

Cryptic Talks on Libya Suit Lavrov

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Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Tuesday that an envoy of Moammar Gadhafi told Russian diplomats that the embattled Libyan leader would consider obeying the terms of UN resolutions on the North African country.

Western diplomats, however, voiced doubts about the effectiveness of Moscow's diplomatic efforts, which centered on a meeting with the leader of an obscure Libyan charity, apparently without the knowledge of the Libyan Embassy.

Lavrov said he was satisfied about the talks with Muhammad Ahmed al-Sharif, the general secretary of the World Islamic Call Society.

"We raised the issue that the Libyan leadership must explicitly embrace and begin the implementation of the UN Security Council resolutions in full," Lavrov [said](#) in comments carried on his ministry's web site.

"The answer that we got cannot be called negative. We were told that Tripoli is prepared

to consider approaches that form the basis of the African Union's Road Map and to fulfill the demands of UN Security Council Resolution 1973," he said.

Lavrov confirmed Moscow's criticism of NATO's ongoing bombing campaign in Libya, which he said goes "far beyond the resolution's goals."

Moscow says the resolution only allows the protection of civilians, while NATO is seemingly trying to bring the opposition to power. The Foreign Ministry issued a harsh [statement](#) Tuesday saying the alliance had once again bombed non-military targets in Tripoli.

At the same time Lavrov stressed that Russia would not take any mediating role in the conflict, which he said should be carried out by the UN and the African Union.

He said, however, that Moscow also was eager to speak to Libyan opposition representatives and that a planned visit had been postponed for "technical reasons."

Mystery has clouded Moscow's diplomatic efforts, and it remained unclear for much of Tuesday who the Foreign Ministry had actually met with.

Lavrov only named al-Sharif and the World Islamic Call Society during a joint news briefing with Council of Europe Secretary-General Thorbjorn Jagland.

The society was apparently founded by Libya in the early 1970s. Its Canadian branch was forcibly closed earlier this month because of suspected terrorism links. The Canadian government revoked the registration of the branch, based in London, Ontario, because documents showed that it had transferred money from Gadhafi's so-called Jihad Fund to bank accounts of known terrorists, the Ottawa Citizen [reported](#) last week.

It was not even immediately clear whether Lavrov himself had taken part in the meeting with al-Sharif.

The Libyan Embassy was apparently unaware of the talks. "We know nothing about this visit and can give you no information about it," an unidentified diplomat told RIA-Novosti.

Calls to the embassy were not answered Tuesday.

While the heads of many Libyan foreign missions have defected to the opposition since the start of the popular unrest in February, no such move has been reported from the embassy in Moscow.

But President Dmitry Medvedev fired the Russian ambassador to Libya, Vladimir Chamov, in March after he indirectly criticized Moscow's waning support for Gadhafi.

Diplomats suggested on Tuesday that the Foreign Ministry's efforts were probably little more than an attempt to show that Russia was not sitting on the sidelines during the Libyan conflict.

"Probably somebody just has to show that the country is playing an active role here," a senior European diplomat told The Moscow Times.

"Formally they can hold talks with everybody, but it will be interesting to see whether anybody from Benghazi will come here," the diplomat said, asking for anonymity to speak candidly.

The east Libyan city of Benghazi is the basis for the opposition forces.

The Benghazi leadership did not reply to e-mailed requests for comment Tuesday.

Yevgeny Satanovsky, an analyst with the Middle East Institute, said Moscow was actually the best possible mediator. "Russia is neutral, while NATO is the air force and navy of Benghazi," he said by telephone.

Satanovsky also dismissed any skepticism about Moscow's diplomacy. "It does not matter who they speak to as long as he comes from Gadhafi," he said.

He said it would probably be much more difficult to find a trustworthy interlocutor from the opposition. "Whoever comes from Benghazi will represent nobody else but himself, which will make negotiations very interesting," he said.

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