

Russian Envoy in Syria Urges Assad to Stop Violence

August 30, 2011

The  Moscow Times

A Russian envoy on Tuesday called on Syrian President Bashar Assad to halt violence against protesters immediately and implement promised political changes.

Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov delivered the demands in a message from President Dmitry Medvedev at a meeting with Assad in Damascus, the Kremlin said in a statement on its web site.

“From the Russian side, the need was stressed for an immediate and complete halt to violence by all parties and the immediate implementation of reforms promised by the Syrian leadership,” the statement said. Bogdanov also called on the Syrian opposition to accept the government’s offer of dialogue, the Kremlin said.

Russia, which has maintained close ties with Syria since the Soviet era, earlier this month rejected demands from the United States and the European Union for Assad to step down because of his regime’s crackdown on protests that began five months ago. Russia also opposes an initiative by the United States, Britain and France, to impose United Nations

sanctions on Syria. The UN puts the death toll at more than 2,200.

Vitaly Churkin, Russia's ambassador to the UN, told reporters in New York on Aug. 26 that his country was starting a diplomatic initiative to halt the violence in Syria.

Churkin also introduced a draft resolution in the UN Security Council that "calls on the Syrian government to expedite the implementation of the announced reforms in order to effectively address the legitimate aspirations and concerns" of Syria's people.

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