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Kerry Presses Russia's Lavrov on Ukraine Cease-Fire Deal

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GENEVA — U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry told Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Monday that Moscow and pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine must implement a cease-fire or face "consequences" that could further hit Russia's faltering economy.

Kerry said the cease-fire must be respected in all "key strategic areas" including the town of Debaltseve and outside the Sea of Azov port of Mariupol.

"If that does not happen, if there continue to be these broad swathes of non-compliance ... then there would be inevitably further consequences that would place further strain on Russia's already troubled economy," Kerry told a news conference in Geneva.

"There's been a kind of cherry-picking, a piecemeal selectivity to the application of the Minsk [cease-fire] agreements. And as we all know, shooting, shelling has still been going on, and people have still been killed over the course of these last days, so there is not yet a full cease-fire."

Sanctions have had a "profound impact" on Russia's economy and ruble, sparking capital flight and turning its bonds into "junk bonds," Kerry added.

The UN human rights office said Monday the death toll in eastern Ukraine had passed 6,000 since April 2014.

Kerry said he hoped that OSCE monitoring and the cease-fire deal could be implemented "in the next hours, certainly not days," and he had raised the issue with Lavrov at a meeting that lasted around one hour and 20 minutes.

"He assured me that they are intent on seeing to it that the agreements are in fact implemented. He said he would get back to me with respect to a number of the issues that I raised."

Lavrov told Russian journalists in Geneva that he had presented Kerry with a list of examples showing the separatist rebels were sticking to the provisions of the agreement.

"From the [Ukrainian] government forces' side there is wavering, attempts to find excuses to push back or stall the implementation of agreements linked to the political process," he said.

Earlier, addressing the UN Human Rights Council, Lavrov urged Kiev to lift what he called its "de facto blockade" of the Donbass region and to restore economic ties, social benefit payments, banking services and freedom of movement.

Ukraine's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergiy Kyslytsya, addressing the UN Conference on Disarmament, said Russia had undermined international security and provoked an arms race.

He also said Moscow's position on potential deployment of nuclear weapons on the territory of Crimea — Ukraine's Black Sea peninsula seized by Russia a year ago — was "very irresponsible and destructive."

Kerry said he hoped Washington would return to a state of cooperation with Moscow but that President Vladimir Putin had misinterpreted a lot of what the United States tried to do.

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