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Off-Guard Remark Lands Russia's Lavrov in Social Media Storm

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Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov attends a meeting with Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir in Moscow, Russia, August 11, 2015.

It was meant to be a news conference about solving the Syria crisis and combating Islamic State, but an unguarded remark into the microphone from Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov grabbed all the attention.

Even a former U.S. ambassador to Moscow joined the social media storm triggered after Lavrov let slip the less than diplomatic language on Tuesday as he and his Saudi counterpart Adel al-Jubeir met the press.

Taped footage showed Lavrov waiting as part of the conference is translated into Arabic, checking his mobile phone, making notes, adjusting glasses, briefly rubbing his forehead and then saying quietly in Russian: "F-----g morons."

It was not clear who or what Lavrov was referring to and his spokeswoman, who was present,

said she did not hear the minister swear and that his talks with Jubeir went well.

The two had earlier failed to resolve a disagreement over the fate of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

The reaction on social media included a contribution from ex-U.S. ambassador Michael McFaul in response to a suggestion that Lavrov had aimed the comment at the Saudi minister.

That would be a major embarrassment for Moscow at a time when it has launched a new diplomatic push over Syria.

"Really? And he used to accuse me of undiplomatic language," McFaul wrote on Twitter.

Lavrov's spokeswoman said he was not annoyed about the talks with Jubeir.

"I cannot comment on what's not related to the essence of the talks," she said. "Interjections, noises, sneezing — I think it's unnecessary to comment on lip reading. Everyone hears differently."

A Reuters photographer and cameraman present said the remark by Lavrov, known for often getting annoyed with photographers, appeared aimed at those who started snapping pictures as he raised his hand to adjust his glasses.

But some on social media, tongues at least partly in cheeks, drew different conclusions.

One Twitter user said Riyadh would respond by pumping more oil and dragging the price further down to hurt Russia, which is overwhelmingly reliant on energy exports.

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