The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia’s Putin, Lavrov Vow to Assist in Iraq's Fight Against Islamic State

May 21, 2015



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Moscow and Baghdad are expanding military cooperation, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday during talks with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi in the Kremlin.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said before the talks began that Russia was ready to supply weapons to Iraq to help it combat Islamic State militants, who have made further sweeping gains in Iraq and Syria over the past week.

Lavrov told reporters Moscow would make every effort to help the Baghdad government push back the militants.

Islamic State insurgents overran the Iraqi city of Ramadi last weekend in the most significant setback for the Baghdad government in a year, exposing the weakness of Iraq's army and the limitations of U.S. air strikes. On Thursday the group seized full control of Palmyra in neighboring Syria.

Lavrov's statement echoed comments he made in late April when, during an interview aired by various radio stations, he said Moscow would help Iraq and Syria fight the Islamic State.

"Islamic State is our main enemy at the moment. If only because hundreds of Russian citizens, hundreds of Europeans, hundreds of Americans fight alongside IS," he said at the time. "They are already coming back. ... And to enjoy themselves could stage vile acts at home."

Russia has criticized air strikes by a U.S.-led coalition against Islamic State positions in Syria and Iraq, and encouraged Washington to work with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in the battle against the Islamic State.

"We are helping both Iraq and Syria, possibly more effectively than anyone else, by providing weapons to their armies and security forces," Lavrov said, without giving details of the weapons.

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