The Moscow Times
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# Britain and Russia in Diplomatic Spat Over Palmyra Concert

By Anastasia Bazenkova

May 06, 2016



British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond

A performance by a Russian orchestra in the ruins of Palmyra in Syria on Thursday resulted in an exchange of caustic remarks between Moscow and British diplomats.

While the Western media immediately criticized the event, calling it part of the Kremlin's campaign to trumpet Russia's military triumph in Syria, most foreign politicians remained silent or reserved in their comments.

However, British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond slammed the concert as "a tasteless attempt to distract attention from the continued suffering of millions of Syrians," referring to a recent air strike on a refugee camp in northern Syria, which killed at least 28 civilians. The opposition blamed the strikes on Syrian government forces, backed by Russia.

"It shows that there are no depths to which the regime will not sink. It is time for those with

influence over Syrian President Bashar Assad to say enough is enough," Hammond added, Agence France Press reported.

The Russian Foreign Ministry reacted with sarcasm.

“It's very sad that Hammond didn't like the concert. We were all run off our feet to make sure he liked it, everything was done for him,” the ministry's spokeswoman Maria Zakharova was quoted as saying by the RIA Novosti news agency.

“Now we know that he does not know anything about music, and nobody is interested in his comments anymore,” Zakharova added.

The concert by Russia's famed Mariinsky theater orchestra was performed in Palmyra's Roman amphitheater on Thursday evening to celebrate the liberation of the city from Islamic State militants by the Syrian army.

The performance titled “With a prayer from Palmyra: Music revives the ancient walls,” was led by the conductor Valery Gergiev and also featured President Vladimir Putin's close friend, cellist Sergei Roldugin.

The Russian delegation included Culture Minister Vladimir Medinsky and the director of the Hermitage museum Mikhail Piotrovsky.

Putin addressed the concert by video from Sochi. He thanked the musicians and said that he considers the event “as a sign of gratitude to all those who fight against terrorism, even putting their own lives at risk,” the Interfax news agency reported.

The Islamic State is a terrorist group banned in Russia.

Contact the author at a.bazenkova@imedia.ru. Follow the author on Twitter at @a_bazenkova.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2016/05/06/britain-and-russia-in-diplomatic-spat-over-palmyra-concert-a52804