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Lavrov Hails Palestinian Reconciliation

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Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Monday that a reconciliation deal forged by Palestinian factions would help advance the Middle East peace process.

Lavrov met in Moscow with representatives of the Palestinian factions that signed a landmark pact this month to end a longtime rift between the two main Palestinian movements, Fatah in the West Bank and Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Lavrov said the deal has "historic" importance, allowing the Palestinians to act as a united force in peace talks and helping re-energize Arab peace initiatives.

Lavrov voiced hope that municipal elections set for October would help "move toward the creation of a Palestinian state living in peace with its neighbors."

Moussa Abu Marzouk, a Hamas leader who participated in the meeting, told reporters that Lavrov had promised the Palestinians that Moscow would back their planned move to ask the United Nations in September to recognize an independent Palestine. But the Russian Foreign Ministry declined to comment on Abu Marzouk's statement or on Russia's position on the issue.

President Barack Obama has requested the Palestinians to drop that plan, warning last week that such an action won't create an independent state.

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