

Russia Has High Hopes for Meeting on Syria

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Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said he hopes a meeting with Arab counterparts this week can bring the world closer to an agreement on how to end the bloodshed in Syria, but gave no sign Moscow would stop protecting President Bashar Assad.

Lavrov said he would join Arab League foreign ministers in Cairo on Saturday.

"I think our meeting could produce very interesting groundwork that we would promote in a broader international format," Lavrov said.

He said Russia and the Arab League share fundamental goals for Syria, but criticized Western and Arab calls for Moscow to pressure Assad's government.

"We are convinced of the need not to await some magical actions for one another but to sit down together and try to agree on how we can all take a common line ... to influence all sides in Syria to stop shooting at each other, sit down for negotiations and start an inclusive national dialogue," he said.

Lavrov said there was no need to put brand new initiatives on the table at the meeting in Cairo, suggesting the ministers could work with an initiative the Arab League adopted in November and a Security Council resolution Russia proposed to counter Western and Arab drafts.

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