

Top Diplomats to Hold Talks with Syrian Opposition

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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GENEVA — Two high-ranking Russian diplomats will hold talks with representatives of Syria's opposition in Geneva on Tuesday, one of the diplomats said.

The meeting that will involve Russian deputy foreign ministers Mikhail Bogdanov and Gennady Gatilov will take place as part of the preparations for an international conference on Syria, due to be held in Geneva this summer, RIA-Novosti reported.

"Representatives of two Syrian opposition groups will come from Paris," Bogdanov told journalists. "One of the groups is the National Coordination Committee ... They will specially arrive to meet with us."

The deputy foreign minister declined to name the other opposition group.

"We would like the Syrian opposition to be represented adequately" at the conference, he said.

In May, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry proposed holding a second international conference on Syria. The planned gathering has been dubbed "Geneva 2" because the first such conference on Syria was held in Geneva last summer.

More than 90,000 people have died since fighting broke out between Syrian government forces and rebel groups in March 2011, according to the latest UN figures.

Russia, along with China, has faced widespread condemnation over its refusal to approve UN sanctions against Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime. Moscow has repeatedly stated that it has no interest in seeing Assad remain at the helm, but is concerned that a power vacuum would lead to more violence.

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