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(27 January)

After the Double Veto: International Community Must Re-Double Efforts to Uphold RtoP in Syria

For the [second time](#) since the nearly year-long crackdown in [Syria](#) began, Russia and China [vetoed](#) a United Nations Security Council [draft resolution](#) on the situation. The draft resolution, premised on the 22 January [Arab League plan](#) calling for President Assad’s transition from power and the formation of a unity government, was introduced by Morocco, with the support of Western and Arab states, and [tabled](#) on 26 January. Extensive negotiations and concessions, however, were not enough to prevent the veto from being employed. Given this failure to reach a consensus, actors at all levels, extending from the national to the international, must re-double their efforts to halt these gross human rights violations in Syria.

Extensive Negotiations Not Enough to Prevent Veto

The Council sat to [vote](#) on the resolution at 11:00 a.m. on 4 February. It was uncertain how the vote would unfold in the lead up to the meeting, especially with regards to Russia's potential veto, and how China, India, South Africa, and Pakistan would vote, particularly as India and South Africa had abstained in a vote on an earlier draft resolution on 4 October 2011.

When the vote was called, 13 Security Council members voted in favour of the draft, which included Morocco, India, Pakistan, Colombia, Guatemala, France, Germany, Portugal, the United Kingdom, the United States, Azerbaijan, Togo, and South Africa. Despite this broad support for the draft resolution, Russia and China prevented the Council from taking any action by employing their veto powers.

The draft resolution went through a [series](#) of [negotiations](#) between 27 January and [4 February](#), as supporters made a number of amendments attempting to appease the “*red lines*” of the Russian delegation and prevent the use of the veto.

Among the provisions dropped were explicit references to the specifics of the Arab League plan regarding President Assad delegation of power. Operative clauses that stated Member States could pursue measures like arms embargoes and economic sanctions in cooperation with the Arab League were also removed from the draft.

These amendments were included in the [final draft of the resolution](#) . Though Council Members awaited Russian changes ahead of the vote on the evening of 3 February, these [amendments](#) did not return to the Council until 4 February, moments ahead of the scheduled vote. [According](#) to Reuters, Western diplomats said that the changes were “*unacceptable*”
,
and the vote proceeded without them.

Russia, China Explain Double Veto – Again

In the wake of the vote, both Russia and China have sought to [defend and explain](#) their use of the veto.

Addressing the Security Council after casting the veto, Russian Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador **Vitaly Churkin**, [stated](#) while his country had been working towards a resolution of the crisis in a non-violent manner, some other Council Members had not:

“Some influential members of the international community, unfortunately, including those sitting around this table, from the very beginning of this process have been undermining the opportunity for political settlement, calling for regime change, pushing the opposition towards power, and not stopping their provocation, and feeding armed methods of struggle.”

Ambassador Churkin said that Russia was thus opposed to the draft resolution because it was “unbalanced” and did not reflect the amendments it had presented before going to a vote. In an [interview](#) with RT on 7 February, Ambassador Churkin stated the resolution could have passed with two or three more days of extended discussions. Russia’s Foreign Minister, **Sergei Lavrov**

, [echoed](#)

this in his

[defence of using the veto](#)

, stating that it did not impose balanced demands on the armed opposition to cease violence, and that it would have obstructed a Syrian-led political process.

Ambassador **Li Baodong**, Permanent Representative of China to the UN, [towed the Russian line](#) at the Council,

stating that the resolution put “

undue emphasis on pressuring the Syrian government

”, which would prejudge the outcome of a Syrian-led political process. Ambassador Baodong said that Council Members were still seriously divided over the draft resolution, and that hastily

moving towards a vote without reflecting the amendments made by the Russian delegation ultimately led to the use of their veto. The Ambassador's statement was quoted near-verbatim in a Xinhua

[report](#)

that explained China's veto.

Supporting Council Members Condemn Double Veto

Council Members who supported the draft resolution were quick to condemn Russia and China in their addresses in the aftermath of the vote.

UK's Permanent Representative, Ambassador **Mark Lyall Grant**, [said](#) that his country was "*appalled*

" that Russia and China would veto an "*otherwise-consensus resolution*

" submitted and supported by a wide array of actors, including a number of regional states.

In his [statement](#) on behalf of Morocco, which tabled the initial draft resolution, Ambassador **Mohammed Loulichki**

expressed his "

great regret and disappointment

" that the Council was unable to act unanimously.

US Ambassador **Susan Rice** [said](#) that her country was “*disgusted*” by the fact that the Russian and Chinese delegations continue to hold the Council “*hostage*” over Syria, while standing behind “*empty arguments and individual interests*” as they delay action in the country. Ambassador Rice called the “*intransigence*” of Russia and China “*shameful*”, as she noted that, “*at least one of these members continues to deliver weapons to Assad*”.

Ambassador **Gérard Araud** of France [called](#) 4 February, “*a sad day*”, and condemned Russia and China for their vetoes, stating, “*They are doing this with a full knowledge of the tragic consequences entailed by their decisions for the Syrian people. They are doing this and making themselves complicit in the policy of repression carried out by the Assad regime.*”

India and South Africa Voice Cautious Support

On 4 October 2011, both India and South Africa [abstained from the vote](#) on an earlier draft

resolution on the situation in Syria, largely paving the way for the first Russia-China double veto. In a rather surprising move both countries voted in favour of the draft resolution on 4 February, voting separately from Russia and China in the Council.

[Pakistan](#)

also voted in favour of the resolution.

Explaining his country's cautious support for the resolution, Ambassador **Hardeep Singh Puri**, Permanent Representative of India to the UN,

[stated](#)

that it was “

in accordance with our support for the efforts by the Arab League for the peaceful resolution of the crisis through a Syrian-led inclusive political process

.” Puri also noted that the resolution strictly ruled out the use of force to respond to the situation, which India stood opposed to in negotiations.

Ambassador **Baso Sangqu**, Permanent Representative of South Africa to the UN, [echoed](#) the statement made by Ambassador Puri, noting his country's support for a Syrian-led process, the emphasis on the Arab League's involvement, and the restriction against the use of force.

Civil Society Organizations Call Double Veto ‘Betrayal’

Throughout the course of the negotiations, [civil society organizations had urged Council](#)

[members](#), particularly Russia and China, not to employ their vetoes against the draft resolution. Later, both

Amnesty International

(AI) and

Human Rights Watch

(HRW) called the double veto by Russia and China a “betrayal” of the Syrian people.

In a [press release](#) issued in the wake of the vote, HRW UN Director **Philippe Boloignon** said:

“After weeks of Russian diplomatic games-playing and in the middle of a bloodbath in Homs, vetoes by Moscow and Beijing are simply incendiary...they are not only a slap in the face of the Arab League, they are also a betrayal of the Syrian people. The Russian government is not only unapologetically arming a government that is killing its own people, but also providing it with diplomatic cover.”

Salil Shetty, AI’s Secretary-General, [said in a presser](#) that Russia and China’s use of veto was “*completely irresponsible*” in the face of an already-watered-down draft resolution.

What’s Next for Syria?

Despite disagreement over the draft resolution, Council members [vowed](#) to remain seized of the situation in Syria at the Council. But with the UN Security Council sidelined by the double veto, it remains unclear how the international response to the situation in Syria will unfold. In the mean time, Syrian security forces have [stepped up their efforts](#) to quell the opposition, including shelling the city of Homs with artillery fire, leading to many civilian casualties across the country.

Russia carried through with its plan to send Minister Lavrov and **Mikhail Fradkov**, the head of the External Intelligence Agency, to [hold talks](#) with President **Bashar al-Assad** in Damascus. Reuters [reported](#) Minister Lavrov as saying that Assad had presented constitutional reforms in their discussions, and that the Syrian President was willing to carry them out in order to end the bloodshed. [According](#) to the BBC, Lavrov said that Damascus was ready for a larger Arab League monitoring mission to observe efforts to end the crisis. The killing continued in the wake of Russia's meet with Assad, however, with [reports](#) of continued government shelling in Homs.

Meanwhile, Western and Arab states increased diplomatic pressure on the Assad regime. In response to the recent surge in violence, the members of the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** have [expelled](#) all Syrian ambassadors, recalled their own envoys, and [called on](#) the League of Arab States to exercise "all decisive measures" to end the bloodshed in Syria. The United States responded by

[closing](#)

its Embassy in Syria, and a number of Western countries, including United Kingdom and Canada, have

[ratcheted up diplomatic pressure](#)

on the Assad regime and Moscow.

UN Officials have also spoken out against the recent violence, with UN Secretary-General **Ban Ki-moon**

[condemning](#)

the assault of Homs on 7 February, calling it “

totally unacceptable before humanity

”, and urging the Assad regime to cease using force against civilians. On 8 February, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Navi Pillay

[condemned](#)

the Syrian government’s indiscriminate attacks against civilians, and reminded the international community of their

responsibility to protect

Syrian civilians.

Pillay’s reminder is all too important: Despite the failure to reach consensus at the UN Security Council, actors at all levels continue to have a ***responsibility to protect*** civilians from genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing. From the Syrian authorities to regional and international organizations, all must work together to prevent further attacks against Syrian civilians.