

# May 2017 Monthly Forecast

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## In Hindsight: Council Dynamics and Syria Negotiations

In the first half of April, the Council was engaged in a series of contentious meetings and negotiations on Syria that culminated in Russia's eighth **veto** of a Syria resolution since October 2011. The Council's engagement on Syria in the lead-up to the vote once again exposed the Council's inability to play a significant role in the Syria crisis due to ongoing divisions among the permanent members. It also highlighted the increasing frustration of elected members with being excluded from negotiations on an issue of grave concern to all members.

The Russian veto was **cast** on 12 April on a P3 **draft** that would have condemned the 4 April chemical weapons attacks on the Khan Shaykhun area of Idlib and set out strong demands for Syria to comply with relevant recommendations of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact Finding Mission (FFM) and the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM). In addition to the Russian veto, the draft received a negative vote from Bolivia, and abstentions from China, Ethiopia and Kazakhstan. It was the fifth Syria chemical weapons draft resolution circulated in just over a week, preceded by two earlier P3 drafts, a Russian draft, and an E10 draft.

Immediately after the 4 April chemical weapons attack on Khan Shaykhun, the P3 circulated the text of a resolution to the members of the Council with a request for comments on the draft text by 9am the next morning. However, it seems that following the circulation of this draft, the US pushed for stronger language, which required further consultations among the P3. Following amendments from the US, the P3 draft that was finally put in blue on 6 April condemned the attacks, expressed full support for the FFM, and requested the results of its investigations as soon as possible. It recalled language in previous resolutions regarding the cooperation of the Syrian government and all parties in Syria with the OPCW and the UN, including the JIM. Regarding the chemical weapons attack, it emphasised in its OP5 that the cooperation required includes the obligation of Syria to provide information on air operations (such as flight plans and flight logs), names of all individuals in command of any helicopter squadrons, and access to air bases from which the JIM or the FFM believed chemical weapons attacks may have been launched, as well as to respond to requests for meetings with generals and other officers.

On the morning of 5 April, there was a public **briefing** on the reports of chemical weapons use in Syria. Council members had been expecting a revised P3 draft to be circulated following the meeting, but instead a P5 meeting was held on the P3 draft at the request of Russia. It seems that Russia raised questions about the intent of the draft and the facts available regarding the chemical weapons attack. It proposed an alternative draft

resolution that expressed deep concern regarding the “alleged incident with...chemical weapons” and requested the OPCW to share with the Council the “personal composition” of the team that would investigate the incident for the Council’s consideration, calling for a full-scale investigation as soon as possible.

The competing P3 and Russian drafts were only circulated to the full Council by noon on Thursday 6 April. By the afternoon, first the P3, and then Russia, asked for their drafts to be put into blue, in anticipation of a vote that evening. That day, the elected members, who had not been included in the negotiations and were growing increasingly frustrated, met on two occasions at Sweden’s initiative: first at political coordinator-level in the morning to compare notes as rumours were circulating about P5 negotiations and why a revised P3 draft had not been circulated; and later in the afternoon at permanent representative-level, after the P3 and Russian drafts had been put in blue, and after the US, as president of the Council, had shown reluctance to have consultations on the two drafts in blue in spite of an informal request from an E10 member. During the afternoon meeting, the E10 members heard that the P5 had met and were unable to come to an agreement on the drafts. Meanwhile, Russia had officially requested consultations at 3pm on the two texts, but the US only agreed to hold them after the briefing on peacekeeping that was scheduled for mid-afternoon. In their afternoon meeting, the elected members decided to propose a text to break the P5 impasse.

The E10 draft substituted language in the P3 draft (i.e. OP5) that specified the Syrian government’s obligations regarding its activities and access (including to provide information on its air operations, individuals commanding any helicopter squadrons, and access to air bases)—a contentious matter in the P5 negotiations—with agreed language from **resolution 2118** of 27 September 2013, which first required the verification and destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons stockpiles and cooperation with the OPCW and the UN. The agreed language from **resolution 2118** specified Syria’s obligations to accept personnel designated by the OPCW or the UN, and to provide them with immediate and unfettered access to and the right to inspect any and all sites and individuals important to their mandate. Other language in the P3 and Russian drafts was also discussed, but the E10 eventually agreed that it was OP5 in the P3 text that was the main stumbling block. All the E10 members subsequently agreed that the text should be circulated.

Sweden formally circulated the E10 text just prior to the briefing on UN peacekeeping, which began around 4:30pm. During the consultations on Syria following the peacekeeping briefing, the US announced that there would not be a vote that evening. It appears that the circulation of the E10 draft made it more difficult for the P3 and Russia to proceed with a vote on draft resolutions that almost certainly would not have been adopted when there was an alternative text on the table that might have had the support of most of the Council. The elected members showed unity over their draft, and expressed disappointment with the way the permanent members had managed the negotiations, excluding them from substantive discussions. China said that the E10 draft represented a good compromise that merited attention, and several members suggested that a veto would not be constructive.

Shortly after the evening consultations ended, the US carried out airstrikes on the Shayrat airbase. Bolivia asked for a briefing from the Secretariat in consultations but the US as president of the Council chose to hold a public **briefing**. Ahead of this meeting on Friday, 7 April, it seems that the US brought together eight elected members (not including Bolivia and Kazakhstan) and the P3 to explain its rationale for carrying out the airstrikes. During the Council meeting, the US stated that “further delay by compromising with Russia for a watered-down draft resolution would have only strengthened [Syria’s President Bashar] Al-Assad.” Among the elected members, Ethiopia called the proposal by the elected members “timely” and “wise,” saying that “the priority for now should be the adoption by consensus of the draft resolution proposed by the elected members...and for the United States and the Russian Federation to exercise greater responsibility and find a way out within their means.”

On Monday evening (10 April), the UK circulated another P3 draft, which was subsequently put into blue without negotiations among the 15 Council members. The draft expanded on the substance of the earlier P3 draft. It incorporated the agreed language from resolution 2118, proposed in the E10 draft. At the same time, it retained the language from OP5 of the previous P3 draft, while adding a preambular paragraph recalling that the 6 July 2016 report of the OPCW Director General states that the OPCW Technical Secretariat was unable to resolve gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in Syria’s declaration of its chemical weapons stockpiles. The draft did not make reference to the US airstrikes. Russia’s immediate reaction to the draft was unfavourable, but the **draft** was tabled for a vote on the afternoon of 12 April, hours after Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura was to brief on the political situation. A minor change made to the draft in comparison with the one circulated on 10 April was that OP5 of the final version called on the Syrian government to provide the JIM and the FFM with the names of individuals in command of “any aircraft” rather than “any helicopter squadron,” as had been the case in the earlier version.

On 11 April, the US convened a meeting to discuss the draft that included the P3 and the same eight elected members, not including Bolivia and Kazakhstan. Concerns were expressed by some of the elected members at the informal meeting that the vote would result in a Russian veto that could undermine the hoped-for progress on the political process.

It seems that in addition to concerns about jeopardising momentum on the political front, some of the elected members felt that a veto on a draft resolution outlining the obligations of Syria to comply with the investigations of the OPCW and UN could negatively impact the investigatory mandate already authorised by the Council. A number of elected members felt that if a compromise text were to be adopted without opposition, it would increase pressure on Syria to comply with its obligations, and therefore, should not be viewed as a weaker text.

Council divisions were on display during the morning **meeting** in which de Mistura briefed and during the afternoon **vote** on the P3 draft, which saw the eighth Russian **veto** on Syria. Particularly during the afternoon meeting, several of the elected members

pleaded for a restoration of Council unity. China, which abstained on the vote, commended the elected members for their efforts to break the impasse with an alternative text.