By Matthew Lee

WASHINGTON—Secretary of State John Kerry is heading to Russia to meet with President Vladimir Putin on his first visit to the country since Russia was blamed for poisoning former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, in Salisbury, Britain. A nerve agent that the Skripals were exposed to is believed to be Novichok, a Russian chemical weapon.

The State Department said Kerry will meet with Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov before the Ukraine crisis had erupted and Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine.

"This trip is part of our ongoing effort to address the serious and persistent problems created by Washington and Moscow's long history of competition," the department said.

The short trip to Sochi will be one of Kerry’s final official acts before he steps down. He has visited Russia before. In 2010, he went to St. Petersburg as Clinton’s deputy secretary of state. In 2013, he made a historical trip to Moscow to meet with Putin and Lavrov before the Ukraine crisis erupted. The Skripals were exposed to Novichok in Salisbury, Britain, just as Clinton was visiting in 2010.

The meeting will also feature Kerry’s commitment to get Russia back to its obligations under the INF treaty. The INF treaty is the only treaty that brings the US and Russia to the table together.

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It was an agreement that both countries accepted, and it was a way to ensure that the US and Russia would work together to reduce the number of nuclear weapons.

However, in recent years, Russia has continued to violate the treaty, which has led to the US and Russia to continue to increase their nuclear arsenals.

Kerry will also discuss the situation with the government of Ukraine, which has been gripped by political unrest for months. The government of Ukraine has been struggling to find a solution to the crisis in the eastern part of the country.

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