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Russia Lobbies for Iran to Take Part in Syria Talks

By The Moscow Times

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Lavrov, left, welcoming his Iranian counterpart, Javad Zarif, at a news conference in Moscow on Thursday. **Pavel Golovkin**

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Thursday that Iran will "inevitably" take part in any resolution of the civil war in Syria, and that Moscow is not working on a separate track with Damascus and Tehran to resolve the conflict.

Tehran should be part of attempts to end the war that has so far killed more than 100,000 people, Lavrov said at a news conference after meeting Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif. Lavrov is scheduled to meet with Syrian foreign minister in Moscow on Friday.

Zarif said that Iran wants to take part in next week's international peace conference on Syria but will not attend if conditions are set for its participation.

"If the Islamic Republic of Iran is invited like all other participants in the conference, it will

take part in this event," Zarif said.

The U.S. says Iranian delegates should be at the conference in Montreux, Switzerland, only if they are willing to accept an agreement reached at a June 2012 peace conference in Geneva calling for a transitional government body to be established in Damascus "by mutual consent."

Washington interprets that language as requiring President Bashar Assad's departure from power but Russia and Iran reject this interpretation.

Zarif said Thursday: "We do not accept any preconditions for our country's participation."

Lavrov urged United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to invite Iran and Saudi Arabia to the conference starting on Jan. 22, saying the participation of regional powers would help find a political solution to the nearly three-year-old conflict.

Material from Reuters is included in this report.

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