

Putin pledges cooperation

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday vowed to cooperate in the fight against terrorism as French President Francois Hollande began the last leg of a diplomatic bid to step up efforts to crush the Islamic State group.

Sitting down to talks with Hollande at the Kremlin, Russian President Vladimir Putin pointed to the November 13 assaults in Paris in which 130 people were killed, and the IS-claimed bombing of a Russian jetliner over Egypt on October 31, with the loss of all 224 people onboard.

These "make us unite our efforts against the common evil," Putin said. "We are ready for this cooperation."

Hollande, pitching a message he had taken to other major capitals with varying degrees of success, said, "We have to form this large coalition together to strike against

FRANCE'S WAR ON TERROR



terrorism."

Moscow was the last stage of a whirlwind campaign by Hollande to intensify efforts to crush IS in Iraq and Syria.

He notably gained the support of Britain, whose prime minister, David Cameron, set out his case on yesterday for air strikes against IS in Syria, telling lawmakers that his country could not "sub-contract" its security to allies. Cameron has also offered France the use of a British air base in Cyprus for flying missions against the jihadists.

In Berlin, Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen yesterday said Germany could offer France Tornado reconnaissance jets, a naval frigate, satellite images and aerial refuelling to back the fight against IS.

In contrast, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, in talks with Hollande in Paris, offered only vague support for "a coalition of greater and greater strength" able to destroy IS.

France last week invoked a clause requiring EU member states to provide military assistance after the Paris attacks.

Hollande also received what is perceived to be a cool response from President Barack Obama when he flew to Washington on Tuesday, with the US reluctant to intensify military action in Syria without a clear strategy or political track in place.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov welcomed a proposal by Hollande to close off the Syria-Turkey border, considered the main crossing point for foreign fighters seeking to join IS.

"I think this is a good proposal and... President Hollande will talk to us in greater detail about it. We would be ready to seriously consider the necessary measures for this," Lavrov said.

DOWNING OF RUSSIAN WARPLANE IN SYRIA

Turkey refuses to apologise

Erdogan demands Russian apology, denies accusation of buying oil from IS; Moscow hits Ankara with wide-ranging sanctions; deploys S-400 missiles; first US ground troops deployed in Kobane

AGENCIES

Turkey refused to apologise for downing a Russian fighter near the Syrian border and Russia unveiled sanctions in retaliation as recriminations between Moscow and Ankara reached fever pitch.

"I think if there is a party that needs to apologise, it is not us," he said. "Those who violated our airspace are the ones who need to apologise. Our pilots and our armed forces, they simply fulfilled their duties."

Tensions in the Middle East have escalated after Turkey shot down the Russian warplane, with Erdogan accusing Russia of deceit and Moscow announcing it will deploy anti-aircraft missiles to Syria.

The downing of the plane raised fears it could fuel a wider geopolitical conflict and highlighted the difficulty of forging consensus on the fate of Syria.

The US, the EU and the UN have appealed for calm.

While Russia ruled out any



military retaliation against Nato member Turkey over Tuesday's incident. Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev gave his ministers two days to work out "a system of response measures" in the economic and humanitarian spheres.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has denounced the act as a "stab in the back" by "accomplices of terrorists." Moscow said the plane was brought down without warning while conducting a bombing raid over Syria.

But Erdogan denied Ankara was

collaborating with IS. He also denied that Turkey bought any oil from IS, insisting his country's fight against the jihadists was "undisputed".

"Shame on you. Those who claim we buy oil from Daesh (IS) are obliged to prove it. If not, you are a slanderer," Erdogan said, lashing out at Russian charges.

However, he said that Turkey would have acted differently if it had known the warplane its forces downed on the Syrian border was Russian, according to France 24 television. He also said that Putin had not answered his call after the

incident that has seriously damaged ties between two rival players in the Syrian conflict.

Medvedev said the economic measures could include halting joint investment projects. He said he hoped to get the sanctions drafted within the next two days.

He said under Russian law the broad punitive steps could include halting joint economic projects, restricting financial and trade transactions and changing customs duties.

Measures could also target the tourism and transport sectors,

labour markets and "humanitarian contacts", Medvedev said.

Russian authorities said they were also tightening checks on food imports over alleged safety standard violations.

Meanwhile, the Turkish military has released a recording to support its claim that it gave 10 warnings to the Russian plane before shooting it in Turkish airspace. The surviving Russian pilot said on Wednesday refuted the claim.

Russia yesterday deployed its advanced S-400 air defence system in Syria's Hmeimim airbase, with the weapons to be used to cover the area around its airbase in coastal Latakia.

US officials have criticised the decision to send the missiles to Syria, saying their presence raises "significant concerns" due to their wide 400-kilometre reach that stretches beyond Syria's borders into Turkey.

On its part, US yesterday deployed its first ground troops to Syria to train Kurdish forces. More

Cameron makes case for UK to join Syria war

AFP, London

Prime Minister David Cameron yesterday argued his case to MPs for Britain to join air strikes in Syria ahead of a vote expected at a later date, with signs of opposition weakening after the Paris attacks.

"If we won't act now, when our friend and ally France has been struck in this way, then our friends and allies can be forgiven for asking: If not now, when?" Cameron asked parliament.

Cameron argued there was a legal basis for intervention for self-defence because of the threat posed by Islamic State jihadists at home, and said Britain should not "sub-contract" its security to allies.

"We have to deny a safe haven for ISIL in Syria. The longer ISIL is allowed to grow in

Syria, the greater the threat it will pose," he said in a written statement on the issue, using another word for IS.

Cameron called for "patience and persistence" and outlined a seven-point strategy for Syria, including diplomatic and humanitarian efforts and planning for what will happen if President Bashar al-Assad falls.

Cameron is expected to call a vote in parliament on the issue before recess begins on December 17.

This will come two years after a previous vote for military action in Syria failed after the main opposition Labour Party voted against.

Cameron has stepped up pressure on MPs to vote for strikes after IS claimed responsibility for the November 13 attacks in Paris, which killed 130 people.

World unity hope shot down in 17 seconds

CNN ONLINE

The cool, calm, clear thinking that kept the Nato alliance intact as it weathered the Cold War with the Soviet Union has been shattered.

Decades of careful diplomacy and nail-biting inaction during the potentially world-annihilating nuclear arms race of the 1950s, 60s and 70s appears to have been sacrificed in a few brief seconds by Turkey.

During the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the deployment of nuclear weapons in western Europe in the 1980s and many other causes of strife, Nato did not take on the Soviet Union or Russia directly; nor did Moscow attack.

That all changed when Turkish air force jets shot down a Russian bomber Tuesday -- the first time a Nato country has taken such action since 1952. And in those moments, Russian President Vladimir Putin was given a strategic goal: Destabilize and divide Nato.

More may have been sacrificed, too. Any chance of a quick end to the war in Syria seems to have gone up in smoke.

Putin has been trying to undermine the unity of Nato for years. Whether it's been Russian planes flying in Baltic airspace, aging bombers buzzing the coast of Britain, the destabilization of Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, he has needed Nato, testing its resolve and probing for division.

Back then Nato -- a military alliance formed after World War II by countries in North America and Western Europe that now has 28 member states committed to defending each other -- stood firmly as one.

But, already, German and Czech officials are expressing surprise at Turkey's action -- taken after the Russian plane was inside Turkish airspace 17 seconds or less, accord-

ing to US calculations.

President Barack Obama urged Russia to stand at IS targets in Syria, in concert with their coalition -- rather than going it alone. Perhaps that seemed more possible this week, with both France and Russia mourning losses from ISIS terror and when they were collectively trading their national tragedies for compromises to find a solution in Syria.

Hollande lost 130 people to ISIS in the Paris attacks this month and Putin 224 to terrorist bombers who blew up a Russian passenger jet a few weeks earlier. Both have a moral authority to galvanize collective



action.

It was a rare moment in international diplomacy and some diplomats were beginning to think Russia's policy on Syria and its support for Bashar al-Assad could be changed. Not quickly, or easily, but the chance was there.

And Erdogan has squandered it.

The downing of the Russian jet smacks of what Erdogan's enemies accuse him of -- of aspirations to resurrect the Ottoman Empire -- and leaves him open to claims he is too soft on radical Islamists. Putin has gone further -- saying that Erdogan, the head of state of a Nato member, is siding with the terrorists.

And that's why -- at first analysis -- this looks like a disaster, beyond the loss of life of one pilot and a would-be rescuer.



3 Palestinians shot dead in West Bank

AFP, Hebron

Israeli forces shot dead three Palestinians engaged in clashes or attempted attacks in the occupied West Bank yesterday, the latest deaths in a nearly two-month wave of deadly violence.

Khaled Jawabrah from Al-Aruba refugee camp, north of the flashpoint city of Hebron, died after being shot by Israeli forces with a live round as he was about to hurl a Molotov cocktail at an Israeli car, the army said.

Earlier, Samer Hassan Siresee, 51, was shot dead by border police after getting out of a taxi and running at forces with a knife at Tapuah junction near the northern West Bank city Nablus, police said.

And in the early hours, clashes in the village of Qatanna, northwest of Jerusalem, resulted in the death of Yahya Taha, 21, who the Palestinian health ministry said was shot in the head.

Ninety-seven Palestinians have been killed in violence since October 1, including an Israeli Arab.

Over half of them have been alleged perpetrators of stabbing, shooting and car ramming attacks aimed at Israeli civilians and security forces. Others have died in clashes with security forces.

The violence has also left 17 Israelis, an American and an Eritrean dead.

Attempts to ease the tensions, including a visit by US Secretary of State John Kerry on Tuesday, have so far proved unsuccessful.

Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, has called a day of rage for Friday.



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Over half of primates on brink of extinction

AFP, Singapore

More than half the world's primates, including apes, lemurs and monkeys, are facing extinction, international experts warned, as they called for urgent action to protect mankind's closest living relatives.

The population crunch is the result of large-scale habitat destruction -- particularly the burning and clearing of tropical forests -- as well as the hunting of primates for food and the illegal wildlife trade.

Species long-known to be at risk, including the Sumatran orangutan, have been joined on the most endangered list for the first time by the Philippine tarsier and the Lavaosa Mountains dwarf lemur from Madagascar, scientists meeting in Singapore said.

"This research highlights the extent of the danger facing many of the world's primates," leading primatologist Christoph Schwitzer, director of



2 DAYS TO GO

UK axes carbon capture scheme

AFP, London

Britain has quietly cancelled a competition to develop carbon capture and storage technology, reversing support for a tool intended to help combat global warming ahead of a climate summit in Paris next week.

The change was announced to the London Stock Exchange on Wednesday as finance minister George Osborne revealed a much-awaited budget update to parliament that vowed to increase investment in energy research.

Proponents of CCS technology -- which aims to capture emissions of carbon dioxide from power plants and prevent it entering the atmosphere and causing the planet to warm -- reacted with dismay to the announcement that funding was no longer available for the £1.0 billion scheme.

"Moving the goalposts just at the time when a four-year competition is about to conclude is an appalling way to do business," said Luke Warren, chief executive of the Carbon Capture and Storage Association.

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