

Russian FM attacks Trump, U.S. over Iran, Jerusalem

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Russia angling to act as mediator in peace talks, experts say

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov picked up where Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas left off with his own rebuke of the Trump administration this week, accusing it of destabilizing the world, a move seen as Russia angling to take over as mediator between the Israelis and Palestinians.

“The U.S. wants to dictate ultimatums and is unwilling to listen to other centers of power,” Lavrov said during a more than two-hour press conference Monday in Moscow. “They are unwilling to accept a multi-polar world.”

Lavrov discussed a range of issues during the annual question and answer session with the media, including the ongoing fighting in Syria, the North Korean threat and the Iran nuclear deal, which he called a “major achievement.”

“The reality is, Iran has been abiding by the agreement, the IAEA says that,” Lavrov said. “We will not support what the United States is trying to do, changing the wording of the agreement, incorporating things that will be absolutely unacceptable for Iran.”

Dr. Eran Lerman, vice president of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies, told The Media Line that Lavrov’s comments were, “very much in line with what we expect from the Russians.” He said, “It’s a bit of anti-Trump posturing,” adding that it appears Russia is “angling for a position as mediator” not so much to broker peace, but more so, “to make sure that the United States doesn’t monopolize anything.”

Lavrov’s comments follow Abbas’ critical statements against the Trump Administration and Israel on Sunday, in which he described Israel as a colonial creation of European powers, declared the U.S. could no longer serve as mediator between the Israelis and Palestinians, instituted a boycott of the Trump administration and, in a bizarre personal attack on President Trump, said: “May God demolish your house.”

President Trump has yet to respond to Abbas, either in a public statement or tweet, and there was no immediate comment from the White House about Lavrov’s statements.

Russia’s top diplomat was also critical of President Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, saying Russia’s sympathizes with Palestinian anger at Trump.

“We completely understand the emotions the Palestinians currently have. For years they

have made concessions without receiving anything in return,” Lavrov explained. “We constantly hear that the U.S. is about to unveil an important deal that would satisfy all sides. We have not seen this kind of document.”

Russia was among the 128 United Nations member states that voted December 21 to condemn President Trump’s Jerusalem declaration.

Emmanuel Navon, a professor of international relations at Tel Aviv University and a foreign policy expert, agreed that Lavrov’s comments appear to show Russia trying to fill a “diplomatic vacuum” by trying to become a mediator between Israel and the Palestinians.

“This is complete wishful thinking,” Navon explained to The Media Line. “Israel will never accept Russia as a mediator because, even though there are diplomatic relations and a direct line of communication between Netanyahu and Putin, the basic interests of Russia and Israel in the Middle East is very much at odds.”

Prime Minister Netanyahu is in India this week meeting with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi. During a briefing with reporters Monday, Netanyahu blamed the Palestinians’ refusal to recognize a Jewish state as the barrier to peace.

“If we ever want to get to reconciliation and peace, there needs to be an understanding why this conflict has continued for so many years,” Netanyahu said. “There is always an attempt to hide this, and I have worked for many years to try and get across the truth that the root of the conflict is the continual and, unfortunately, unchanging denial of the Palestinians to recognize a Jewish state within any borders.”

Dr. Lerman said Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov did, if anything, a disservice to Abbas and the Palestinians by playing into Abbas’ “delusions” that a country other than the United States can act as mediator between the Israelis and Palestinians.

Still, Lavrov’s comments are unlikely to generate much anger in Israel, Lerman said, one, because they’re consistent with Russia’s positions, and two, because “it’s important for Israel to have open communications with Russia. It’s important for bilateral relations to continue.”