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## **EUROPEAN DIPLOMATS ATTACK RUSSIA'S SYRIA POSITION AFTER ISLAMIC STATE RETAKES PALMYRA**

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Senior U.K. and French diplomats said Monday that the renewed Islamic State push into the Syrian city of Palmyra demonstrated that Russian forces were focused on propping up the Assad regime, not tackling terrorism in the country.

In a blistering attack on Russian actions in Syria, French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault told reporters ahead of a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels that Russian policy in Syria was one of permanent lies.

The Russians, who claim to be fighting against terrorism, concentrate in fact on Aleppo and have left a space for Daesh [IS] Islamic State [IS] are in the process of retaking Palmyra. Quite a symbol, he said.

EU foreign ministers are discussing the Syrian crisis Monday afternoon.

Islamic State fighters retook the ancient city of Palmyra on Sunday, an embarrassing setback for thousands of Syrian government troops and their Russian allies defending the area after it was captured from the extremist group early this year. Syrian officials said they were preparing a counterattack, and Russian war planes were pounding the city Sunday.

The city's fall came after fresh talks aimed at securing a cease-fire in Aleppo [IS] the delivery of humanitarian aid—over the weekend involving the U.S., Russia and others.

Mr. Ayrault said those talks had failed because of Russia's double speak over Syria.

On one hand, they say, we negotiate, we negotiate and we are going to reach a cease-fire, and on the other hand, they continue the war. And the war, its a total war. Its the desire to save the regime of Bashar al-Assad, he said.

In his comments to reporters, Britains Minister for Europe and the Americas, Alan Duncan, said what had happened in Palmyra illustrates everything that needs to be done to fight Daesh and terrorism.

He called the continued attacks by the Assad regime and Russia on Aleppo appalling and said it wouldnt bring peace to Syria.

The only solution is a political solution, but this will require a change of attitude on the part of the Russians—which we will argue for very strongly in this forum today, he said.

Syrian forces, backed by Russia, continued to retake Aleppo neighborhoods from opposition groups, and the government and opposition forces said Monday that the regime has gained control of almost all of the city. Rebels on Monday lost control of the Sheikh Saeed neighborhood, one of their last remaining neighborhoods, after several days of intense ground combat with regime forces backed by Russian airstrikes and militias comprised of thousands of Shiite Muslim foreign fighters.

On Friday, EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini had called for an immediate pause in violence around Aleppo and urged Russia to ensure humanitarian aid, which has been impossible to deliver for weeks, could flow to civilians in besieged areas in the east of the city.

She said the continued attacks on Aleppo meant the EU would impose fresh sanctions targets but made it clear the bloc once again would target only Syrian people and entities.

The U.K., France and Germany had supported possible sanctions against Russian people and entities over the Aleppo attacks. However, several other countries, including the Czech Republic, Austria and Italy, have made it clear they oppose any such step, which would need to be unanimous.

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said Monday that as long as a broader political agreement couldn't be reached to end the fighting, the first priority must be providing humanitarian assistance to the people in Aleppo.

The EU launched a humanitarian initiative in early October helping arrange an aid convoy for eastern Aleppo. But despite repeated efforts, it hasn't been able to reach the besieged areas.

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Kaynak/Source: