

Possible Vote on Syria Resolution

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What's In Blue

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At press time, a vote was scheduled for this afternoon (18 July) on the UK draft resolution put in blue last Friday (13 July) and co-sponsored by France, Germany, Portugal, and the US (S/2012/538). The draft renews the UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) for 45 days and threatens sanctions if the Syrian government does not cease the use of heavy weapons and withdraw from population centres within 10 days. However, it remained possible that the vote might be postponed to allow for further negotiations if it looked like Russia was willing to engage on coming to a consensus regarding Chapter VII language on the draft text. (The UNSMIS mandate expires this Friday, 20 July.)

During negotiations on the draft resolution on Monday at both expert and permanent representative level, Russia continued to take the position that it would vote against any draft resolution under Chapter VII which included the threat of sanctions. It seems China was more circumspect during negotiations in its criticism of the text, but has nevertheless clearly expressed that it shares Russia's position. Meanwhile, the co-sponsors of the draft resolution remained firm that any renewal of UNSMIS needs to be in the context of a Chapter VII resolution which can change the dynamic on the ground.

It seems some elected Council members are uncomfortable with the UNSMIS renewal being so intricately linked with Chapter VII provisions knowing that the possibility of a veto could leave the Security Council without any reporting or verification capacity in Syria. Nevertheless, these members also appear sensitive to the argument that with such an unstable situation, UNSMIS cannot fulfill its mandate to support Annan's six-point plan and that the Council needs to find other ways of exerting pressure on Damascus and armed opposition groups to cease violence so that UNSMIS can carry out its mission.

No further negotiations were held yesterday on the UK draft as it seemed unlikely the P5 would be able to bridge their differences on the Chapter VII provisions in New York. However, Russia held deputy permanent representative level negotiations yesterday on its draft resolution that renews UNSMIS for three months without any explicit reporting requirements or Chapter VII language. Russia put its draft in blue (S/2012/547) on 13 July after the UK had done so. (According to rule 32 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure "draft resolutions shall have precedence in order of their submission.") Therefore, if a vote is called for on both the UK and Russian drafts then the UK draft would be voted on first.)

It seems many Council members were waiting to see whether UN-Arab League Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan's meeting yesterday with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow would convince Russia of the need for a Chapter VII resolution. The Secretary-General also spoke to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and stressed the

importance of the talks between Annan and Putin given the escalating and alarming situation in Syria. Although no progress was announced following his meeting with Putin, Annan, who is still in Moscow, said that he hoped the Council would continue with its discussions and find language that would allow the UN to “move forward on this critical issue”. It was unclear at press time if any substantial Russian proposals for such consensus language would be forthcoming before today’s scheduled vote.

At press time it appeared there were several possible scenarios that could unfold in the lead up to the 20 July UNSMIS expiry.

The vote could be postponed to later in the week if it seems there is a basis for further negotiation.

The vote on the UK draft could occur as scheduled this afternoon and face the prospect of a veto. China and Russia have vetoed two previous draft resolutions on Syria on 4 October 2011 (S/2011/612) and 4 February 2012 (S/2012/77).

If the UK draft resolution is vetoed, Russia could then call for a vote on its draft. However, some Council members are of the view this is unlikely as it appears the Russian draft does not have the requisite nine votes in favour to be adopted. (Also, if there were a vote without nine Council members in favour then any negative vote by the P3 would not be considered a veto as it would not be overriding the required majority.)

A short-term technical rollover for one or two weeks could be authorised to allow Council members space to agree on UNSMIS’ future. (However, it is possible that the recent determination by the ICRC that Syria was in a state of civil war and the increased escalation of fighting in Damascus this past week, including media reports this morning of a suicide bombing resulting in deaths of several high level Syrian government officials, including the Defence Minister and his deputy, could lead the Secretariat to make the operational decision to withdraw the mission if the situation does not stabilise quickly.)

Separately, Russia broke silence Monday morning on the draft press statement regarding the 12 July Tremseh attacks saying the Council should be briefed by UNSMIS Head Maj-Gen Robert Mood on the incident before issuing any statement. It was unclear at press time whether any such briefing would be organised. It was also unclear whether the Council would react to today’s suicide bombing in Damascus.

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