

Hagel: Russia, U.S. Must Fight Islamic State Together

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Former U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel

Former U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel called for including Russia in a consolidated global battle against Islamic State, and suggested putting aside the inevitable disputes between Washington and Moscow for the sake of the fight against terrorism.

Hagel dismissed the disagreements between the West and Russia about Syria's President Bashar Assad as secondary, and said operations in Syria should be focused on defeating Islamic State, according to an interview Sunday with CNN.

“Assad is a very bad guy,” Hagel said. “There are bad guys all over the world. But I think it's pretty clear that ISIS represents the real threat to our country, to the world.”

He called for bringing together various countries — including traditional opponents or adversaries of the United States — to fight the Islamic State.

“The Russians have got to be part of this,” Hagel said. “I think the Iranians have to be part of it.”

“It isn't an alliance,” he added. “It's — let's seize on the common interest. What is the common threat to all those countries? What's our common interest here? ISIS. And you build around that. I don't think you're going to find a resolution to Assad until you figure out how you're going to deal with ISIS.”

[Watch the interview on CNN website.](#)

Relations between Moscow and the West turned fetid over Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine last year and Russia's support for separatist insurgents in eastern Ukraine.

But following the downing of a Russian passenger plane over Egypt on Oct. 31, and a series of terrorist attacks in Paris on Nov. 13 — Islamic State has claimed responsibility for both terror acts — Moscow has toned down its adamantly anti-Western rhetoric of the past year, and called for unity in fighting Islamic State.

Russia's air strikes in Syria were widely seen as an attempt to distract attention from its meddling in Ukraine and to reassert itself as a major international player while supporting the Assad regime, but calls for a joint fight against terrorism have been part of Russian President Vladimir Putin's stance since long before the Ukrainian crisis.

Hagel did not mention Ukraine, but suggested that differences between the United States and its opponents, such as Russia, could be put on the back burner in the face of a formidable common enemy.

“We're gonna have differences with Iran for years and years, with Russia for years, but you can't let those differences dictate, or you can't become captive to the differences,” Hagel told CNN. “Let's center on the core threat, the common threat, build out from there.”

Hagel resigned as defense secretary last year, following disagreements with White House administration officials over Syrian policy.

Islamic State is a terrorist organization banned in Russia.

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