

# Foreign Ministry Offers to Host New Talks on Syria

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov speaking about the Middle East on an international affairs program

The Foreign Ministry said Tuesday that Russia would be ready to host a new meeting of world powers on ending the conflict in Syria, and the ministry proposed broadening the talks to invite other countries, including Iran.

Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov said Moscow had made the proposal at an international meeting in Geneva on June 30.

"From our side, I can only confirm that we would welcome the organization of a regular session of an action group in Moscow. ... In any case, we see the relevance in carrying out such an event," Bogdanov said, according to Interfax.

International powers agreed in Geneva that a transitional government should be set up in

Syria, but they left open the question of what role President Bashar Assad would play.

The foreign ministers of the UN Security Council's five permanent members — Russia, the United States, China, France and Britain — all attended.

They were joined by representatives of Turkey, Kuwait and Qatar, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Arab League chief Nabil Elaraby and EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton.

Bogdanov repeated Russia's position that any similar meetings in the future should include other countries that have influence over the Syrian situation, namely Iran and Saudi Arabia.

"Moscow regrets that because of the positions of a number of our partners, Iran and Saudi Arabia were not present in Geneva," he said.

Washington and its allies, which are trying to isolate Iran to force it to curb its nuclear activities, firmly oppose allowing Tehran to attend such meetings. Iran has defended the Syrian government, dominated by members of the Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shiite Islam.

Syrian opposition representatives in Moscow for talks said Monday that they would take part in talks with the Syrian government only if there was a change in Syria's leadership.

Russia rejects that precondition, which is not stipulated in the peace plan set out by UN envoy Kofi Annan.

Repeating Moscow's affirmations that it is not backing Assad, Bogdanov said Russia was not "linked to any concrete personalities."

Russia's Navy dispatched a destroyer-class warship to Syria on Tuesday, a Navy source told Reuters, and another military source was quoted as saying four more Russian ships were en route to the violence-torn country.

The destroyer Smetlivy, which patrolled waters off the coast of Syria in April and May, was seen leaving the Black Sea port of Sevastopol on Tuesday morning.

"The vessel is expected to reach the Turkish straits tomorrow morning," the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity, adding that the ship was heading to Syria.

The Navy declined to confirm its destination.

The source quoted by Interfax said that three landing ships and an anti-submarine destroyer from the Northern Fleet had left the port of Severomorsk and were carrying marines on a training mission as well as food, water and fuel for Russia's naval maintenance and repair base in Syria's Mediterranean port of Tartus.

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