The Moscow Times
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Lavrov Accuses West of Blackmail on Syria

July 16, 2012

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Monday accused the West of effectively trying to use blackmail to secure a new UN Security Council resolution that could allow for the use of outside force to end Syria's civil war.

The Security Council is debating a new resolution on Syria as international envoy Kofi Annan's plan for halting the fighting appears dead and the violence in the Arab state escalates. Russia, a longtime Syria ally, is facing intense criticism that it is standing in the way of an end to the conflict there.

Lavrov met Annan on Monday evening, though they were not expected to talk to the press afterward. The envoy was scheduled to meet with President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday.

Russia has adamantly opposed international military intervention in Syria. Such a step has been all but ruled out publicly by Western nations, but the text for a Western-backed resolution circulated by Britain that calls for sanctions would leave the possibility open for military enforcement under the UN Charter's Chapter 7. Russia has submitted a rival text. The

debate comes as a mandate for a UN observer force expires on July 20, and Lavrov said the West was using the deadline as a bargaining chip. “To our great regret, there are elements of blackmail,” he said at a news conference. “We are being told that if you do not agree to passing the resolution under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, then we shall refuse to extend the mandate of the monitoring mission. We consider it to be an absolutely counterproductive and dangerous approach, since it is unacceptable to use monitors as bargaining chips.”

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