
PUTIN CANCELS PARIS VISIT IN SYRIA ROW

12.10.2016

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Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday (11 October) cancelled a visit to France in a furious row over Moscow's role in the Syrian conflict.

The announcement from the Kremlin came a day after French President François Hollande said Syrian forces had committed a war crime in the battered city of Aleppo with the support of Russian air strikes.

GERMANY, FRANCE HARDEN TONE ON RUSSIA OVER ALEPPO BOMBINGS

Germany is mulling sanctions against Russia over the Syria and France is considering asking the International Criminal Courts prosecutor to launch an investigation into war crimes it says have been committed by Syrian and Russian forces in eastern Aleppo.

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Putin had been due in Paris on 19 October to inaugurate a spiritual centre at a new Russian Orthodox cathedral near the Eiffel Tower, but Hollande had insisted his Russian counterpart also took part in talks with him about Syria.

PUTIN IN BERLIN – AND PARIS? – ON 19 OCTOBER FOR UKRAINE TALKS

Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit Berlin on 19 October for talks with some leaders of the European Union and Ukraine to discuss a solution to the Ukrainian crisis, a Kremlin aide told reporters yesterday (10 October).

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The unprecedented cancellation of a visit so close to being finalised is a serious step * reminiscent of the Cold War, said Russian foreign policy analyst Fyodor Lukyanov.

This is part of the broader escalation in the tensions between Russia and the West, and Russia and NATO, he told AFP.

Russia has been waging a punishing aerial bombing campaign in Syria for more than a year in support of President Bashar al-Assad's forces, part of a multifront war that has claimed some 300,000 lives and seen Moscow further estranged from the West.

The French president had admitted he was agonising over whether to meet Putin, but the Kremlin on Tuesday called off the visit.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Putin was ready to visit when it is comfortable for President Hollande, adding that Moscow would wait for when that comfortable time comes.

Hollande responded that he was prepared to meet Putin at any time... to further peace.

Speaking in Strasbourg, Hollande said France and Russia had had a major disagreement over Syria.

It is necessary to have dialogue with Russia but it must be firm and frank, Hollande told the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe rights body.

Thomas Gomart, head of the French International Relations Institute (IFRI), said the optics of a Putin visit at this time would be explosive.

He said the cancellation was the culmination of a divergence that has been widening for some months between France and Russia.

Outrage fatigue

Outspoken British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson waded into the row, calling for anti-war campaigners to protest outside the Russian embassy in London.

Johnson said the wells of outrage are growing exhausted and anti-war groups were not expressing sufficient outrage at the conflict in Aleppo.

Where is the Stop the War Coalition at the moment? Where are they? he said during a parliamentary debate.

Johnson warned Russia it risked becoming a pariah nation.

If Russia continues on its current path then I think that great country is in danger of becoming a pariah nation, Johnson told parliament, calling on anti-war protest groups to demonstrate outside the Russian embassy.

Id certainly like to see demonstrations outside the Russian embassy, he said, calling on anti-war groups such as the Stop the War coalition, which is backed by the leader of Britains main opposition Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn.

Johnson cited the deadly attack against a humanitarian convoy in Aleppo on 19 September which according to the US was hit by two Russian planes.

EU ADDS ITS VOICE CONDEMNING ATTACK ON SYRIA HUMANITARIAN CONVOY

The EU has added its voice to the international row over the deadly attack on a humanitarian convoy near Aleppo on Monday (19 September), but □ unlike the USA □ it did not point its finger at Russia.

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On Saturday (8 October), Russia blocked a draft French UN resolution calling for an end to the

barrage of air strikes on the rebel-held east of Aleppo that have escalated in the last month, leaving hundreds of people dead, including dozens of children.

It was the fifth time that Russia used its veto to block UN action to end the five-year war in Syria that has sent millions fleeing and triggered the biggest migration crisis in Europe since World War II.

In the aftermath of that decision, Hollande described the bombing of Aleppo as a war crime.

He said in a TV interview on Monday (10 October): Those who commit these acts will have to pay for their involvement, including at the International Criminal Court.

On Tuesday, at least 12 civilians were killed in the heaviest Russian bombardment in days of Aleppo, a monitoring group said.

An AFP correspondent and the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported it was the most intense bombing since the Syrian army said on 5 October it would reduce its onslaught on the northern city.

Despite cancelling his visit to Paris, Putin is still considering travelling to Berlin on 19 October for a meeting on the conflict in Ukraine, one of his aides told Itar-Tass on Monday.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel proposed the meeting along the lines of the so-called Normandy format, bringing together Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine, with the possible participation of Hollande.

But it is uncertain whether Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko is prepared to take part.

The outbreak of the Ukraine crisis in 2014 eventually prompted France to cancel the delivery to Russia of two Mistral assault ships and repay almost €950 million.

The ships were subsequently sold to Egypt.

WHY RUSSIA ACCEPTED THE MISTRAL AGREEMENT

The head of French defence and security has revealed why Russia accepted an agreement on the non-delivery of two Mistral warships that appeared to let France come out on top. La Tribune reports.

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