

Wednesday, 10 April 2013

Russia warns against stoking N.Korea tensions



Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned Wednesday against heating up the North Korea crisis with military maneuvers, but stressed that Moscow and Washington had a common stand. "On North Korea we have no differences with the United States," he told journalists as he met with US Secretary of State John Kerry for talks on the sidelines of a meeting of G8 foreign ministers in London. "One just shouldn't scare anyone with military maneuvers and there's a chance that everything will calm down," he added in Russian, without specifying which countries he believed were carrying out such military exercises. South Korean and US forces raised their alert status to "vital threat" Wednesday before an expected North Korean missile test, with tensions wound tight during a five-day build-up to a key anniversary. The North last week told foreign diplomats in Pyongyang they had until Wednesday to consider evacuation, fuelling speculation of a launch between now and the April 15 birthday celebrations for late founder Kim Il-Sung. Any launch could coincide with visits by Kerry and NATO chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who will both be in Seoul on Friday. A senior US official agreed after the talks that Kerry and Lavrov were "very aligned on North Korea" sharing concerns about the rhetoric and recent threats from Pyongyang as well as a "commitment to putting the necessary pressure on." The Russians are "committed to denuclearization, they don't particularly want things to escalate, they understand our concerns and... they're going to try to work with us," a second State Department official said, also asking not to be named. "I think they understood that everybody wants this to end in a peaceful way." Russia, which maintains close ties to North Korea's key ally China, could play a major role in pushing Beijing to loosen its ties to Pyongyang. Moscow could also "push to make sure that the North Koreans understand... what they're doing now doesn't serve anybody's interests including their own." Washington and Moscow have had uneasy ties though in recent months, after the Kremlin passed a law banning Americans from adopting Russian children and has also moved to shut down non-governmental organizations receiving US aid. Kerry and Lavrov "talked about some irritants between the two countries, they talked about the need to be able to engage more fully," the second State Department official acknowledged. The main issue of Syria -- with Moscow unlike Washington still maintaining its support for the Assad regime -- was to be the focus of talks at a dinner for the G8 ministers later Wednesday.