

Syria State Media Praise Putin's UN Speech

BY ALBERT AJI
Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria — Syria's state media on Tuesday praised Vladimir Putin's speech before the U.N. General Assembly in which the Russian leader defended Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Syrian newspapers said the speech drew "clear outlines" for what is needed to "fight terrorism" on a global level.

In his address Monday in New York, Putin urged the world to stick with Assad, saying it was a "huge mistake" not to engage the Syrian military in the fight against the Islamic State group.

The Al-Baath daily of Assad's ruling party said the essence of the Russian plan for combating terrorism is "simple and clear." Al-Baath added that "the Russian step is pivotal in the history of the region and the world to prevent the expansion of devastation."

The daily Al-Thawra said Putin entered the United Nations "from the Syrian gate," adding that "the Russian surgeon came to fix flabbiness in the international legitimacy."

Al-Thawra said Putin struck in his speech at "American charlatanism about fighting terrorism."

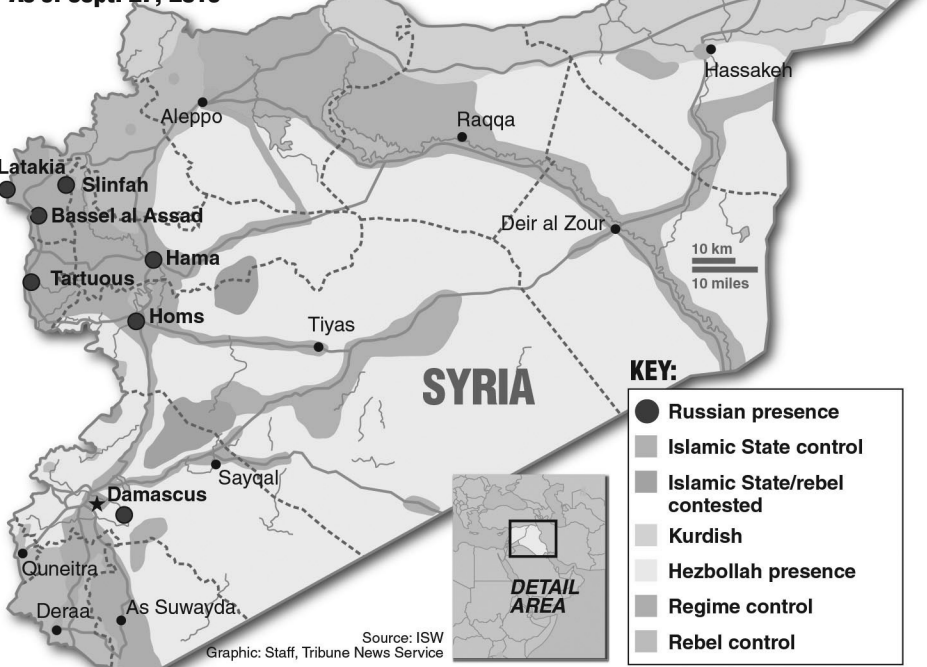
U.S. President Barack Obama and Putin held their first formal meeting in more than two years in New York on Monday without reaching a breakthrough on Syria, which has strained their already tense relationship.

The U.S. still insists Syria's future cannot include Assad, while Putin appears keen to bolster the standing of his longtime ally, casting Assad's government as the best defense against Islamic State militants.

Moscow has been ramping up its involvement in Syria in recent weeks by ferrying weapons, troops and supplies

Russian presence in Syria

As of Sept. 27, 2015



to an airport near the Syrian coastal city of Latakia in what the U.S. sees as preparations for setting up an air base there.

Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon said Russia's presence in Syria is near the coast, far from Israel. But he said Israel will not tolerate advanced weapons reaching Lebanon's militant Hezbollah, which has fought alongside Syrian troops. Yaalon said Israeli warplanes on Monday targeted two Syrian artillery guns suspected of shelling inside the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights.

He said Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told Putin that "we are not involved and we don't have any interest to intervene in the civil war in Syria, but we have to keep our interests."

Retired Israeli army Col. Jacques Neriah said Russia has a "moderate presence" in

Syria.

"It will help in stabilizing the area, and especially if Russia has the intent to fight the Islamic State together with the United States and the Western coalition," said the former deputy head for assessment of the Israeli army's military intelligence.

Sheikh Naim Kassem, deputy leader of Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group, which has sent fighters to help Assad, said Tuesday that "Russia intervened by its weapons and capabilities because there is someone that stood on his feet," referring to Assad, who is at war with an array of rebel and Islamic militant groups.

Kassem said "the world today admits that a solution in Syria can be only achieved with President Assad."

Syria's civil war has killed more than 250,000 people since March 2011 and wounded more than a million.

On Tuesday, the representative for the U.N. children's agency in Syria said children too often fall victim to indiscriminate violence. On Saturday alone, 17 children were killed when government troops and allied forces shelled a rebel-held neighborhood in the central city of Homs.

"What was supposed to be a family gathering in one of the few remaining playgrounds in the neighborhood has turned into a tragedy," UNICEF representative Hanaa Singer said in a statement.

"The use of heavy weapons has become commonplace in Syria and far too often children find themselves in the line of fire."

At least 10,000 children have been reported killed in Syria's civil war.

FIFA Bans Blatter Ally Warner For Life Over Repeated Bribery

BY ROB HARRIS
AP Sports Writer

ZURICH — Four years after stepping down in disgrace, former FIFA vice president Jack Warner was banned from soccer for life on Tuesday, accused of repeated acts of bribery related to World Cup bidding votes.

Warner, a long-time ally of President Sepp Blatter who was allowed to resign from FIFA in 2011 with his "presumption of innocence" maintained, is currently fighting extradition from Trinidad and Tobago on U.S. charges of racketeering, wire fraud and money-laundering.

The decision by the FIFA ethics committee on Tuesday shows that judge Hans-Joachim Eckert will pursue officials long after they have left their jobs.

A more pressing case for the ethics body is an investigation into Blatter, who was interrogated by Swiss prosecutors on Friday in part over allegations he undervalued the awarding of World Cup television rights to Warner. Blatter, who denies wrongdoing, is at risk of being suspended by his own organization.

Warner's lifetime FIFA ban stems from Eckert's report on the bidding process for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups.

"I do not believe however that this will serve as the distraction to the FIFA's present problems as the FIFA wishes it to be," Warner said. "Given what is happening in Zurich with Sepp Blatter I guess that there is no such thing as a coincidence."

As leader of the CONCACAF region from 1990-2011, Warner gained considerable influence in World Cup votes by the FIFA executive committee and now the extent of his wrongdoing has been reinforced by Eckert.

"Mr. Warner was found to have committed many and various acts of misconduct continuously and repeatedly during his time as an official in different high-ranking and influential positions at FIFA and CONCACAF," the FIFA statement

said.

"In his positions as a football official, he was a key player in schemes involving the offer, acceptance, and receipt of undisclosed and illegal payments, as well as other money-making schemes."

The case highlights how the specter of corruption has hung over FIFA under Blatter's 17-year presidency.

Former FIFA vice president Chung Mong-joon, who hopes to succeed Blatter in February's election, said Tuesday the leadership crisis is so severe that an emergency task force should be set up to run the game.

With Blatter under criminal investigation and general secretary Jerome Valcke suspended from work and being investigated by the ethics committee, Chung said FIFA is in "total meltdown."

"Under such circumstances, FIFA and regional confederations should consider convening extraordinary sessions of their respective executive committee(s) as well as congress to set-up an emergency task force that will enable FIFA secretariat to function without interruption," Chung, a former vice president under Blatter, said in a statement from South Korea.

Among Chung's potential rivals in the election is UEFA President Michel Platini, who has been questioned as a witness over a payment from FIFA — one of the reasons Blatter was interrogated on Friday by Swiss authorities. Blatter and Platini denied wrongdoing as they await news from the ethics committee, which is looking into the case.

Swiss attorney general Michael Lauber said Tuesday that Platini is being treated as "between a witness and an accused person."

Lauber said he would raid Platini's office if necessary to "clear up what's the real truth."

The payment under investigation is the 2 million Swiss francs (about \$2 million) received by Platini in 2011 for work supposedly carried out in his job as a FIFA adviser between 1998 and 2002. FIFA's

accounts for 1999-2002 show a revenue surplus of 115 million Swiss francs (about \$83 million in 2002).

"Mr. Blatter informed me when I started my role as his adviser that it was not initially possible to pay the totality of my salary because of FIFA's financial situation at that time," Platini said in comments provided by UEFA.

With less than a month to go until he must pass integrity checks to stand in the FIFA presidential election in February, Platini insisted that he doesn't "fear a (FIFA) suspension because I have done nothing wrong."

FIFA is expected to hold an election on Feb. 26 to replace Blatter, who delivered his sudden resignation statement in June, four days after being re-elected for a fifth term.

The FIFA bribery scandal erupted in May when the United States indicted 14 officials, including seven who were arrested at a Zurich hotel two days before the presidential election.

Only one of the seven men — ousted FIFA vice president Jeffrey Webb — has been extradited to the U.S.

A week after the American request to extradite Venezuelan official Rafael Esquivel was granted, the Swiss justice ministry agreed Tuesday to also send former Costa Rican soccer federation president Eduardo Li.

Li, accused of taking bribes in connection with the sale of marketing rights for World Cup qualifiers, was ousted from the FIFA executive committee two days before he could take his seat.

Extradition orders can be challenged at Switzerland's federal criminal court within 30 days.

Speaking after a lecture at Zurich University, Lauber described the ongoing FIFA case being run from the attorney general's office as a "big investigation."

"This is not a 90-minute game," Lauber said. "It's like more or less not even at the half (time) break."

Obama Still Dogged By Syria Failures

NEW YORK (AP) — In a year of diplomatic breakthroughs, President Barack Obama can't escape the shadow of Syria's intractable crisis.

Obama arrived for his annual trip to the United Nations this week eager to tout the restoration of U.S. diplomatic ties with Cuba and the completion of a landmark nuclear accord with Iran. He shook hands with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif, the first such encounter by an American president since the 1979 Islamic revolution, and held formal talks with Cuban President Raul Castro.

To the president, the openings with Cuba and Iran are not just validation of his own belief in the pursuit of diplomacy over military force, but also affirmation of a broader international order that marginalizes bad actors while giving them clear pathways to redemption.

The chaos in Syria, however, has defied all that. He returned to Washington Tuesday with the path forward no clearer than when he arrived in New York, even after lengthy talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Syria's most powerful backer.

"Nowhere is our commitment to international order more tested than in Syria," Obama acknowledged when he addressed the U.N. General Assembly.

Taliban Puts On Show Of Force

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — A day after a strategic northern city fell to the Taliban, the insurgents fanned out in full force Tuesday, closing roads, throwing up checkpoints and torching government buildings as fearful residents huddled indoors amid signs a promised Afghan counteroffensive was faltering.

U.S. warplanes carried out two airstrikes on Taliban positions, but government ground troops sent to try to retake Kunduz, one of Afghanistan's wealthiest cities, were stalled by roadblocks and ambushes, unable to move closer than about a mile (two kilometers) toward their target.

A NATO officer said more airstrikes were unlikely as "all the Taliban are inside the city and so are all the people." He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief media on the issue.

His words suggested the fight to retake the city would involve painstaking street-by-street fighting as government forces try to avoid civilian casualties in retaking control.

Inside the city, residents were stunned by the audacity of the insurgents, who attacked Kunduz on a number of fronts before dawn on Monday, taking the government, intelligence agency and military by surprise.

German States Lower Housing Standards

BERLIN (AP) — Refugees coming to Germany can expect a roof over their head, a bed to sleep in and three meals a day. But with authorities struggling to find housing for tens of thousands of people each month, many new arrivals will find their lodgings a squeeze.

Smaller, in fact, than what's permitted for a German shepherd dog.

An Associated Press survey has found that several of Germany's 16 states have waived the usual rules expected of communal housing. As a result, migrants in some parts of Germany are finding themselves living in cramped conditions that rights groups say are unfit for human habitation.

"The situation is becoming dramatic," said Karl Kopp, an expert on refugee policy with the campaign group Pro Asyl. "If we put people up in undignified conditions then this will have long-term consequences for their health and their ability to integrate in the country."

On Sunday 14 people — including three police officers — were injured when a mass brawl involving hundreds of refugees broke out at a reception center in Calden, near Kassel. The site is a tent city originally designed for 1,000 people but now housing 1,500.

US Slaps Sanctions On Islamic State

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. government announced sanctions Tuesday against 25 people and five groups connected to the Islamic State, disclosing intelligence that depicts a sprawling international organization with tentacles across Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

The moves by the Treasury and State departments are aimed at disrupting the activities of Islamic State financial, logistical and recruiting operatives who may not be suitable targets of American bombs or drone strikes. Many of them reside outside the theaters of war in Iraq and Syria.

The sanctions, the largest such effort against the Islamic State, also serve to demonstrate how far and wide the group's ideology has spread.

The State Department designated as foreign terrorist organizations Islamic State regional spin-offs in Russia's Caucasus region, Algeria, Indonesia and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. Among the individuals designated as terrorists was Sally Jones, a British native and the widow of an operative killed recently in an American drone strike.

The State Department also designated as terrorists three French nationals and a Russian. Russia, France and other countries cooperated with the U.S. in supplying information that contributed to the sanctions, officials said.

Planned Parenthood Chief Rebuts Videos

WASHINGTON (AP) — The head of Planned Parenthood defended the women's health organization Tuesday before a Republican-run Congress bent on slashing its federal funding, telling lawmakers that accusations against her group fed by stealthily recorded videos are "offensive and categorically untrue."

In Planned Parenthood's first appearance before Congress since those videos emerged this summer, Republicans on the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee argued that the group needs no taxpayer financing. They cited Planned Parenthood tax documents showing it spends millions on political activities, travel and exorbitant salaries.

"That's money that's not going to women's health care," said committee Chairman Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah. "It's a political organization, and that's something that needs to be ferreted out."

Cecile Richards, Planned Parenthood's president, told the lawmakers that her group has fallen victim to a "smear campaign" based on videos in which its officials coolly describe how they sometimes harvest tissue from aborted fetuses for scientific research.

Conservatives and many Republicans say the videos, made by abortion foes posing as private purchasers of fetal organs, show Planned Parenthood has broken federal laws including a ban on for-profit fetal tissue sales. The organization says it's acted legally and says the videos were deceitfully edited.

Burkina Faso Army Attacks, Takes Over Coup Plotter Barracks

BY BRAHIMA OUEDRAOGO
Associated Press

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso — Burkina Faso's army took over the barracks of the presidential guard that carried out a short-lived coup this month, barring them with gunfire Tuesday after they refused to disarm, the government said.

The government confirmed the takeover on national TV, saying they liberated all of the places formerly occupied by the presidential guard.

"Given the situation which has become intolerable for our people, and determined to turn this dark page in our history, our patriotic defense and security forces took responsibility with success," it said.

The government did not immediately give a casualty toll.

Burkina Faso's army appeared to have prepared for the offensive all day, earlier surrounding the barracks, and the nearby presidential palace and national radio in the capital, Ouagadougou. Artillery was fired at the barracks of the elite presidential guard before they took control, said army spokesman Capt. Guy Herve Ye.

Gen. Gilbert Diendere, who led the coup earlier this month but handed power back last week, called on his followers to lay down arms.

"I call on all the elements to lower their arms and to rejoin the ranks of the army to avoid unnecessary bloodshed," Diendere said in an interview with local Radio Omega after the army attacked.

The elite presidential guard staged the coup

because it was unhappy that supporters of former President Blaise Compaore, ousted in a popular uprising in October, couldn't run in elections. The presidential guard arrested interim President Michel Kafando and interim Prime Minister Yacouba Isaac Zida on Sept. 16. Diendere later took power, but stepped down after pressure from the West African regional bloc, Burkina Faso's military and demonstrating citizens. Kafando and Zida were reinstalled on Sept. 23.

Under a peace deal brokered last week, members of the presidential guard are supposed to disarm.

Diendere told the radio station that some 100 soldiers, a captain and an interim leader had left the presidential guard and ac-

cepted disarmament. But the presidential guard, which initially had around 1,300 members, said Tuesday that it will not give up its weapons under "shameful and violent" conditions.

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