

Moscow Opposes Embargo on Arms Sales to Strife-Torn Syria

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Russia opposes any imposition of an arms embargo on Syria and believes that some countries should stop threatening Damascus with ultimatums, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Tuesday.

Proposals "to impose a ban on all arms deliveries are quite dishonest," Lavrov said, suggesting that in practice an arms embargo would cut off supplies to Syrian President Bashar Assad's government but not to its opponents.

"We know how that worked in Libya when the arms embargo only applied to the Libyan army. The opposition received weapons, and countries like France and Qatar publicly spoke about it without shame," he told a news conference with his Icelandic counterpart. Libyan rebels toppled Moammar Gadhafi in August.

Lavrov, alluding to Western powers and the Arab League, said it was time to "stop using ultimatums" to pressure Damascus and repeated Russia's calls for dialogue between the government and its foes, who Moscow says share blame for the bloodshed.

"The longer what is happening in Syria goes on, the more it troubles us. For the most part, armed groups are provoking the authorities. To expect the authorities to close their eyes to this is not right," Lavrov said.

A United Nations commission of inquiry said Monday that in cracking down on protesters, Syrian military and security forces had committed crimes against humanity including murder, torture and rape, and called for an arms embargo on Syria.

Moscow, which has also been critical of further sanctions slapped on Syria by Western and Arab League states, has close political and strategic relations with Assad's government and has been a principal supplier of arms to Damascus.

Russia teamed up with China last month to veto a Western-backed UN Security Council resolution condemning Assad's government for violence that UN investigators say has killed more than 3,500 people.

Russia has urged Assad to implement reforms but rejects international calls for his resignation and accused Western nations of trying to set the stage for armed intervention.

Syria accounted for 7 percent of Russia's total of \$10 billion in arms deliveries abroad in 2010, according to the Russian defense think tank CAST.

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