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U.S. and Russian Officials to Meet in The Hague on Syria

By The Moscow Times

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WASHINGTON — A leading diplomat from the U.S. State Department and the U.S. ambassador to Syria will meet with a Russia delegation in The Hague next week to discuss plans for a peace conference to end the civil war in Syria, a spokeswoman for the State Department said.

"We have long agreed with Russia that a conference in Geneva is the best vehicle for moving toward a political solution," State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki told a daily briefing for reporters Monday. She did not offer a specific date for the meeting but said Wendy Sherman, undersecretary for political affairs at the State Department, would attend, along with U.S. Ambassador Robert Ford.

The Russian delegation is likely to include deputy foreign ministers Gennady Gatilov and Mikhail Bogdanov, Interfax reported. It quoted Gatilov as saying the sides hoped to make progress on who should attend the conference.

Iran's participation in the so-called Geneva-2 conference is a thorny issue for the U.S., which has condoned the presence of Iranian advisers aiding President Bashar Assad in the two-year civil war.

A team of United Nations chemical weapons experts arrived in the capital Damascus on Sunday after months of delays to investigate reports about the possible use of chemical weapons in the Syrian civil war.

Syria's turmoil has not only torn the country apart, it is also dragging neighboring countries into the conflict and stoking regional sectarian tensions.

An estimated 29,000 Syrian refugees have entered northern Iraq since Thursday in one of the largest crossings to date by Syrians fleeing the conflict. More than 1.9 million Syrian refugees have registered in neighboring countries as well as Egypt.

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