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Obama Calls Putin to Discuss Syria and Olympics

By The Moscow Times

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President Barack Obama has called President Vladimir Putin to discuss security measures for the Sochi Olympics in light of this month's Boston bombing and to raise U.S. concerns that Syria might have used chemical weapons in its civil war.

Obama, who placed the phone call to Putin late Monday, expressed appreciation for the joint work that the two countries were doing to shed light on the Boston Marathon attack that killed three people and injured scores on April 15, the White House and Kremlin said in separate statements.

Investigators from both countries have been working together after suspicion for the attack fell on Chechen brothers Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, who had lived in the U.S. for the past decade. Tamerlan Tsarnaev died as he was being detained on April 19, while his younger brother has been jailed. CNN reported Tuesday that Dzhokhar is recovering rapidly from injuries sustained in a shootout with police and talking with the people around him.

With the approval of the Russian side, U.S. investigators last week traveled to Dagestan, where the brothers' parents live, to find out whether Tamerlan Tsarnaev might have been influenced by local extremists during a six-month visit to the area last year.

"The two leaders discussed cooperation on counterterrorism and security issues going forward, including with respect to the 2014 Olympics in Sochi," the White House statement said.

Neither the Kremlin nor the White House offered addition information about the Sochi discussion.

The presidents also reviewed the situation in Syria, and Obama expressed concern over intelligence reports that Syrian forces might have used chemical weapons in the conflict with insurgents.

Russia has always been skeptical of this possibility, with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov saying repeatedly that there was no proof that the Syrian government has or intends to use chemical weapons.

"The presidents agreed to stay in close consultation and instructed Secretary [of State John] Kerry and Foreign Minister Lavrov to continue discussions on Syria," the statement said.

Obama began the phone call by conveyed his condolences over a fire in a psychiatric hospital just outside of Moscow that killed 38 people last week. Only two patients and a nurse survived the fire, whose cause has yet to be determined.

The presidents also noted that looked forward to meeting in person during a Group of Eight summit in Northern Ireland in June and again in September at a bilateral summit in St. Petersburg.

The phone call was their second in as many weeks. Putin called Obama on April 20 to voice his support in connection with the Boston attack.

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