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## **RUSSIA BACKS DE-ESCALATION ZONE IN SOUTHWESTERN SYRIA**

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A de-escalation zone established in southwestern Syria has "drastically" reduced the level of violence there, Russias foreign minister claimed on Wednesday.

"The southwestern zone that was formed with the participation of Russian, Jordanian and U.S. military and diplomats has already helped to drastically reduce the level of violence," Sergey Lavrov was quoted as saying by Russia's official TASS news agency.

Lavrov said there are "positive changes" in Syria with the implementation of agreements to set up de-escalation zones.

At the fourth meeting in the Kazakh capital on May 4, the three guarantor countries -- Russia, Turkey and Iran -- signed a deal to establish such zones in Syria.

On July 7, Lavrov announced Russia, the U.S and Jordan had agreed a cease-fire in southwestern Syria -- in Daraa, Quneitra and Souweida. This came into effect on July 9.

"We expect that this trend will be consolidated," Lavrov said at a news conference with his Belgian counterpart Didier Reinders in Brussels, according to TASS.

Lavrov said he hoped the other three zones will be completed during the sixth round of Astana talks in August.

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Kaynak/Source: