

Putin, Annan Meet on Syria Crisis

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Putin preparing to shake hands with Annan prior to their talks on Tuesday. Lavrov, in the red tie, stands nearby. **Alexander Zemlianichenko**

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Tuesday that Moscow was ready to seek consensus in the UN Security Council on a new resolution aimed at ending Syria's civil war, but gave no indication of how it would resolve a disagreement over a Britain-sponsored resolution.

Moscow's draft resolution calls for the "immediate implementation" of a peace plan from Kofi Annan, the UN and Arab League envoy for the crisis, and the guidelines for a political transition approved at a meeting in Geneva last month, but it objects to the resolution that would be tied to Chapter 7 of the United Nations Charter, which could allow the use of force to end the conflict in Syria.

Although Western nations appear to have little appetite for force, Russia adamantly opposes any prospect of international intervention in the 16-month-old conflict.

But after a meeting between President Vladimir Putin and Annan on Tuesday, Lavrov said: "I don't see a reason that we couldn't agree in the Security Council. We are prepared for that," according to Interfax.

Annan, in turn, said: "I would hope that the council will continue its discussions and hopefully find language that will pull everybody together for us to move forward on this critical issue."

There were no comments from Putin after the meeting, but at its opening he promised Russia would do all it could to support Annan.

Russia, which incurred international criticism by twice vetoing UN resolutions to increase pressure on President Bashar Assad and his regime, has staked its position on Annan's six-point plan for ending the fighting that activists say has killed some 17,000 people.

The plan was to begin with a cease-fire between government forces and rebels, followed by political dialogue, but increasingly intense fighting has called into question whether the plan is obsolete.

British Foreign Secretary William Hague said Tuesday that implementing Annan's peace plan was the "best hope" for ending the civil war in Syria.

He also insisted that a Chapter 7 resolution is required to implement the plan and urged Russia and China to get on board.

"Those nations that might block a Security Council resolution have to consider the fact that if they do so, they will be held increasingly responsible for the consequences, for that chaos and bloodshed that are even now becoming worse in Syria," he said of Russia and China, which are standing by Assad's regime.

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