The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Blinken Holds 'Frank' Discussion With Russian FM on Prisoners, Ukraine

By AFP

July 29, 2022



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov meet ahead of the 28th OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting in Stockholm, Sweden in 2021. **Russian Foreign Ministry / TASS**

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke Friday with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in their first contact since the Ukraine war, saying he pressed him to accept a proposal on freeing two Americans held in Russia.

"We had a frank and direct conversation. I pressed the Kremlin to accept the substantial proposal that we put forward," Blinken told reporters.

Blinken said on Wednesday he planned to contact Lavrov in a bid to free two Americans, basketball star Brittney Griner and former Marine Paul Whelan, and push forward a proposal issued several weeks earlier.

The top US diplomat declined to characterize Lavrov's reaction, saying, "I can't give you an

assessment of whether I think things are any more or less likely."

"But it was important that he heard directly," Blinken said.

The proposal reportedly includes swapping the two Americans, whose plight has drawn growing attention, for convicted Russian arms smuggler Viktor Bout.

Blinken said he also pressed Lavrov on Russia honoring a Turkish-brokered proposal to ship grain out of Ukraine and on purported plans by Moscow to annex additional parts of Ukraine seized by Russian troops.

Blinken said he told Lavrov that "the world will never recognize annexation" and that Russia would be hit by additional ramifications.

"It was very important that the Russians hear directly from us that that will not be accepted — and not only will it not be accepted, it will result in additional significant costs being imposed upon Russia," Blinken said.

Blinken said Russia was preparing "sham referendums" to try to "falsely demonstrate that the people in these parts of Ukraine somehow seek to become part of Russia."

The votes would be part of Russian President Vladimir Putin's objective of "gobbling up as much Ukrainian territory as he can," he added.

The telephone conversation was the first between Blinken and Lavrov since February 15, when the top US diplomat warned Russia against invading Ukraine.

Putin went ahead and attacked nine days later, leading the United States and its allies to impose sweeping sanctions and to seek to isolate Russia on the world stage.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/07/29/blinken-holds-frank-discussion-with-russian-fm-on-prisoners-ukraine-a78446