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U.S. Accuses Russia of Sending Attack Choppers to Syria

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The U.S. State Department on Tuesday accused Russia of sending attack helicopters to Syria, warning that the move could drastically escalate the conflict that has rocked the Arab country for the past 15 months.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said the United States was "concerned about the latest information we have that there are attack helicopters on the way to Syria," The Associated Press reported.

"We have confronted the Russians about stopping their continued arms shipments to Syria," she said.

The United States has repeatedly voiced concerns over ongoing arms shipments to Damascus, with whom Moscow has signed lucrative arms deals.

A study by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute released in March found that

Russia had supplied 78 percent of Syria's weapons imports over the past five years.

For its part, Russia has strenuously denied that the weapons it supplies to Syria could be used to crush internal dissent.

"We aren't supplying the Syrian government with any weapons that could be used against peaceful demonstrators — even in your wildest dreams," Sergei Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, told a news briefing in Moscow on Saturday.

Lavrov insisted that ongoing deliveries only contained anti-aircraft guns.

Clinton's comments come as Herve Ladsous, United Nations undersecretary for peacekeeping operations, said Tuesday that Syria was now mired in a civil war.

"Clearly what is happening is that the government of Syria lost some large chunks of territory, several cities to the opposition, and wants to retake control," Ladsous told reporters from the BBC.

The UN believes that more than 10,000 people have died during the standoff between rebels and forces loyal to President Bashar Assad.

Rosoboronexport, Russia's state arms exporter, has also faced international criticism for weapons deliveries to Syria, after prominent international NGO Human Rights Watch called on French authorities to cancel the company's participation in the Eurosatory weapons show held in Paris between June 11 and 15.

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