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Exit Found to U.S.-Russian Missile Defense Impasse

By The Moscow Times

February 25, 2013



The United States and Russia may exchange presidential declarations stating their intention to work together on a European missile defense system and not use the system against each other, unnamed officials from both sides have said, the Kommersant daily reported on Tuesday.

Such an agreement could also include so-called "confidence building" measures, including mechanisms for exchanging information, and bilateral research and threat assessment.

A breakthrough on missile defense, long a source of bilateral tensions, could come as early as Tuesday, when Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Secretary of State John Kerry are scheduled for a lengthy meeting in Berlin, their first face-to-face as top diplomats.

The two are also expected to discuss the ongoing civil war in Syria, North Korea's nuclear program, and the conflict in Mali, as well as the U.S. Magnitsky Act — which calls

for sanctions against Russian human rights abusers — and bilateral adoptions.

U.S. plans for a missile defense system, which it says would protect allies against the threat of an Iranian attack, have been a thorn in the side of U.S.-Russian relations for more than two years, as some Russian officials have speculated that the system is, in fact, aimed at Russia.

A presidential agreement would not require the approval of the U.S. Congress, which is seen as potentially hostile to defense cooperation with Russia.

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