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## **RUSSIA DENIES PLANS FOR MASS EVACUATION FROM SYRIA, DEFENDS U.S. ADOPTIONS BAN**

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23.01.2013

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Washington Post, January 23, 2013 Russias foreign minister on Wednesday played down the implications of the departure of some of its citizens from Syria a day earlier and said Moscow has no intention of evacuating any of the thousands of Russians living in that country. Although 77 Russians left Syria on Tuesday, traveling to Moscow on two Russian flights from Beirut, Sergei Lavrov declined to describe their journey as an evacuation. Russia has contingency plans for evacuating its citizens from Syria, as from any unstable region, he said. But, he declared, [ ] are not talking about carrying out these plans now. A As the violence in Syria worsened, Lavrov said, Russian citizens were asked if they wanted to leave when humanitarian flights made their return journeys. [ ] 1,000 women said they would be interested in this, in principle, A he said. But when the opportunity arose this week, fewer than 100 said they would leave, Lavrov said. He added that essential employees of the Russian Embassy in Damascus would stay put, although their families and the embassys nonessential personnel left Syria long ago. Lavrov, speaking at an annual news conference summing up the year in foreign policy, also defended a controversial ban on American adoptions, citing the reported abuse and deaths of some Russian children adopted by families in the United States. The foreign minister said that Russia has not received similar reports of mistreatment of Russian children adopted in European countries and that those adoptions would continue. He spoke optimistically, however, about future relations with the United States, saying Russia wants constructive dialogue and cooperation with Washington even though he stressed that any acts that Moscow considered unfriendly would be met with a stern response. Lavrov oversaw long negotiations on the adoption issue that resulted in an agreement with the United States that went into effect in the fall. By December, however, Russias parliament had decided to nullify the agreement and halt U.S. adoptions. At first, Lavrov counseled against the ban. But he quickly abandoned that stance. On Wednesday, he avoided answering a question about his personal feelings on the issue. Instead, he criticized U.S. authorities for not allowing Russian officials access to adopted Russian children, citing the case of 6-year-old Maxim Babayev, who was removed from a Florida home because of child abuse charges. Consular officials were not able to visit the boy last year, Lavrov said. [ ] was a telling situation, A he said. [ ] saw no willingness to help us. A Lavrov said he understood very well that the vast majority of the children adopted by American families find loving homes. But he said that, according to Russian estimates, dozens have been abused and that at least 19, including a toddler left in a vehicle in Northern Virginia in 2008, have died. [ ] doesnt happen with European families, A Lavrov said. In 2011, Americans adopted 965 Russian children, Italians adopted 798 and Spaniards 685, according to Russian figures. Lavrov said Russia and the United States have made progress on easing visa requirements and deepening cultural ties. But he cited irritants, as well, such as the [ ]A Magnitsky Act, which imposes visa and financial restrictions on corrupt Russian officials, and deep differences over missile defense. The adoption ban is considered by many to be retaliation against

Washington for the Magnitsky Act, which President Obama signed into law Dec. 14. Asked about the [ ] in relations that Obama pursued in his first term, Lavrov said that by its very definition, it could not go on forever. It was meant to repair working relations that had deteriorated under President George W. Bush, he said. [ ] reset means something is wrong, A he said. [ ] this is a computer term, everyone should realize that an ongoing [ ] is a failure of the system and the system is frozen. A U.S.-Russian relations, Lavrov said, are not at their best now. [ ]A he said, [ ] are consistently promoting the idea that, despite problems and difficulties arising, we should continue to move ahead along the tracks where our interests coincide.”

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Kaynak/Source: