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Lavrov Eyes Missile Defense, Not Visas

By Alexandra Odynova

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While a U.S. diplomat has called agreements on visa rules and child adoptions the highlight of U.S.-Russian talks in Washington, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the "key issue" would be the U.S. missile defense system.

Lavrov arrived in the United States on Monday, and his three days of talks starting Tuesday are to include the signing of the agreements with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and a meeting with U.S. President Barack Obama, who is to travel to Russia later this year.

"The political meaning of the situation around the missile defense system — of either a positive or negative outcome — will, of course, be discussed during my trip to Washington," Lavrov told Rossiiskaya Gazeta in an interview published Monday.

The United States says it wants to install elements of the missile defense system in Europe to intercept threats from Iran. Russia has objected to the planned system and offered an alternative in which it would participate.

U.S. Ambassador John Beyrle said last week that an Obama-initiated "reset" in ties with Russia would reach a new high with Lavrov's and Clinton's signing of a deal on child adoptions and to introduce three-year multiple-entry visas for businesspeople and tourists, as well as eliminating the need to secure visa invitations for residents of both countries.

"We can talk about a lot that we have got done together over the last three years ... but for me, the best is really still yet to come next week when I go to Washington for the signing," Beyrle said July 4.

The date for the visa signing is not set. Lavrov said Thursday that the deal was being finalized.

Under the adoption agreement, adoptive parents will pass psychological testing, adoptions will be handled only by accredited agencies, and children will be considered Russian citizens until they turn 18, Lavrov said in an earlier interview with Rossia-24 television.
The agreement will also require U.S. authorities to monitor adoptive parents to prevent child abuse.

Adoptions were effectively halted by Russia last year after a U.S. adoptive mother sent her 7-year-old son back to Russia unaccompanied on a plane.

Lavrov told Rossiiskaya Gazeta that in Washington he would also discuss Russia's hopes to enter the World Trade Organization this year, unrest in North Africa, and the creation of a wildlife reserve on both sides of the Bering Strait separating Russia and Alaska.

His trip was to kick off late Monday with a meeting of the Middle East "Quartet" to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The Quartet comprises the European Union, Russia, the United Nations and the United States.

No breakthroughs were expected because the mediators were to only "compare notes about where we are and plot a course forward," State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland told reporters Friday in Washington, according to a transcript on the State Department's web site.

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