

Russia Urges UN Security Council to Visit Mideast

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UNITED NATIONS — Russia proposed on Tuesday that the UN Security Council make its first visit to the Middle East in more than three decades to help restart stalled peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians.

In addition to Israel and the Palestinian territories, the 15-nation council should aim to visit Egypt, Lebanon and Syria, Russian UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin told reporters.

He said the council could boost international efforts to restart Israeli-Palestinian peace talks with its first visit to the region since 1979. "We think that the Security Council could play a role in helping this move ahead," he said.

Council diplomats said privately that it was unclear whether the United States would support a council visit to the Middle East at the present time.

"A number of council members questioned whether such a trip would be harmful rather than helpful," a diplomat from another of the five permanent Security Council members told

Reuters on condition of anonymity.

"The [Security Council] meeting concluded with agreement that countries would revert to capitals and consultations would continue on the issue," the diplomat added.

In addition to Russia and the United States, Britain, China and France are permanent veto-wielding council members.

Churkin said the council would want to visit the West Bank, as well as the Gaza Strip, "in some form." The militant Islamist group Hamas, which does not recognize Israel's right to exist, controls Gaza. The Palestinian Authority controls the West Bank.

Churkin said a Security Council visit would ideally take place soon, given a weekend statement from the Quartet of Middle East peace negotiators — the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations — that reiterated support for concluding Israeli-Palestinian negotiations by September.

The United States and the United Nations have urged the revival of peace talks mired by long-running Israeli-Palestinian disputes about Israeli settlements in the West Bank, boundaries and the inflexibility of Hamas rulers in Gaza.

Middle East diplomacy has been thrown into further disarray by the weeks of political upheaval in neighboring Egypt — the key regional power broker — and other Arab states.

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