

Russia to Supply Personnel for Syria Weapons Inspection

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Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, in a file photo, at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum in June. **Maxim Stulov**

Russia will participate “in all parts of the operation” to execute the United Nations Security Council’s binding resolution to clear Syria of chemical weapons, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in an interview published Monday.

“We will definitely contribute personnel to the inspection work and participate in other forms of international involvement that might be proposed by the general secretary of the UN,” Lavrov told Kommersant, adding that Russia would likely provide financial support to the mission as well.

The Security Council on Friday agreed to send a group of 10 to 12 inspectors to Syria as early as Oct. 1 with plans to eliminate the country’s chemical weapons stockpiles by mid-2014.

On Monday, UN chemical weapons inspectors investigating claims of chemical and biological weapons use left Damascus after completing their second mission in two months, Reuters

reported, citing witnesses.

Another team of experts, tasked with beginning the process of verifying and eliminating Syria's chemical weapons as part of the newly passed resolution, landed in Beirut on Monday. They are expected to travel to Damascus this week.

Asked what obstacles the Security Council's resolution might encounter, Lavrov anticipated "disruptions" brought on by rebels trying to provoke foreign governments into military intervention.

"Here a central role is held by our Western partners and their close allies in the Persian gulf, and in the region as a whole, who sympathize with the rebels. They have influence over them. ... A signal must be sent [to the rebels], so that they don't dare to disrupt this process," Lavrov said, although he added that some forces "do not obey anyone except al-Qaida."

Syria's foreign minister Monday told the UN that his regime was struggling against al-Qaida linked militants, saying that the U.S., Britain and France had prevented the Syrian government from disclosing the real perpetrators of the August gas attack near Damascus.

Lavrov said governments who support the rebels financially or militarily "are responsible for ensuring that the opposition does not try to lay a hand on any chemical weapons stockpiles."

The foreign minister also seemed intent on promoting an image of President Vladimir Putin as a committed advocate of international disarmament.

Putin plans to "do everything to neutralize, bring under international control and subsequently destroy the chemical stockpiles remaining in the world," Lavrov said. The president set himself this task after a discussion with U.S. President Barack Obama at the G20 summit in St. Petersburg in early September, he added.

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