

Putin to Meet With Obama in New York

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U.S. President Barack Obama

Vladimir Putin and Barack Obama will be meeting Monday in New York, their first face-to-face encounter in nearly a year amid strongly troubled relations between the two nations.

The announcement of the meeting was made Thursday by the Russian president's spokesman Dmitry Peskov and confirmed by the White House.

Putin is speaking Monday at the United Nations General Assembly. Peskov said the meeting with Obama, expected to last about an hour, will take place afterward and will focus on the Syria crisis.

The conflict in Ukraine, the crux of Moscow-Washington tensions, could also be discussed, but only if time allows, Peskov said.

Russia is ramping up its involvement in the Syria war, which has left 250,000 dead and forced millions to flee their homeland since it began in March 2011. Russia recently has ferried weapons, troops and supplies to an airport near the Syrian coastal city of Latakia in what the U.S. sees as preparations for setting up an air base there.

Moscow has denied that it's building up its presence there in order to protect its longtime ally, Syrian President Bashar Assad, saying instead it wants to help him fight the Islamic State group.

U.S.-Russian relations deteriorated significantly after Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in March 2014. The United States, as well as other Western countries, imposed sanctions on Russia over the annexation and over claims that Russia is supporting an insurgency in eastern Ukraine with troops and arms.

Russia vehemently denies it is militarily involved in eastern Ukraine and portrays the sanctions and strong criticism from the United States as attempts to undermine Russia and force Putin from power.

The last time Putin and Obama were face-to-face was a series of brief encounters last November at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Beijing. They have spoken by telephone three times since then.

The White House said Monday's meeting was arranged at Putin's request and that despite deep differences with Moscow, Obama felt it would be irresponsible not to assess whether progress could be made on the Ukraine and Syria crises.

Peskov said Putin also is to meet Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Monday.

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