

US intentionally spare ISIS in Syria, want terrorists to weaken Assad – Russian FM



The US and its allies are playing a dangerous game in Syria as they count on Islamic State to weaken President Bashar Assad, but at the same time don't want the terror group to seize power in the country, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

Despite announcing ambitious plans for its coalition against Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS/ISIL), *"the analysis of those [US-led] airstrikes during over a year lead to conclusion that they were hitting selectively, I would say, sparingly and on most occasions didn't touch those IS units, which were capable of seriously challenging the Syrian army,"* Lavrov told the Rossiya 1 channel.

The Russian FM called Washington's actions in Syria a *"dangerous game,"* making it hard to determine America's true aims in Syria.

"Apparently, it's a kind of a 'honey is sweet, but the bee stings' situation: they want IS to weaken Assad as soon as possible to make him leave somehow, but at the same time they don't want to overly strengthen IS, which may then seize power," he explained.

The US stance *"seriously weakens the prospects of Syria to remain a secular state, where the rights of all ethnic and religious groups will be provided and guaranteed,"* Lavrov added.

According to the minister, Russia's assessment of the US-led anti-terror operation in Syria *"is based on*

observations of specific results and there are little results, not to say there are none – except the fact that during this period [since August 2014] the Islamic State has grown on the territories they control.”

He also said that Western claims that Russia’s air forces have been hitting peaceful civilians in Syria are “groundless.”

“We... are doing this (conducting air-strikes) in a step-by-step manner and don’t divide terrorists into those that could help us solve some tactical problems in the hope that they would be dealt with later, but hit everybody, who profess and preach the terrorist ideology,” Lavrov stressed.

Also on Tuesday, the Russian foreign minister visited the French embassy in Moscow to express condolences over the Islamic State attacks in Paris last week, in which at least 129 lives were lost and over 350 people were wounded.

“The barbaric Islamic State plots must be prevented. Our sorrow, our anger should help put aside all secondary issues and unite the efforts of Russia, France and all other countries in the merciless fight against terrorism, forming a truly global military coalition,” Lavrov wrote in the Book of Condolence.

Earlier in the day, Russia’s security services confirmed that the crash of the Russian A321 jet over Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula in late October was caused by a terror attack, as traces of explosives have been found in the wreckage of the plane. Islamic State has claimed responsibility for downing the aircraft, in which 224 passengers and crew were killed.

Moscow announced that it is now going to use its fleet of 25 long-range bombers to double the number of airstrikes against IS and other terror groups.

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