

NATO Chief Ready to Meet Russia's Lavrov to Discuss Ukraine

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said Friday that he was ready to meet Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov next month in Munich, as fighting escalates in eastern Ukraine.

Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine on Friday ruled out joining more peace talks and said they would push on with a new offensive to seize territory from government forces.

In an interview, Stoltenberg described a "substantial increase in Russian heavy equipment" in Ukraine, supplying a conflict that the United Nations says has killed more than 5,000 people, including 262 in the last nine days.

"We speak about tanks, armed vehicles, artillery, advanced air defense systems," Stoltenberg said during a visit to Kosovo, where NATO has some 5,000 peacekeepers.

He said he would hold talks with Russia's Lavrov next month. NATO's top military

commander said Thursday that its military leaders would re-establish contact with their Russian counterparts after months of tension over Ukraine.

"I can confirm what Lavrov stated a few days ago, that we are ready to meet each other on the margins of the Munich conference," Stoltenberg said, referring to the annual Munich Security Conference on Feb 6-8. He gave no details of the likely agenda.

Asked about Iraq, where Islamist fighters of the Islamic State have seized swathes of territory, Stoltenberg said NATO would receive an Iraqi government delegation "in a few days."

"We are now considering a request from the Iraqi government to help them enhance their defense capacity and their ability to fight terror, ISIL, in their own country," he said.

"We will sit down with them and discuss how we can work together and discuss and assess their request for NATO help and assistance."

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