Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Explanation of vote on draft Syria resolution vetoed by Russia and China

2012-07-19

Thank you Mr President,

The United Kingdom is appalled by the decision of Russia and China to veto this draft resolution aimed at bringing an end to the bloodshed in Syria and to create the conditions for a meaningful political process. It is the third time that Russia and China have blocked efforts by this Council to address the crisis in Syria. More than fourteen thousand innocent Syrians have been killed since Russia and China first vetoed our efforts to stem the violence in October last year.

Since then, the regime has intensified its use of heavy weapons in population centres, including the use of artillery and helicopter gunships. More than 100 civilians are being killed every day . The events in Damascus over the last 48 hours demonstrate the need for urgent and decisive action by the Security Council to stop the downward spiral into chaos which will claim many more innocent lives and affect the stability of the region. Meanwhile, the United Nations Supervision Mission has been rendered inoperable due to the dangerous security situation.

Against this backdrop, we proposed eight days ago a resolution aimed at changing the situation on the ground for the better. Its logic was simple and clear: to use the collective weight of the Council to provide greater support to the work of the Joint UN-Arab League Special Envoy and his efforts to secure implementation of his six point plan. In so doing, we were aiming to create the prospect of a reduction in violence by all sides, to create the conditions for the political process agreed by the Ministerial Action Group in Geneva on 30 June, and to promote a conducive environment in which the UN Mission could resume its operations. We put the resolution under Chapter VII as a clear signal to all parties that their commitments were binding.

Both the Secretary-General and Mr Annan had repeatedly requested that the Council stipulate serious consequences for non-compliance with the Six Point Plan and Resolutions 2042 and 2043. That is precisely what we did in proposing this Resolution. It is an approach supported by the Arab League and all key regional actors. It focused on the removal of heavy weapons as a first step - because we have been repeatedly told by the Envoy and the

Secretary-General that it is the first and most urgent problem that must be tackled and the one which was most likely to alter the dynamic on the ground.

Yet, throughout the negotiation process, Russia and China have chosen not to support the course of action proposed by the Envoy. They claimed their agreement to a transition plan in Geneva as a great step forward. But when it came to turning words into action, taking the decisions required to implement the two resolutions that they have supported, and securing an improvement on the ground that might eventually lead to progress against the transition plan, they choose to refuse engagement.

They argued that a Chapter VII Resolution was somehow designed to seek military action through the backdoor. These arguments are irrational. This Council adopts many Chapter VII Resolutions, most recently on Sudan and South Sudan. This Resolution, like that one, was set under Article 41. It was not under Article 42 of the Charter and could not, therefore, be construed as a precursor to military intervention. We offered flexibility on Russia and China's concerns and gave them more time. But still, they refused to engage. Instead they advocated more of the same approach that has consistently failed to have an effect. Instead of the pressure that Mr Annan had requested, they advocated relying on Assad's empty promises. The same promises that have been made and broken with predictable consistency since November last year. And instead of trying to generate the conditions in which the UN Mission could become effective, they argued for its extension in a manner that wilfully ignored the fact that it was currently unable to operable.

Mr President,

By exercising their veto today, Russia and China are failing in their responsibilities as Permanent members of the Security Council to help resolve the crisis in Syria. They are failing to provide the Joint Envoy and the Secretary General with the support they have asked for. They are failing the people of Syria. They have - for the third time - blocked an attempt by the majority of this Council, supported by most of the international community, to try a new approach. The effect of their actions is to protect a brutal regime. They have chosen to put their national interests ahead of the lives of millions of Syrians.

Mr President,

The consequence of their decision is obvious. Further bloodshed, and the likelihood of descent into all-out civil war.

For our part, we shall continue to work with the Envoy, the Secretary-General and responsible members of the international community to achieve the political transition which is the only way forward for Syria. It is deeply regrettable that this Council has been unable, today, to play the role for which it was established and is duty-bound to fulfil.

Thank you

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