

Building a Pretext to Wage War on Syria: Hidden Agenda Behind UN Security Council Resolution

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[Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

I - Introduction

On Tuesday, October 4, the UN Security Council announced it would take up a draft resolution on Syria. This meeting was to be an instance, when the lessons some Security Council members had drawn from the experience with the resolutions on Libya could be reflected in their action on a draft resolution against Syria.

Several weeks earlier, journalists had been told that there were two different draft resolutions about Syria tabled at the Security Council.

One draft resolution on Syria had been proposed by Russia and China. Russia and China said their resolution had been designed to encourage a peaceful process to help the Syrian government deal both with its stated desire for reforms and with the extremist violence against the Syrian government that was making such reform difficult.

The other draft resolution was tabled by four of the European members of the Security Council - France, UK, Germany and Portugal. (1) This draft condemned the actions of the Syrian government. It did not oppose foreign intervention into Syria's domestic affairs. The European draft called on all states to deny the Syrian government arms, but made no such call to deny weapons to the armed opposition.

The European draft framed the problem as the Syrian government, similar to how Resolution 1973 framed the problem in Libya as being due to the government guided by Muammar Gaddafi.

Coming to the stakeout area where the journalists were congregated, the four European Security Council members informed journalists that they had called for a vote on their resolution that evening at a meeting scheduled to start at 6 pm.

II - The Security Council Vote on the European Draft Resolution

At 6:20 pm, the Nigerian Ambassador U. Joy Ogwu as the President of the Security Council for the month of October, opened the meeting.(2) Under Rule 37 of the Provisional Rules of Procedure of the Security Council, she invited the Syrian UN Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari to participate in the meeting.(3)

The Security Council President called for a vote on the European draft resolution. No

members spoke before the vote.

There were nine votes in favor of the resolution, two votes opposed and four abstentions. Voting in favor of the draft resolution were Bosnia-Herzegovina, Colombia, France, Gabon, Germany, Nigeria, Portugal, the UK, and the US . Voting against were China and Russia. Abstaining were Brazil, India, Lebanon and South Africa. The 'no' votes by China and Russia, as permanent members of the Security Council, represented a double veto of the European draft resolution. The European draft resolution failed to pass.

III - Comments by Nations Voting 'No' on the Resolution

What was different in this situation from the vote on Security Council Resolution 1973 about Libya, is that instead of the two permanent members Russia and China abstaining, as they had done on the Libyan resolution in March, this time they both voted 'no'.

Russian Federation UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin explained his vote. He said that working with China, Russia had prepared a draft resolution which was supported by Brazil, India and South Africa. The fundamental philosophy of the draft resolution he had worked on, he explained, was to support a respect for the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, and the principle of non intervention in its internal affairs. These are key principles of the UN Charter. Such an effort, he argued, necessitated the need to refrain from confrontation. There should be no threats, ultimatums, or sanctions against the Syrian government.

"The situation in Syria cannot be considered in the Council separately from the Libyan experience, " Ambassador Churkin said. (Transcript, p. 4) He referred to the alarm expressed in the international community at NATO statements that Security Council resolutions on Libya provided a model for future actions by NATO.

Churkin specifically pointed to how the language of Resolutions 1970 and 1973 on Libya was turned into its opposite by some members of the Council. The language calling for a quick cease fire, he said was turned into a full-fledged civil war. The provision of a no fly zone, he explained, "has morphed into the bombing of (Libyan) oil refineries, television stations and other civilian sites." (Transcript, p. 4) The arms embargo was used as a pretext for a naval blockade affecting humanitarian goods. The call to prevent a tragedy in Benghazi led to a tragedy in Sirte and Bani Walid, observed the Ambassador.

Though Churkin did not present a specific description of this tragedy, NATO bombing campaigns were being waged against civilians in Bani Walid and Sirte, even as the Council met. "These types of models should be excluded from global practices once and for all," said Churkin.

One of the reasons Churkin gave for voting against the European draft, was that those writing the resolution had refused to build in a prohibition against foreign intervention into the Syrian conflict. "Our proposals for wording on the non-acceptability of foreign intervention were not taken into account and, based on the well-known events in North Africa that can only put us on our guard," Churkin told the Council.

While the Russian Ambassador condemned Syrian government repression of non-violent demonstrations, he also pointed to the need to condemn the extremists' violent actions against the Syrian government taken outside the law and aimed at gaining foreign sponsors

for their actions. Churkin offered to continue to work on the Russian-Chinese draft resolution to support a process toward a peaceful resolution of the internal Syrian conflict.

China's UN Ambassador Li Baodong, explaining his own vote against the European draft resolution, called on all parties in Syria to avoid violence. Whether the Security Council takes further action on the question of Syria, he said, should depend on whether such action would facilitate the easing of tension in Syria, help to defuse differences through political dialogue, and contribute to the maintenance of peace and stability in the Middle East.

Important for China was whether the Security Council's efforts comply with the UN Charter and the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states, "which has a bearing upon the security and survival of developing countries, in particular small and medium sized countries," Ambassador Li told the Security Council.

China's Ambassador reminded the Council that there were two draft resolutions, one of which China supported because "it advocates respect for the sovereignty of Syria and resolving the crisis through political dialogue." The other draft, the one that was voted down, focused "solely on exerting pressure on Syria, even threatening to impose sanctions," he explained.

IV - Nations Abstaining Explain their Vote

The four nations that had abstained also spoke to the Council about the reasons for their votes.

The Indian Ambassador, Hardeep Singh Puri, explained that states have an obligation "to respect the fundamental aspirations and respond to the grievances" of their people. (Transcript, p. 6) "At the same time," he said, "states also have the obligation to protect their citizens from armed groups and militants." Clarifying his concern, he said, "While the right of people to protest peacefully is to be respected, states cannot but take appropriate action when militant groups - heavily armed - resort to violence against State authority and infrastructure."

He saw the need for "the international community" to give "time and space for the Syrian government to implement far-reaching reform measures they have announced." For this to happen, he proposed, it is necessary "that the opposition forces in Syria give up the path of armed insurrection and engage constructively with the authorities."

The Indian Ambassador cautioned that the international community should "not complicate the situation by threats of sanctions, regime change, et cetera."

Ambassador Basu Sagqu of South Africa explained his nation's abstention. He observed, "We have seen recently that Security Council resolutions have been abused, and that their implementation has gone far beyond the mandate of what was intended." (Transcript, p. 11)

He questioned whether the plans of the European sponsors of the draft resolution were not part of "a hidden agenda aimed at once again instituting regime change which has been an objective clearly stated by some." He referred to the rejection by the European Security Council members of "language that clearly excluded the possibility of military intervention in the resolution...." He proposed that, "the Security Council should proceed with caution on Syria lest we exacerbate an already volatile situation."

Lebanon's Ambassador Nawwaf Salam said his country had abstained to defend Syria's right to sovereignty and "the integrity of its people and land" and in protection of Syria's unity and stability. (Transcript, p. 9)

Explaining why her nation abstained from voting for the draft resolution, Ambassador Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti of Brazil said that the European draft resolution had been rushed to a vote rather than allowing the needed time to accommodate the serious concerns raised by members about it. (Transcript, p. 11-12)

V - Votes of Nations Sponsoring the Draft Resolution

Explaining their votes in favor of the resolution, France, the UK, Germany and Portugal portrayed what is happening in Syria mainly as a movement for "freedom and democracy" essentially denying that there have been violent attacks against the Syrian government or foreign intervention which encourages these attacks. Their response to the concerns raised by Russia and China and other Council members was to dismiss the issues that they raised. The four European members brought their draft resolution to a vote without resolving the disagreements. While it is likely they had anticipated a veto, they claimed to be surprised at the results of the vote. UK Ambassador Sir Mark Lyall Grant maintained that their text "contained nothing that any member of this Council should have felt the need to oppose." (Transcript, p. 7)

VI - Other Council Members Voting in Favor Draft Resolution

The US Ambassador Susan Rice said that the US was "outraged" by the action of the Council. (Transcript, p.8)The US offered no specific responses to concerns raised by other council members about the resolution, such as Ambassador Churkin's concern about how the words of the Libyan resolution were turned into their opposites, or the South African concern that the draft European resolution on Syria would be used for actions far beyond any mandates intended by all members of the Council. Ambassador Rice merely said that the resolution against Syria was "not about military intervention" or about Libya.

Nowhere in her comments was there any response to the problem other Council members raised about alleged foreign intervention, like that of Turkey and other States which are repeating with Syria the pattern of what NATO nations had done in the case of Libya. Colombia and Bosnia expressed their support for the resolution condemning the Syrian government. Gabon and Nigeria did not speak to explain why they voted in favor of the European resolution.

VII - Syrian Comments to the Council

After all of the Council members who had asked to speak, had been given the floor, Syrian Ambassador Ja'afari was called on to present his comments to the Council. It is the usual Security Council practice to allow a UN member with a material interest in an issue being considered, to present its position, but only after a vote is taken.

The Syrian Ambassador proposed that the reason the NATO countries are targeting his country for hostile action is not because of any humanitarian concerns. The basis for their hostile actions, he said, is "due to our independent political position which does not conform to the agendas of those capitals." (Transcript, p. 12) Pointing to massacres and human rights violations by the US and other western nations in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Algeria,

many African countries, Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, Ja'afari said he did not see how anyone could ignore these. The implication was that the nations bringing the draft resolution to the Council had a double standard about whose human rights violations they asked the Council to condemn. While he acknowledged the need and desire of the Syrian people and government for economic, political and social reforms, he denounced the misuse of such demands to try "to facilitate external opposition," and to "pave the way for external intervention."

He proposed that, "encouraging the radical demands of the opposition in Syria to topple the government by force of arms, violence and terrorism amounts to a coup supported by outside powers...." (Transcript, p. 14)

He argued that "the intervention of the Security Council in Syrian internal affairs further aggravates the situation and sends a message to extremists and terrorists - that their acts of deliberate sabotage and violence...are encouraged and supported by the Security Council." (Transcript, p. 14)

Concluding his comments, he expressed his appreciation to the States that had rejected what he characterized as abuse of the Council. "If we are optimistic about the Council," he said, "it is because we continue to hear the voice of the wise echoing in the Chamber."

The Security Council meeting ended at 7:45 pm.

VIII - Some Examples of Netizen Comments on the Resolution

While much of the mainstream Western media portrayed the October 4 Security Council meeting in the terms offered by the US and European members of the Council, several responses posted on the Internet demonstrated that there are many people who oppose the actions of the western members of the Security Council.(4)

For example, in one response to media reports that Ambassador Rice said the US was "outraged" by the Russian and Chinese vetoes of the European draft resolution, one netizen asked, "Where is all the outrage over US and Europe's cracking down on their protesters? Where is the UN resolution on all that?"

A number of netizens applauded Russia and China for vetoing the European resolution against Syria.

Some netizens wrote that Russia and China "should also have vetoed the Libyan resolution." One netizen explained the view that "they (Russia and China) just allowed NATO to kill Libyans, and destroy the country so they can make big money in reconstruction contracts. "

A US netizen who expressed a similar view said, referring to the US President Obama, "So I guess our Nobel Peace Prize winner wants to spread more peace around the globe. He will have to do it Bush style without UN approval."

Another netizen said that such a veto a few months ago in the Libyan situation would have prevented the "now ongoing genocide and catastrophe that the US, France and so-called UK have brought the Libyan nation via NATO bombings and flagrant - shameless support of armed revolt. Perhaps there's still a chance for the 'United Nations' to vindicate itself historically and salvage its long lost credibility and honorable standing."

Expressing a similar viewpoint, a netizen ended his comment, "If a 'no-fly zone' is interpreted by Obama and Sarkozy as 6 months of unlimited bombing (of Libya), how could China and Russia risk allowing any kind of resolution on another country."

IX - Conclusion

Comparing the October 4 Security Council meeting which rejected the hostile European draft resolution against Syria with the March 17 meeting approving Resolution 1973 against Libya, what stands out is that on October 4, some members of the Security Council acknowledged the violent actions of some of the internal opposition against the Syrian government. In March the Council had failed to acknowledge the armed insurrection against the Libyan government.

One lesson that several members of the Council appear to have drawn from the Security Council action on Libya, was the need to avoid passing a vague or hostile resolution which could be abused by powerful nations as a pretext to carry out a hidden agenda of regime change.

The opposition on the Security Council to the European draft demonstrated a determination to prevent a NATO type intervention against Syria, similar to that which had been carried out by the US, France, and the UK against Libya using NATO. The Libyan experience had shown that these powerful western governments would do as they wished using a Security Council resolution as a pretext and the Security Council had no means to stop such abuse of its resolutions.

The UN Charter obligation of the Security Council is to work for the peaceful resolution of conflicts affecting peace and security in the international arena. The situation in Syria, as it was in Libya, is a domestic affair complicated by foreign intervention. The fact that many Libyan civilians have been and continued to be killed by NATO bombing missions in Libya as the Council considered a similar resolution against Syria, offered a grotesque backdrop to the fact that some NATO members who are members of the Security Council have continued to try to use the Security Council to claim legal authority for their clearly illegal attack on the sovereignty of UN member nations.(5)

Netizen comments in response to western media reports in support of such illegal actions demonstrate a rejection by these netizens of the kind of action NATO has undertaken against Libya. The effort of NATO members of the Security Council to use the Libya resolution as a model to support their attack on Syria, was met by a double veto and four abstentions in the Security Council. It was also met by netizens posting articles and comments on the Internet to oppose NATO's actions and to welcome the Russian and Chinese vetoes of the European draft resolution.

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Notes

1) S/2011/612, Security Council Draft Resolution (Not approved)
<http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/8257293.10512543.html>

2) Rule 37 of the “Provisional Rules of Procedure of the Security Council”

<http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/scrules.htm>

“Any Member of the United Nations which is not a member of the Security Council may be invited, as the result of a decision of the Security Council, to participate, without vote, in the discussion of any question brought before the Security Council when the Security Council considers that the interests of that Member are specially affected, or when a Member brings a matter to the attention of the Security Council in accordance with Article 35 (1) of the Charter.”

3) S/PV.6627, The Security Council Meeting of Oct 4, 2011. I refer to this UN document as “Transcript” in the text of the article. A url for the document at the UN website is:

<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/529/74/PDF/N1152974.pdf?OpenElement>

4) Comments in response to an article in the Washington Post.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/russia-china-block-syria-resolution-at-un/2011/10/04/gIQArcFBML_allComments.html#comments

5) See for example an excerpt from a talk given by John Pilger at the October 8, 2011 protest in Trafalga Square, UK <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2011/pilger101011.html>

“(T)he United States, Britain, and France are bombing a city in Libya called Sirte. There are 100,000 people. Day and night, residential buildings, clinics, schools have been hit with fragmentation bombs and Hellfire missiles. . . .The media refer to Sirte as a true Gaddafi stronghold. The Channel 4 reporter in Libya describes the attacks as “cutting off the head of the snake.” For such heroic journalists, there are two types of humanity in war: there are worthy victims and unworthy victims. The people of Sirte are unworthy victims, and therefore they are expendable both as people and as news. In Iraq the people of Fallujah were also unworthy victims. American Marines, helped by the British, killed some 5,000 people there. . . . As Harold Pinter would say . . . none of it happened. It didn’t happen even as it was happening. It didn’t matter. . . . We’ve had ten years of such crimes that didn’t happen, that didn’t matter. . . . The war on Afghanistan was a fraud right from the beginning, just as the attack on Iraq was a fraud and the invasion of Libya is a fraud.”

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