

# Lavrov Tells Outsiders Not to Meddle in Libya

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Rebels clashing with pro-Gadhafi forces near Ras Lanuf this week. **Asmaa Waguih**

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned world powers on Thursday against meddling in the affairs of Libya and other African countries, saying military intervention would be unacceptable.

Moscow could use its clout, siding with fellow permanent UN Security Council member China, to temper Western policy and influence global actions, as it has done with Iran in an eight-year standoff over its disputed nuclear activity.

Lavrov said Western discussion of proposals for a no-fly zone over the North African country was premature and had not yet been put before the Security Council, where Russia holds veto-wielding power.

He added that Russia would, however, "closely study" any such initiatives to provide support to rebel forces battling to oust long-time Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi.

Russia, which has called the three-week uprising in Libya a fully fledged civil war, has warned against military intervention in Libya even as the United States and NATO weigh potential options to aid anti-Gadhafi rebels, including the no-fly zone, which could entail destroying Libyan air defenses.

"In the United Nations charter and other international accords, it is clearly stated that each nation has the right to decide its own future," Lavrov said on state television during a meeting with his Congolese counterpart in Moscow. "Intervention in internal affairs, especially military interference, is unacceptable."

Lavrov also warned that attempts to interfere in the revolt could bring greater long-term problems for Libya, and urged forces on both sides of the Libyan fighting to hold talks.

"Any reckless action, based on foreign models that were used in other parts of the world, could lead to serious problems which will then have to be faced by the African countries themselves," Lavrov told reporters.

"They must sit and negotiate, because the other alternative is civil war, more and more deaths among civilians."

But in a gesture of solidarity with international efforts to isolate Gadhafi, Moscow earlier on Thursday said it will ban all weapons sales to Tripoli, effectively halting billions of dollars worth of arms deals signed with Gadhafi's government.

The move belatedly brought Russia into line with a Feb. 26 UN Security Council resolution ordering an arms embargo and other punitive sanctions against Libya.

Rosoboronexport, the state-owned arms export monopoly, said this week that it had more than \$2 billion worth of arms contracts with Libya. Kommersant reported that Rosoboronexport was about to close deals for military jets and anti-aircraft missiles worth another \$1.8 billion.

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