Beat: Politics

Putin, Obama task top diplomats to seek new Syria initiatives

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USPA News - Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Barack Obama have tasked their top diplomats to find new initiatives aimed at ending the ongoing civil war in Syria, officials in both countries said on Saturday. They also discussed a range of other issues.

The Kremlin press office described Friday`s phone conversation as "constructive in nature," adding that both leaders stressed the fundamental importance of cooperation between the two countries to achieve stability throughout the world. "Both sides expressed readiness to work actively on developing mutually beneficial bilateral cooperation in all areas," Putin`s office said. But the ongoing civil war in Syria, which still divides Washington and Moscow, appeared to be the most significant topic during the call. Putin noted the need to rapidly bring an end to hostilities in Syria, the Kremlin said, but both countries have long differed over how to handle the crisis. The White House said both leaders agreed on the need for a political transition to end the violence in Syria and welcomed the "substantive and constructive" consultations held by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov during their meeting in the German capital of Berlin earlier this week. "The leaders instructed Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and US Secretary of State John Kerry to continue active contacts and to focus on developing possible new initiatives aimed at a political settlement of the crisis," the Kremlin press office said. "The two leaders expressed a common desire to avoid any steps that could impact negatively on their bilateral relations." The countries said the leaders also discussed other international topics such as the Middle East peace process, Iran`s nuclear program, North Korea, and missile defense plans. They also talked about the international economic situation and the path toward a more substantial trade and investment relationship between the United States and Russia. Responding to an invitation from Putin to come to Russia on an official visit, Obama agreed to hold a bilateral meeting during the G8 summit in Northern Ireland on June 17 and June 18. Obama said he also looks forward to visiting the Russian city of St. Petersburg for the G-20 meeting in September.

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