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U.S. Senators in Moscow Seek to Be 'Adversaries, Not Enemies'

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Vyacheslav Volodin, Duma Speaker **Kremlin**

Six U.S. senators and a congresswoman are in Moscow this week ahead of a summit between presidents Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin in Finland later this month.

Russian media outlets have presented the visit as a coup for the Kremlin, which has shrugged off sanctions and allegations of electoral meddling.

On Tuesday, the U.S. lawmakers met with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and members of the State Duma and the Federation Council.

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Russian media reported early Tuesday that the U.S. delegation, which is headed by Republican Senator Richard Shelby, had asked to keep the State Duma meeting closed for the press. (The U.S. Embassy did not respond to a request for comment.)

“[The topics were] Syria, Ukraine and Russia’s meddling in the U.S. election,” the head of the Duma’s financial markets committee Anatoly Aksakov told Interfax. “[Duma Speaker Vyacheslav] Volodin said the claims of election meddling were absurd.”

He added Volodin had said the accusations were “undignified”and “belittled” those who made them.

Lavrov said he hoped the visit would be a step toward “restoring relations,” Interfax reported.

The point was echoed by Shelby. Russia and the U.S. “can be adversaries, as in sport or business, but not enemies,” he was cited as saying by the state-run TASS news agency.

The lawmakers were also invited to visit Crimea, the head of the foreign affairs committee, Leonid Slutsky, was cited as saying by Interfax.

“In the future,” Slutsky said, “that which looks intangible and unlikely today could become a reality.”

The U.S. delegation is set to stay in Moscow for Independence Day on July 4.

Includes reporting by Anton Muratov.

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