

Russian Lawmakers Call Off U.S. Trip After Congress Snub

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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WASHINGTON — Russian lawmakers have canceled plans to travel to the U.S. to discuss the crisis in Syria with their U.S. counterparts after congressional leaders refused to see them, the Russian ambassador to Washington said Friday.

The Obama administration has been intensely lobbying Congress to authorize a U.S. military strike against Syria in response to the alleged use of chemical weapons by Syria's government in the country's civil war.

Presumably, the Russian lawmakers would have taken the opposite view and lobbied their U.S. counterparts against supporting U.S. military action in Syria, which Moscow opposes.

But the Russians, who first proposed the trip to Washington last week, decided against it after the leaders of the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate declined to get involved, Russian Ambassador Sergei Kislyak said.

"We're disappointed. The delegation isn't coming. I think American legislators lost an opportunity to learn at least some alternative views," Kislyak said at the Center for the National Interest think tank in Washington.

"They wanted to be heard, and they wanted to hear," he said of the Russian lawmakers. "They thought it was an important issue," and wanted to discuss it "irrespective of the very low level of contacts between the legislatures," Kislyak said.

U.S. President Barack Obama's push for military action in Syria has drawn a mixed response in Congress, with scores of lawmakers still undecided about authorizing military force.

Aides to House Speaker John Boehner, a Republican, and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a Democrat, confirmed that they had declined invitations to meet Russian lawmakers about Syria, but did not elaborate.

The aborted meeting of lawmakers comes at a low point in U.S.-Russian relations, with the two sides bitterly divided by the crisis in Syria as well as by Russia's decision last month to grant asylum to former U.S. Intelligence leaker Edward Snowden, who revealed details of U.S. surveillance programs.

In Russia, President Vladimir Putin said Friday that he and Obama were still at odds over Syria, but listened to each other during a one-on-one meeting on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit in St. Petersburg. Putin blamed the chemical attack on opponents of the Syrian government.

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