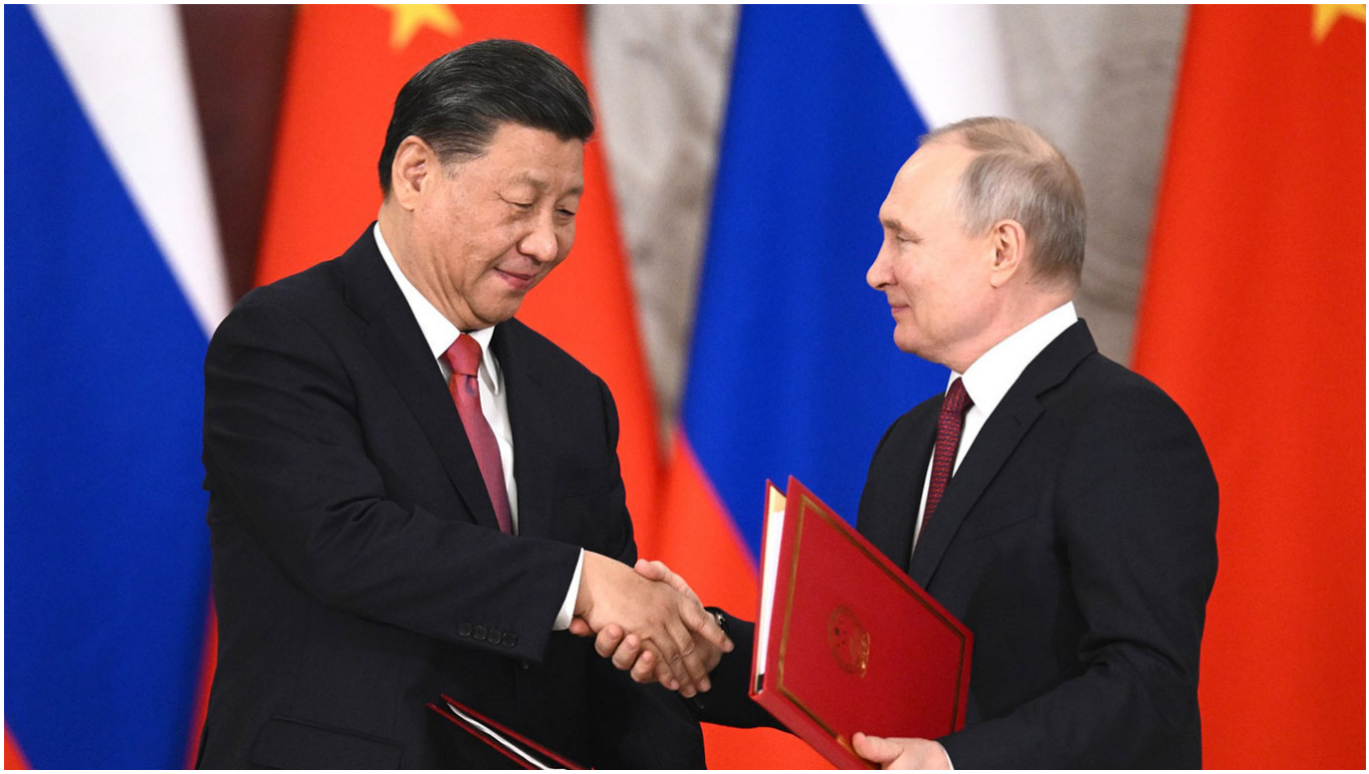
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Russia's Lavrov Tells China Envoy 'Serious Obstacles' to Ukraine Peace

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China's President Xi Jinping (L) and Russia's President Vladimir Putin. **kremlin.ru**

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told China's special envoy Li Hui on Friday that there were "serious obstacles" to resuming peace talks, blaming Ukraine and Western countries.

"The Russian foreign minister reaffirmed Moscow's commitment to a political-diplomatic resolution of the conflict, noting the serious obstacles to the resumption of peace talks created by the Ukrainian side and its Western mentors," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

During the meeting with Li, who was China's ambassador in Russia between 2009 and 2019, Lavrov also praised Beijing's "balanced" position on Ukraine.

While China says it is a neutral party in the Ukraine conflict, it has been criticized for refusing to condemn Moscow for its offensive.

"Both sides expressed readiness to further strengthen Russian-Chinese foreign policy

cooperation, invariably aimed at maintaining peace and stability in the region and on the planet as a whole," the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

The Chinese envoy's visit to the Russian capital came after Li met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv earlier this month.

The Wall Street Journal, citing Western officials, reported Friday that China is urging European governments to sign onto a peace deal for the war in Ukraine that would grant Moscow possession of Ukrainian territories it currently occupies.

Related article: China's Xi Offers Russia 'Firm Support' in 'Core Interests'

Li, who has been visiting capitals across Europe before coming to Moscow, was reportedly pushing Western officials to agree to an immediate end to the 15-month conflict even if that meant significant territorial losses for Kyiv.

But Western officials who spoke to the WSJ cast doubt that a ceasefire would be possible anytime soon, adding that China seems more interested in ensuring that Russia doe not lose the war rather than acting as an impartial broker in negotiations.

In February, China released a 12-point plan to end the war in Ukraine, but Western powers rebuffed the proposals while warning against Beijing's warming relationship with Moscow.

Li has said there is "no panacea to resolve the crisis."

Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin met with Chinese President Xi Jinping on Tuesday to sign a series of trade deals, during which he hailed economic ties between the two countries.

Since the start of Moscow's assault on Ukraine, Beijing and Moscow have drawn closer under a partnership that has served as a diplomatic bulwark against the West.

Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Moscow in March, saying ties were "entering a new era."

AFP contributed reporting.

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