

# Putin Slams U.S. Refusal to Meet With Russian Delegation

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President Vladimir Putin

President Vladimir Putin called the position of U.S. officials who rejected a Russian proposal to send a delegation to Washington in order to discuss Syria non-constructive and weak, the TASS news agency reported Thursday.

“I think this position is non-constructive. Its weakness is based on a lack of agenda. Probably there's simply nothing to talk about,” Putin said during a press conference in the Kazakh capital Astana on Thursday.

Putin said Tuesday that Russian authorities had suggested a meeting with Washington to discuss solving the Syrian crisis “at the highest military and political level,” Russian media reported. A delegation headed by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev was, according to Putin, ready to go.

On Wednesday, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the U.S. had declined the offer.

The White House isn't interested in talks "as long as Russia is not willing to make a constructive contribution to our counter-ISIL effort," said White House spokesman Josh Earnest, using another name for the Islamic State terrorist organization.

Commenting on the refusal, Putin said he didn't understand how the U.S. can criticize Russia's actions in Syria when they themselves refuse to engage in a dialogue, the report said.

He added that Russia "was leaving the doors open" to anyone who would like to discuss the situation in Syria.

Russia has been carrying out air strikes in Syria since Sept. 30. According to Russian officials, the strikes are aimed at the Islamic State and other terrorists, but U.S. officials claim Russia is targeting the Syrian opposition in order to support its longtime ally President Bashar Assad.

Russian and U.S. military experts did, however, discuss via video conference Wednesday a possible agreement outlining measures to make the air space over Syria safe for both Russian and U.S. aircraft.

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