



Washington Snubs Syria Delegation

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Washington (BBC) - The US State Department has turned down a request by a Syrian delegation to meet a top US official after initially saying the meeting would happen.

The State Department did not give an explanation for the decision, beyond a mention of scheduling problems.

Washington has long seen Syria as a destabilising influence in the Middle East and may feel it should not be rewarded with a high-level meeting.

Syria is also on the State Department's list of countries sponsoring terrorism.

The BBC's Kim Ghattas says from Syria's point of view, it will be seen as a frustrating snub.

'Semi-official'

Washington may be willing to change tack or show flexibility in its dealings with Iran and North Korea, but when it comes to Syria, the policy, and tactics, remain the same, our correspondent says.

This may also have to do with the awkward Syrian approach as it tried to initiate contact with Washington, after years of tension.

The delegation requested a meeting with a State Department official.

It was initially announced that Washington's top diplomat on the Middle East, David Welch, was willing to meet them, to encourage cultural exchanges and help end the isolation of the Syrian people.

But while the delegation presented itself as a group of civil society leaders, it included advisers to the foreign minister and the prime minister.

It also contained officials who have been leading indirect peace talks with Israel through Turkey - so there was a definite official flavour to the team

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