

'Russians made peace possible': Ex-NATO military committee chief praises Syria op

12/02/2016



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Lieutenant General Harald Kujat, who was chief of staff of the German Bundeswehr in 2000-2002 and served as NATO's Military Committee chairman in 2002-2005, made the comments on the Syrian crisis in an interview with Passauer Neue Presse newspaper.

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"The Russians have made the peace process [in Syria] possible," he told the newspaper on Friday.

The West was at standstill until September 2015, Kujat stressed: *"Neither the Americans nor the Europeans had any strategy for a peaceful Syria. Both weren't prepared to be really involved. The Russians did it and opened a window for political solution."*

The Russian operation was crucial for the Syrian Army on the ground to survive Islamic State's (IS, formerly ISIS/ISIL) offensive and prevent the entire country from being seized by Islamist militants, he said.

"I gave them several weeks [to last before being defeated]. Then Syria would have collapsed, with IS capturing the country. The next target would be Lebanon, then Israel. It could result in far-reaching consequences for all of us."

According to Kujat, Russian air support for the Syrian Army's operation to re-take Aleppo was essential from a military perspective.

Earlier in February, Kujat, who started his military career in the German Air Force, dismissed possible NATO Airborne Early Warning and Control Systems (AWACS) deployment to Syria as purposeless.

"NATO decides nothing in the Syrian civil war with a few AWACS aircraft," he told Neue Osnabrucker Zeitung. *"To really beat IS, ground forces are required. The question is whether NATO really wants to step into this war."*

Russia's anti-IS air campaign has been frequently criticized by the West, who accuse Moscow of targeting Syrian *"moderate"* opposition forces and stalling the peace talks. The Russian Defense Ministry has repeatedly dismissed the accusations and has dubbed the US-led strikes inefficient, while Russian diplomats have pointed out that Washington's Syrian strategy seems to be playing into IS' hands.
