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## **[UN Security Council fails to uphold its Responsibility to Protect in Syria](#)**

*Please see the latest post on the ICRtoP blog discussing Russia and China's double veto of a Security Council Resolution on Syria.*      **UN Security Council fails to uphold its Responsibility to Protect in Syria**

The UN Security Council [failed](#) to reach a consensus at an 4 October meeting on the situation in Syria, foregoing a collective response to the ongoing violence crackdown on civilians by the Syrian government.

Permanent members Russia and China vetoed a Resolution, which condemned the 'grave and systematic human rights violations' in Syria and warned of possible sanctions should the situation continue to deteriorate. Opponents of the Resolution argued that the Council needed to prioritize Syrian-led dialogue instead, and cited concerns over the implementation of Resolution 1973 in Libya.

In 2005, Member States agreed not only to the primary responsibility of the state to protect its civilians from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing, but to the responsibility of the international community to those civilians if a state was found manifestly failing in that regard. The failure to reach a consensus to respond to the situation in Syria, in which crimes against humanity have been widely documented, is a failure of the Security Council's responsibility to protect the Syrian population.

In this post, we explore the efforts to negotiate a Resolution on Syria leading up to the 4 October vote, and discuss the explanations of the double veto by Russia and China in an effort to comprehend the Council's failure to uphold its responsibility to protect.

**Previous efforts and negotiations on a Resolution**      Security Council negotiations on a Resolution have been ongoing for nearly six weeks, but thus far the Security Council has only issued a [Presidential Statement](#) on 3 August which condemned the use of force against civilians by Syrian authorities and called for

the attacks to end.

Since June 2011, the Council has deliberated over a Resolution, divided over imposing non-military coercive measures on the Syrian government versus calling for all sides to stop the violence and emphasizing the need for a political solution based on Syrian-led dialogue.

Several draft resolutions have been tabled by both the European Council Members and Russia reflecting the different opinions. The latest effort to break the Council's deadlock came on 28 September when Germany, Portugal, France and the United Kingdom presented a [revised](#) draft, condemning the attacks on civilians and calling for sanctions only if the Syrian authorities failed to stop the violent crackdown on protesters. As Jonathan Marcus of the BBC [notes](#), the draft resolution itself was watered-down to appeal to the Chinese and Russian delegations.

The European sponsors saw the common concern of all Council members about the level of violence, now [claiming](#) 2,900 deaths, and hoped that dropping the call for immediate sanctions would appease remaining resistance. However, while the draft resolution garnered 9 votes in favor (with Brazil, India, Lebanon and South Africa abstaining), the minimum for Council consideration, the resolution would ultimately be blocked by vetoes employed by both China and Russia.

The disappointment of the double veto was made immediately clear by various Council members, including the [United Kingdom's Ambassador to the UN](#), Mark Lyall Grant, who said this at the Council's vote:

*We removed the sanctions. □ Still it was unacceptable to the minority. □ We called on all sides to reject violence and extremism. □ Still it was unacceptable. □ We removed any sense that sanctions would automatically follow in 30 days if the regime failed to comply. □ And still it was unacceptable. □ By including reference to Article 41 of the UN Charter, we made it clear that any further steps would be non-military in nature. □ Still it was unacceptable. The text that we voted on today contained nothing that any member of this Council should have felt the need to oppose. □ Yet, two members chose to veto.*

And, as United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, who also walked out, [stated](#):

*Several members have sought for weeks to weaken and strip bare any text that would have defended the lives of innocent civilians from Assad's brutality. Today, two members have vetoed a vastly watered-down text that doesn't even mention sanctions...In failing to adopt the draft resolution before us, this Council has squandered an opportunity to shoulder its responsibilities to the Syrian people. We deeply regret that some members of the Council have prevented us from taking a principled stand against the Syrian regime's brutal oppression of its people.*

With what was widely considered a watered-down resolution on Syria, what explains Russia and China's double veto and the abstentions of Brazil, India, and South Africa?

## Backlash towards the implementation of Resolution 1973 in Libya

The no-fly zone authorized by the Security Council and implemented by a coalition of Member States in response to the crisis in Libya was a landmark example of force being used, when non-military measures had proved inadequate, to stop the commission of mass atrocities.

However, concerns that the NATO-led mission went beyond the mandate issued in Resolution 1973, focusing on regime change rather than solely civilian protection, have left some Council Members reluctant to place sole blame on the government during a crisis and to take robust action to end mass violence. Reflecting the mood of other Council members, India's UN Ambassador Hardeep Puri [said](#) that, "Libya has given R2P a bad name."

These concerns would manifest themselves at the Security Council's vote on Syria on 4 October. As Russia's UN Ambassador, Vitaly Churkin, [noted](#):

*"The situation in Syria cannot be considered in the council apart from the Libyan experience," he stressed. "The international community is alarmed" that the NATO interpretation of the Libya resolution "is a model for future actions of NATO in implementing responsibility to protect ... (and) could happen in Syria."*

Despite urges by the [United States](#) and [EU members](#) that a Resolution on Syria would not lead to military intervention in their speeches to the Council, concerns over the implementation of Resolution 1973 in Libya held by Russia and China that even the threatening of sanctions could lead to a military intervention were paramount for the two Permanent Members.

## Political interests and national sovereignty

On top of the backlash from the implementation of the Resolution 1973, other factors serve to explain the double veto by China and Russia. These include China's traditional policy preference of non-interference in dealing with matters of international peace and security through the Security Council, as well as Russia's strategic interests in Syria and its ties to the Assad regime.

As an [article](#) in Xinhua, a state-owned media outlet in China, entitled "China, Russia uphold peaceful approach by vetoing Syria resolution", states:

*The draft resolution, tabled by France, Britain, Germany and Portugal, was seen as a tool to interfere in Syria's internal affairs, as it only advocated sanctions or threat of sanctions against Syria and made no reference to any measures encouraging a peaceful settlement through dialogues among all the parties concerned. Non-interference is one of the fundamental principles enshrined in the UN Charter and also included in the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence. Intervention in a sovereign country's internal affairs is detrimental to the peaceful settlement of its problems.*

While the Russian Ambassador echoed these sentiments, as we covered in a previous [post](#) ,

some speculate that Russia's interests in Syria go further to explain its veto of the proposed resolution.

[According](#)

to Álvaro de Vasconcelos of the European Union's Institute for Security Studies, these interests can explain Russia's intransigence towards the efforts to impose harsher measures against Assad at the Council:

*For Russia the stakes have to do with its strategic ambitions. Under Prime Minister Putin, Russia has developed close energy and military ties with Syria, including building a military naval base that should be operational in 2012.*

And as Jonathan Marcus of the BBC [notes](#) , the Syrian regime remains an important ally of the Kremlin, with Russia reportedly concluding arms agreements with Syria during the protests and Syria hosting the only Russian naval facility outside the territory of the former USSR.

Thus, in somewhat of a redux of various situations where mass atrocity crimes have been documented, including Darfur, Sudan more recently, national interests and a preference of non-interference have trumped the responsibility of the international community, acting through the United Nations Security Council, to protect civilians.

### **Civil society response, shock at the double veto**

In response to the failure of the Council to exercise its RtoP in Syria, various civil society organizations have expressed their shock and disappointment. Dr. Simon Adams, Executive Director of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, [stated](#) :

*Today's veto is a new low. Action to stop crimes against humanity should not be held prisoner to sectional political interests and convenient alliances. This veto will cost lives in Syria...In preventing the U.N. from upholding its Responsibility to Protect, China and Russia have placed themselves on the wrong side of history. Today's veto is a victory for impunity, inaction and injustice. The long suffering people of Syria deserve better than this."*

Amnesty International (AI) claimed the countries who wielded their veto power to block the resolution have utterly [failed](#) in their responsibilities to protect the Syrian people. Malcolm Smart, AI's Middle East and North Africa Director, said:

*"It is shocking that after more than six months of horrific bloodshed on the streets and in the detention centres of Syria, the governments of both Russia and China still felt able to veto what was already a seriously watered down resolution."*

And, as Don Kraus, CEO of Citizens of Global Solutions, an ICRtoP member, [wrote](#) in an op-ed for the Huffington Post:

*There are clearly major human rights violations being committed in Syria. By using their veto power, Russia and China are not meeting their responsibility to protect and are also preventing the rest of the world from doing so...It is clear that the two governments have put national*

*interests ahead of their international responsibility.*

In the wake of the double veto by Russia and China, the Syrian opposition [condemned](#) the move, stating that the two Permanent Members of the Security Council put their interests ahead of the aspirations of the Syrian population. As protests and crackdowns continue, the deadlock at the Council must be broken, and the responsibility of the international community to protect Syrian populations must be upheld.