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Kerry, Lavrov: Ukraine Shouldn't Be a 'Pawn'

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PARIS — U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Thursday that Ukraine should not be a "pawn" in a power struggle between East and West, but allowed that significant differences between Washington and Moscow could hurt efforts to prevent that.

In unscripted remarks to reporters before meeting in Paris, Kerry and Lavrov said Moscow and Washington agree that Ukraine should be a peaceful, stable and prosperous bridge between Russia and Europe. Kerry said the U.S. wanted to see Russia embrace Ukrainian President-elect Petro Poroshenko's desire to reach out to all Ukrainians, including ethnic Russians.

"This is an opportunity, we hope, for Russia, the U.S. and others, all to come together in an effort to try to make a Ukraine that is strong economically, whose sovereignty is respected, whose independence is respected but clearly is not a pawn in a tug-of-war between other nations," Kerry said.

Ukraine, he added, should "rather [be] an independent sovereign country with the integrity of its borders and people able to act as a bridge between East and West, with trade and involvement with all parties, that is our hope," he said. "We hope that with Russia, together we have the ability to be able to find a way to cooperate on how to make this happen," Kerry continued. "That is our hope. There obviously are difficulties, we understand that. That is why we are meeting today to talk about them."

Kerry spoke first. Lavrov appeared taken aback by the secretary's statement.

But Lavrov offered his own brief comments in English, ending with a clear jab at U.S. policies in Iraq, Libya and Syria.

"I can only subscribe to what the secretary just said," Lavrov said. "We would like to see Ukraine peaceful, stable. A place for all those who live in Ukraine ... to be feeling equal, respected, and listened to, living in peace being a bridge, not being a pawn."

"The Russian-American agenda is much broader than just Ukraine," Lavrov added. "We would like to see other countries like Iraq, Libya, Syria, many others also to be in peace, not to be used as a pawn."

See also:

Kerry and Lavrov to Discuss Ukraine, Syria at Paris Meeting

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