

Kerry-Lavrov Meeting Ahead of Crimea Referendum in the Balance

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U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry will only meet Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov ahead of a planned referendum in Crimea this Sunday if Russia demonstrates a willingness to work toward a diplomatic solution.

In a written statement, U.S. State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said that Russia had to show it was prepared to engage in dialogue with the Ukrainian interim government, and that it was willing to use "international mechanisms" to de-escalate the conflict there, Reuters reported Monday.

Kerry made clear to Lavrov that "he would welcome further discussions focused on how to de-escalate the crisis in Ukraine if and when we see concrete evidence that Russia is prepared to engage on these proposals," Psaki added.

However, in a televised briefing with President Vladimir Putin on Monday, Lavrov said U.S. proposals for a negotiated solution to the crisis were unsuitable, as they took the removal of President Viktor Yanukovich as the starting point.

Russia has refused to recognize the interim government in Kiev, describing the overthrow of Yanukovich as "an anti-constitutional coup and a military seizure of power."

The backlash against developments in Kiev also led to the election of a pro-Russian Prime Minister in Ukraine's Crimea region.

The Crimean authorities have since announced they are preparing to hold a referendum on Sunday that could pave the way for the region to become part of Russia.

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