

Lavrov: No Russian Intervention in Ukraine

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Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Russia would not intervene militarily in Ukraine, defying reports by the Ukrainian government, NATO and Western nations that Russia has already sent troops, artillery and tanks across Ukraine's southeast border to reinforce the separatists.

"There will be no military intervention," Lavrov told students at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations on Monday, the first day of classes for schools and universities across the country. "We call for an exclusively peaceful settlement of this severe crisis, this tragedy."

Lavrov also urged the so-called contact group holding a new round of talks in Minsk on Monday to push for a cease-fire between Ukrainian government troops and pro-Russian separatists.

He added that any new sanctions from the European Union or the United States — of which there have been many in connection with the Ukraine crisis — would force Russia to protect its economy, citizens and businesses.

In the case of new sanctions over Ukraine, he said: "We will start with our own interests — protect our economy, protect our social sphere, protect our businesses — and at the same time draw conclusions from the actions of our partners."

Lavrov played down Russia's exclusion from the Group of Eight powerful countries over its annexation of Crimea, saying the forum had lost much of its significance since the formation of the wider G20.

He said there would be no military intervention from Russia in Ukraine. Moscow denies the presence of Russian tanks and troops there, despite what NATO and Western governments have said is overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

Fighting in eastern Ukraine between the separatists and the Ukrainian government in Kiev began in mid-April.

(AP, Reuters)

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