

Beat: Politics

PART TWO - JOHN KERRY GIVING FULL REMARKS ON UNITED STATES STRATEGY IN SYRIA

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USPA NEWS - Secretary of State John Kerry : 'But today, I really want to focus on an area of the world "" and, in fact, one particular country "" that has been the central concern of the Obama Administration for the past four and a half years, and that is Syria. The civil war there and the humanitarian...

Secretary of State John Kerry : 'But today, I really want to focus on an area of the world "" and, in fact, one particular country "" that has been the central concern of the Obama Administration for the past four and a half years, and that is Syria. The civil war there and the humanitarian disaster that is unfolding before the world's eyes, that has flowed from all of the insecurity and challenges of modernity clashing with culture and young people and their aspirations "" all of that will be a major topic of discussion at the G20 summit, and before that at the meetings that I will participate in in Vienna on Saturday.'

'So I thought this might be a good time to bring you up to speed on the Administration's strategy in Syria, on decisions made by the President, and on the actions that we are taking and will build on in weeks and months to come.'

'Now, Syria as we know it is not just another country. In fact, it is one of the first places that most of us learned about when studying history in school. Damascus and Aleppo are among the oldest continually inhabited cities on the face of the Earth. They are part of Mesopotamia, the cradle of civilization. For 4,000 years, empires have risen and fallen, but Syria has remained a commercial crossroads. And this has contributed to a rich cultural mix of ethnicities, customs, and creeds.'

'But the story of modern Syria has been a grim one. In 1970, a Baathist military leader, Hafez al-Assad, seized power, ushering in an era of limited modernization accompanied by unlimited repression. In the year 2000, Assad was succeeded by his son, Bashar, raising hopes for the possibility of greater political openness "" hopes that the new leader chose not to fulfill.'

'It was little wonder, then, that when the sparks of Arab Spring began to ignite, demands for change were heard in Syria. The protests were actually quite modest at first, and they were driven not by sectarian or religious differences, but by the lack of freedom and jobs.'

'The violence only began when Assad responded to peaceful demonstrations by sending in thugs to beat up young people. And when the parents of those young people objected "" they took to the streets themselves, the regime replied with bullets and then with bombs.'

'Having made peaceful change impossible, Assad made war inevitable. And this war gave rise to Daesh "" ISIL "" the gravest extremist threat faced by our generation and the embodiment of evil in our time.'

'The result, as we know, has been four and a half years of nonstop horror. One Syrian in twenty has been wounded or killed. One in five is a refugee. One in two has been displaced. The average life expectancy dropped by 20 years. Eighty percent of the electricity has been knocked out, plunging much of the country literally into darkness. And the burden of the conflict falls most heavily on the smallest shoulders.'

'Imagine what it would mean for America's future if the entire public school systems of our largest cities "" New York, Chicago, Los Angeles "" were suddenly to close and stay closed. And then there are children like two-year-old Yazan al-Najjar, whose birth in Lebanon could not be registered because his parents were separated during the war.'

'Officially, he is neither Syrian like his mother nor Lebanese. And there are thousands like him "" young people growing up in camps, many of them without education; growing up in overcrowded apartments, under bridges, and in the streets, without a country to call their own or any official identity at all.'

'Make no mistake: The longer this terrible civil war lasts, the harder it will be for the country to recover, and the more wounds of body and mind we will see opened ““ wounds that can never be truly closed.'

'Since the fighting began, and as senator and as Secretary of State, I have met with many of those personally touched by this conflict: doctors who are risking their lives in a country where treating the injured can be equated with treason; women who struggle to keep their families together despite constant attacks, threats of abuse, bitter cold, shortages of water and food; a courageous whistleblower who emerged from Syria with photographic evidence of the torture that Assad's security forces inflicted on thousands of victims.'

'And just a few weeks ago, with refugees ““ I've talked to those refugees too, who had survived barrel bombs dropped from helicopters and made their way to Berlin, Germany.'

'Given all of this, I want to be very clear. From the beginning of this crisis, there has not been a single idea for addressing the Syria conflict that has been discussed in public that hasn't been the subject of intense scrutiny within the Administration. Whatever questions one might have about the content of our policy, there should no doubt about the effort made to consider every single option for ending this crisis.'

'That explains why the United States originally supported the deployment of international human rights monitors to Syria; why our UN Ambassador, Samantha Power, led the fight in the Security Council to demand access for humanitarian relief agencies and for an investigation into war crimes by the International Criminal Court; and it is why we have been at the forefront of every single attempt to forge a diplomatic solution from the day I know that I became Secretary of State'

.....TO BE CONTINUED WITH PART THREE

Ruby BIRD

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