

Lavrov Says Russia Defending 'Justice' in Syria Conflict, Not Assad

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Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Wednesday that Russia aims to defend not the regime of Bashar Assad but the right of Syrians to choose their own leader and stability in the Middle East, Interfax reported.

"We are defending not the regime, but justice, the sovereign right of Syrians themselves to democratic choice," Lavrov said in an address to the State Duma on a wide range of foreign policy topics.

"Our goal is the achievement of peace in Syria, the preservation of human lives, not allowing an inter-religious explosion in the Middle East," he said.

Lavrov lamented the fact that, by his assessment, the Assad regime has not always listened to Russia's recommendations for resolving its conflict with opponents of the Syrian government.

"Unfortunately, far from all our advice, and far from always in good time, has found some practical reflection in his [Assad's] actions," he said.

Lavrov has said Russia will not halt military cooperation with Syria, despite calls from Western powers for Russia to stop selling arms to the Assad government.

Russia has blocked UN sanctions over Assad's yearlong clampdown on the opposition in which an estimated 7,500 people have been killed.

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