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# Russia's Lavrov Discusses Syria, Yemen in Call With U.S.' Kerry

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Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has discussed the situation in Syria and Yemen as well as Ukraine with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

The phone call was the latest in a string of high-level contacts between Moscow and Washington in recent days over the crises in the Middle East as well as Ukraine, a conflict that has dragged ties between the Cold War-era foes to new lows.

"The situation in Syria and Yemen, including efforts by the international community to facilitate the start of a peace process in both the 'hot spots', was the focus," the ministry said Thursday.

Russia has been a key international ally of Syrian President Bashar Assad since an uprising first started against him in early 2011, while the United States have backed rebels seeking to oust him.

Differences over Assad's future have been a key stumbling bloc in international efforts

to resolve the conflict that spiraled into an all-out war in which radical Islamists gradually took the upper hand. Islamic State now controls large swathes of Syria and the neighboring Iraq.

Syria was also high on the agenda when Kerry travelled to Russia's Black Sea resort of Sochi last week for talks with President Vladimir Putin.

U.S. Special Envoy for Syria, Daniel Rubinstein, paid a follow-up visit to Moscow and held talks on Monday with Lavrov's deputy Mikhail Bogdanov, Putin's Middle East special envoy.

"Our American colleagues have now understood one thing — that there is no alternative currently to Bashar Assad and the present government. And if something happens to them then extremists, terrorists, Islamic State capture full control over Syria," RIA news agency quoted Bogdanov as saying on Thursday.

"That is why they [the United States] are showing this interest in cooperating with us. Without wasting time, we need to think now of enterprising ideas to hedge ourselves together with the United States," he said, without elaborating on what he said were various options on the table.

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