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Russia, Venezuela To Boost Cooperation in Energy, Including Nuclear

By AFP

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Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov (2nd L) and Foreign Minister of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela Yvan Gil Pinto (2nd R) during a ceremony to unveil a bust of Alexander Pushkin in Ezequiel Zamora Park in Caracas. **Russian Foreign Ministry / TASS**

Anti-American allies Russia and Venezuela vowed to boost cooperation in oil and gas production and the "peaceful use of nuclear energy" at a meeting of foreign ministers in Caracas Tuesday.

Russia's Sergei Lavrov arrived in Venezuela late Monday from Cuba as part of a Latin American tour as Moscow seeks new diplomatic and trading partners amid Western sanctions and isolation over its war on Ukraine.

In Caracas, Lavrov met his Venezuelan counterpart Yvan Gil and Vice President Delcy Rodriguez and discussed "expanding cooperation in oil production, gas field development, agriculture, medicine and pharmaceuticals," he told reporters afterward.

"We also consider promising the area of peaceful use of nuclear energy; we also discussed this issue today (and) we agreed to increase the volume of cooperation in all these areas," said an official translation of the minister's statements.

Lavrov last visited Venezuela in April last 2023, when he urged like-minded countries to "join forces" against the "blackmail" of Western sanctions.

Venezuela has long been a key Moscow ally, and Maduro has repeatedly expressed his support for Russia and President Vladimir Putin before and after the invasion of Ukraine.

Russia, for its part, has supported Caracas in the face of U.S. sanctions against the government of Maduro, whose 2018 reelection was not recognized by dozens of countries.

Until the end of an oil-based economic boom in 2014, Venezuela had purchased Russian weapons and military equipment worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

"Venezuela is one of [Russia's] closest and most trusted friends in Latin America and in the world... we are united by close strategic partnership ties," said Lavrov.

After Venezuela opened talks with the opposition last year and agreed to hold free and fair elections in 2024, the U.S. eased sanctions to allow Chevron to resume limited oil extraction in the South American country — part of an effort to keep down global prices as the West pressed sanctions on Russia.

But Maduro has since said the agreement with the opposition was "mortally wounded" as he claimed to have been the target of a U.S.-backed plot to assassinate him.

And last month, the United States warned it was ready to reinstate sanctions on Venezuela's oil industry unless opponents of Maduro are allowed to run in elections against him.

In Havana on Monday, Lavrov had railed against "blackmail, ultimatums, threats" by the United States and other countries he said were seeking "by all means... to preserve their domination, hegemony and diktat."

Lavrov will travel to Brazil next to attend a G20 foreign ministers meeting.

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