just emergency. And we are also the largest single contributor, now over \$4.1 billion in the last few years in contributions to the UN refugee efforts. And since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, we're proud that we've been able to provide more money for shelter, for food, for medicine. But we still need to do more, and we understand that. There are 7 million men, women, and children who are displaced inside Syria. There are 4 million more who are refugees scattered throughout the region. And the magnitude and duration of this crisis obviously has stretched the global response thin.

To that end, I'm pleased to announce today that the United States will significantly increase our numbers for refugee resettlement in the course of this next year and the year after. Last year I think we were at 70,000. We are now going to go up to 85,000 with at least, and I underscore the "at least" – it is not a ceiling, it's a floor – of 10,000 over the next year from Syria specifically even as we also receive more refugees from other areas. And in the next fiscal year, we'll target 100,000, and if it's possible to do more, we'll do. One of the reasons it's difficult is that post-9/11, we have new laws and new requirements with respect to security background checks and vetting, so it takes longer than one would like and we cannot cut corners with respect to those security requirements. But this step that I am announcing today I believe is in keeping with the best tradition of America as a land of second chances and a beacon of hope, and it will be accompanied by additional financial contributions to the humanitarian effort not only from our government but from the American people. And that will become more specific in the next days.

We're also determined to attack the root causes of this problem. As we've said many times and we reaffirmed today in our discussions, there is no military solution. It requires a political solution, and the way forward has always been trying to find the common ground with respect to that. Now, military pressure is part of the equation, which is precisely why we have put together an over 60-nation coalition to degrade and ultimately defeat Daesh wherever it exists. That is why we've also said that there could be no solution without a transition in power, as the Geneva process has affirmed and which Russia has signed up to. It would be delusional to believe that President Assad can ever unite or govern a peaceful Syria, and it would be just as impossible for Daesh or any other violent extremist group, it would be impossible for any of us to conceive of any way in which they should be allowed or possibly come close to governing.

So the international community has a fundamental, huge obligation in these next days to come together to help Syrians find a more promising path. I asked some of the refugees today what was it that triggered, after enduring a number of years of this extraordinary conflict in which they've lived fearful for their lives on a daily basis, what suddenly triggered that wave. And it is really an utter sense of desperation, loss of hope, a sense that there isn't any possibility for any kind of future.

Well, all of us in positions of responsibility, nations with power and capacity and opportunity, have an obligation to come together and restore hope and prove to the world that the multilateral community could actually find a way forward here. In our discussions today, the foreign minister and I agreed that continued military support by the regime – for the regime by Russia or any other country risks the possibility of attracting more extremists and of entrenching Assad in a way that hinders the potential for resolution. So we're ready to seek a way to end Daesh's prospects, but we're not bending with respect to the possibility of what will bring peace to Syria itself.

In closing, I want to thank Chancellor Merkel and Foreign Minister Steinmeier for all that they have done to manage the crisis within Europe. Frank-Walter said and wrote eloquently that we owe it to ourselves and to the world to help the refugees. And I couldn't agree more, nor could President Obama. So we are facing tough challenges. That's nothing new. We've proven that we know how to face these tests together, and we've proven that we know how to find the common ground.

So Frank, thank you for your partnership. Thanks for your friendship. It's a privilege to be here, and we're delighted to take a few questions, I think.

FOREIGN MINISTER STEINMEIER: (Via interpreter) Let's begin with a question from a German colleague, Majid Sattar, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.

QUESTION: I'm right here. I'm waving. This is me. The question is in London you talked about cooperating with Russia and Syria. Does cooperating with Russia ultimately mean accepting Assad as a president for what time period?

SECRETARY KERRY: No. Look, what I said was nothing different from anything that any of us have said for more than a year or more now. We've been consistently saying that under the Geneva recommended process, which Russia has signed up to, there is a process of transition. Now, that has to be defined through negotiation. Nobody knows what the answer to that is. I can't tell you standing here today. But most people have accepted that to get somewhere it's not going to happen on day one or week one; there's got to be some period of time. I don't know what it is, but it has to be negotiated.

But it doesn't mean at all that – and I just said cooperation is not – we're not talking about cooperation. What we're talking about right now, military to military, is de-confliction so that accidents don't happen, confrontations that you don't intend don't occur, and we have an understanding of exactly what will be undertaken to fight Daesh. That's different from what is necessary to effect a transition and move to the peaceful political solution that will restore Syria as a whole nation unified, protecting all minorities, and secular. That is a shared goal, as stated by the neighbors, and so – and even some of the supporters like Russia.

So the key here is getting to this negotiation with a reality check on what is really possible. And that's what we're doing, but it's not – it's no different from anything

we've been talking about the entire time.

MR KIRBY: The next question, Lesley Wroughton, Reuters.

QUESTION: Actually, it's --

MR KIRBY: Oh, okay. Ken, go ahead.

QUESTION: Ken Dilanian, Associated Press. Thank you, John. Mr. Secretary, first I need to ask you if you can confirm reports that two American and British hostages were released today in Yemen with the help of Oman.

And then secondly, as you probably know, a number of former Obama Administration officials sent a letter to the President Friday calling for the U.S. to accept 100,000 Syrian refugees. The plan you just announced obviously falls well -- falls well short of that. Given that the U.S. accepted, like, 800,000 Vietnamese refugees in the wake of the Vietnam War, why can't the U.S. take as many as 100,000 or approaching that?

And Mr. Minister, what would you say to members of Congress and other Americans, given the extent that your country has accepted Syrians, who oppose accepting more Syrians on the grounds of a security risk?

SECRETARY KERRY: I can't give you any confirmation at this moment in time regarding Yemen. I can tell you that we have been working hard with various parties, including the Sultan Qaboos, with respect to any missing American, and we continue to work on not just Yemen but the question of other Americans who are being held in the region. And we will not rest until we have succeeded, obviously, in bringing them all home.

With respect to -- the second part of your question was on the --

QUESTION: The 100,000.

SECRETARY KERRY: Yeah, the 100,000. Look, we're -- as I said to you, we want to take more. We understand the responsibility. We would like to. But taking folks out of Syria for us at least, given our law right now post-9/11, requires a very specific vetting security process. And we can target it. I could announce to you today we're going to try to take whatever larger number, but we don't have the money allocated by Congress to hire the people necessary to do the job of expediting and of moving it. Now, this will be a debate, obviously, and a discussion in Congress in the next days. We're doing what we know we can manage immediately, what we feel we can do by working within the system we have and within the challenges that we have budget-wise. But as soon as we have an opportunity to try to up that, we're welcome because America has always welcomed bringing more people in in these kinds of circumstances, and we want to live up to that. But it's a very -- it's a different place, a different time, a different set of challenges than what we faced bringing boat people in from Vietnam.

FOREIGN MINISTER FRANK-WALTER STEINMEIER: (Via interpreter) As concerns the question that you put to me, I would like to begin by saying that I am very grateful for the fact that the United States, not only the political -- see not only a political responsibility or duty but also moral duty for themselves to do more than just observe the refugee crisis and to allow refugees into their country. Of course, I welcome the fact that -- I would welcome it if you could increase the numbers you can take into your country in the years to come, but I think when you look to what we both have just said, you can realize that we are both aware of the fact that it is, at the end of the day, not just a question of fair distribution. The fair distribution in Europe is something that we are struggling, that we are having a heated debate about. But it's very important that we have the United States at our side in this respect.

And the most important thing is, and that's also become obvious when you've listened to both of us, is that we have to focus on the root causes of the great influx of refugees, of the flight. And the refugees we've just talked to, we affirmed that in our exchanges. The civil war in Syria has made the people flee their homes, their houses and their home, and many of them have been separated, have been forced to flee parts of their families and relatives. So we have to tackle the root causes as they are obvious.

So, and as regards the second part of your question and the security needs that have to be attended to, my colleague, Mr. Kerry, has just pointed out, has indicated that there are certain standards that have to be fulfilled in the United States. Now I believe is not the moment to comment on this as an outsider. John Kerry pointed to the need. He also pointed to the fact that one -- that when one takes in a greater number of refugees into the United States, then one has to over time adapt the number of people involved in the procedures. We are trying to do the same in Germany. We are right in the midst of carrying out the necessary preparations that will allow us to increase staff. And this is true with regard to the Federal Police force but also with regard to the Federal Office for Migration and Asylum.

A German colleague, any questions? Doesn't seem to be the case.

SECRETARY KERRY: I like German colleagues. (Laughter.)

MR KIRBY: One more? Lesley?

SECRETARY KERRY: Oh, it's (inaudible).

MR KIRBY: Yes, sir. Sorry. Lesley Wroughton, Reuters.

QUESTION: Let's try again, Mr. Secretary. (Laughter.) Actually, for both of you, Mr. Secretary, you have spoken for a long time that Assad must go. You have called for a renewal of efforts to urgently address this issue. But can you be more specific on how do you get to the negotiating table? Do you bring -- is there a meeting at the UN on this, on how to do it? How quickly would you want to see that meeting happen? And particularly, how do you convince Iran to bring Assad to that negotiating table?

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, we're going to have a number of meetings. Yes, the answer is yes, we're going to have a number of meetings in New York. I'm not going to go into all of them at this moment in time. It's one of the things we discussed today, and we've agreed on certain formats and processes by which we should try to proceed.

I will also be meeting with Foreign Minister Lavrov in New York, a meeting with Foreign Minister Zarif regarding Iran and other things. And I'll be meeting -- I think we're both meeting with almost every single one of the players on several different occasions. So this will be a very timely meeting in New York that gives all of us a tremendous opportunity to be able to work together on finding some ways forward, and I'm very hopeful that we can do that.

MR KIRBY: Thank you.

SECRETARY KERRY: Thank you all.