

# Russia Questions U.S. Military Buildup In Mideast

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa, Russia  
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Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said today that Moscow expects Washington to explain the growing U.S. military presence in the Middle East.

Lavrov was quoted as saying today that what he called “the rather aggressive rhetoric from Washington” is continuing, as are U.S. actions to increase its military presence in the region.

Lavrov vowed to raise Russia’s concerns when the international Mideast Quartet group meets in Washington in the next few days to try to revive Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

Lavrov also criticized the United States for its “hard-line” policies against Iran.

He said unilateral U.S. sanctions against Iran would force Iran out of talks aimed at resolving a standoff over its nuclear program.

Lavrov also said that Iran and Syria — both of which have been accused by the West of arming and supporting recent Hizballah violence — should understand that they are expected to play a positive role and that in return they will receive an appropriate position in the regional dialogue.

Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora today accused Tehran of waging a proxy war against the United States on Lebanese territory.

The heads of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Muhammad el-Baradei, and the Arab League, Amr Musa, have recently warned of the risks of any military action that might target Iran and its nuclear activities.

President George W. Bush and senior U.S. officials have toughened their public statements concerning Iran recently, including accusations that Tehran is supplying weapons to insurgents or militants in Iraq. Iranian officials have dismissed those suggestions, and critics have urged U.S. officials to produce evidence of such activities.

Iranian news agency IRNA quoted Foreign Minister Manuchehr Mottaki suggesting today that his country would welcome a “comprehensive formula” to overcome international objections to Iran’s nuclear activities.

Mottaki said that Russian Security Council Secretary Igor Ivanov was expected to arrive in Tehran tonight for talks aimed at “finding a comprehensive formula” to help “preserve Iran’s rights as well as remove certain concerns” over its nuclear program.

(Reuters, ITAR-TASS, AFP)

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