

# Lavrov Stresses Ties With Pakistan After Putin Cancels Visit

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The foreign ministers of Russia and Pakistan insisted on Thursday that the ties between their countries are strengthening, despite grouching in the Pakistani media about President Vladimir Putin's decision to cancel a visit to Islamabad.

Putin was supposed to be in Pakistan this week as part of a summit involving Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Afghanistan, which also ended up being postponed.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who arrived Wednesday on a seemingly hastily scheduled visit, assured Pakistanis that Putin merely had scheduling issues and that he hoped to visit at a future date.

During a news conference Thursday, Lavrov and Pakistani Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar said the two countries were working on forging stronger bonds in areas such as the steel and energy sectors, as well as combatting drug smuggling. Also this week, Pakistan's army chief is visiting Moscow for talks with his Russian counterpart, suggesting a desire for more military cooperation.

Lavrov and Khar also discussed the conflicts in Afghanistan and Syria, as well as other crises in the Middle East and North Africa. Neither offered details about what they discussed, but Lavrov said "there is a convergence of views on all these issues."

The Russian foreign minister also expressed dismay over the violence at the Syrian-Turkish border.

Lavrov was also to meet with the Pakistani president and prime minister during his visit.

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