

G8 Leaders to Press Russia on Syria

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A young boy carrying a weapon as he walks with members of the Free Syrian Army in Deir al-Zor on Wednesday. **Khalil Ashawi**

BERLIN — Britain and Germany aim to use next week's summit of major economic powers to press Russia's leader to use his leverage with the government of President Bashar Assad to calm the fighting in Syria.

Leaders at the G8 meeting starting Monday will push President Vladimir Putin, "who has a special responsibility and a particular influence to contribute to a de-escalation as [Syria's] weapons supplier," a senior German official said Thursday.

The issue has become more urgent because of the "increasingly sectarian character" of the civil war, pitching Shia and Sunni Muslims against each other, including the increased role of Lebanon's Hezbollah militia fighting alongside Syrian government forces, the official said.

The worsening situation also increasingly threatens to destabilize neighboring Iraq and Lebanon, said the official, who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity in line with

government rules.

Syria's upwardly spiraling violence has resulted in the confirmed killings of almost 93,000 people since March 2011, the United Nations' human rights office said Thursday, but it said the real number is likely to be far higher.

Russia has shielded Assad from UN sanctions and has continued to provide his regime with weapons. Moscow has said it's only providing arms such as air defense missile systems to protect Syria from a foreign invasion.

British Prime Minister David Cameron will be meeting Putin in London on Sunday for talks on Syria, ahead of the two-day G8 summit in Northern Ireland, and has pledged to have frank and open discussions with the Russian leader.

"We will also take advantage that the open and honest format of discussion at the G8 has to discuss Syria," Cameron said Thursday. "I want us to focus on the tangible steps we can take to help forge a political transition."

The German official added that the leaders wanted to add new momentum for a peace conference proposed by the U.S. and Russia. That conference in Geneva was first envisioned for May but has since been postponed until July at the earliest.

"We hope for some movement and a more constructive approach" from Putin, the official said.

The leaders of the United States, Japan, Germany, Britain, France, Russia, Canada and Italy will have a private working dinner Monday — with no aides present — focusing on foreign policy issues like Syria, he added.

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