

Lavrov Says Magnitsky Act 'Odious' but Wants Constructive Ties

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russia wants constructive relations with the United States despite disputes over U.S. legislation designed to punish Russian human rights abusers and other difficulties in ties, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Wednesday.

Lavrov spoke during an annual news conference after a year during which relations between the former Cold War foes deteriorated following improvements under U.S. President Barack Obama's "reset" policy.

A major irritant has been the Magnitsky Act, a law signed by Obama last month that denies visas to Russians accused of human rights violations and freezes their assets in the United States.

President Vladimir Putin responded by signing a law that imposes similar measures on Americans it says have abused the rights of Russians and also bans adoptions of Russian

orphans by Americans, further increasing tension.

Lavrov called the Magnitsky Act "odious" and also criticized a U.S. judge's recent ruling in a dispute over a collection of Jewish writings held in Russia. He said the sides remain at odds over U.S. plans for a anti-missile shield in Europe.

However, he said, "we are interested in constructive dialogue and the development of stable, mutually beneficial cooperation, particularly in the area of investment, in trade and economic relations and in contacts between people."

At the news conference, Lavrov also warned Israel and the West against any military strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities and urged North Korea to adhere to restrictions on its nuclear and missile programs.

The foreign minister mixed words of caution over isolating Iran or attacking it with a gentle nudge to Tehran over the inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

"Attempts to prepare and implement strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities and on its infrastructure as a whole are a very, very dangerous idea. We hope these ideas will not come to fruition," Lavrov said.

Speaking of separate negotiations between Iran and six world powers that are trying to ensure it does not pursue a nuclear weapons program, Lavrov said he was confident a new round of talks would be held but said a venue had not yet been agreed.

Speaking about North Korea, Lavrov said: "We hope our North Korean neighbors will heed the voice of the international community and return to the path of cooperation ... but for this it is necessary to stay within the bounds of the demands made in UN Security Council resolutions."

The Security Council, in which Russia and China hold veto power, unanimously approved a new resolution Tuesday that condemned violations of previous restrictions and expanded existing sanctions. North Korea responded by saying it would boost its military and nuclear capabilities.

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