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## **Kerry Plans 11th-Hour Meeting With Russians Over Crimea**

Secretary of State John Kerry will fly to London to meet with his Russian counterpart in a 11th-hour effort to persuade the Kremlin not to move forward with the annexation of Crimea, American officials said on Wednesday.

Mr. Kerry's meeting with Sergey V. Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, will come on Friday, just two days before a Sunday referendum in Crimea in which the region is to decide whether to become part of Russia.

The United States and its partners have said that such a referendum would not be legal, and Mr. Kerry has warned that Russian steps to annex the region would "close any available space for diplomacy."

Mr. Kerry announced the meeting with Mr. Lavrov in testimony to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations. His testimony came as Ukraine's acting prime minister, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, was scheduled to consult with Mr. Kerry at the State Department this afternoon before meeting with President Obama and Mr. Kerry at the White House.

"There are a lot of variants here, which is why it is urgent that we have this conversation with the Russians," Secretary of State John Kerry said. Credit Gary Cameron/Reuters

In his opening statement, Mr. Kerry repeated his oft-made point that while Russia had legitimate interests in Crimea, "nothing justifies a military intervention," adding that there were peaceful ways to ensure that Moscow's concerns were addressed.

Under questioning, Mr. Kerry asserted that the United States and its partners were prepared to impose tough sanctions if Russia moved to annex Crimea. "It can get ugly fast if the wrong choices are made, and it can get ugly in multiple directions," he said. "Our hope is that there is a way to have a reasonable outcome here."

Mr. Kerry held out the hope that a political solution might be reached even though there have been no public hints of Russian flexibility. Even if the referendum in Crimea went ahead, he suggested, there might be a chance for a political solution if Russia stopped short of annexing the province.

"There are a lot of variants here, which is why it is urgent that we have this conversation with the Russians," he said.

President Obama, along with Secretary of State John Kerry, met with the interim prime minister, Arseniy P. Yatsenyuk, and vowed to "stand with Ukraine."

Mr. Kerry noted that the United States has "exchanged some thoughts" on how to address the crisis but acknowledged that the two sides "haven't had a meeting of the minds."

The announcement of Mr. Kerry's trip came as the Group of 7 nations on Wednesday issued a statement warning Russia to "cease all efforts to change the status of Crimea contrary to Ukrainian law and in violation of international law."

"We call on the Russian Federation to immediately halt actions supporting a referendum on the territory of Crimea regarding its status, in direct violation of the Constitution of Ukraine," the statement said. "Given the lack of adequate preparation and the intimidating presence of Russian troops, it would also be a deeply flawed process which would have no moral force. For all these reasons, we would not recognize the outcome."

Mr. Kerry met with Mr. Lavrov twice last week in Europe. American officials later said that the Russian foreign minister did not appear to have the authority to negotiate a compromise with the United States.

The Obama administration then weighed sending Mr. Kerry to Russia so he could meet directly with President Vladimir V. Putin. But the administration decided not to do so because

there were no indications that Mr. Putin appeared receptive to the American position. The United States seeks a halt in Russia's military moves in Crimea, the affirmation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and a meeting between Russian officials and officials from the new Ukrainian government, either directly or as part of an international "contact group."

The London meeting is expected to last a day, possibly two. The choice of the venue appeared to reflect a recognition that the American conditions for a Russia trip had not been met.

On Saturday, the State Department sent Mr. Lavrov a series of questions that were intended to probe whether the Kremlin was receptive to the American proposals for addressing the crisis. On Monday night, the Russians responded, but the answers did not signal a shift toward the Western position, American officials said.

"We received responses from the Russians last night," Jen Psaki, the State Department spokeswoman, said on Tuesday. "They largely restate positions that we heard in Paris and Rome," she added, referring to Mr. Kerry's meetings there with Mr. Lavrov last week.

Another important issue, which come up at the hearing on Wednesday, is the \$1 billion American loan guarantee that Mr. Kerry announced during a visit to Kiev last week.

The Obama administration is seeking Congressional support for the loan guarantee, but the prospects for speedy Congressional approval are unclear. The House has voted to provide the loan guarantee. But Senator Robert Menendez, Democrat of New Jersey, wants to combine it with measures to overhaul the International Monetary Fund that the House may not support.

Representative Harold Rogers, the Kentucky Republican who leads the House Appropriations Committee, urged the Senate to support the \$1 billion loan guaranteed "unencumbered" by other measures.