

Negotiations on a Syria Draft Resolution

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What's In Blue

Posted Fri 9 Mar 2012

The P5 and Morocco (as the Council's Arab Group voice) have been discussing a draft resolution on Syria. It appears that there is still no agreement on a draft text. It now seems unlikely that significant negotiations will take place before the Council's high-level debate on challenges and opportunities in the Middle East on Monday (12 March). The draft resolution is also unlikely to be circulated to the wider membership unless there is agreement among the P5.

Since the last draft resolution was vetoed by China and Russia on 4 February, the situation on the ground has continued to deteriorate. On 1 March, the Council presented a united front in a press statement on the humanitarian aspect of the crisis, sending an important signal to Damascus. (Despite vetoing the two previous resolutions, both China and Russia appear concerned about the effects of the crisis on the civilian population and have been working bilaterally with Damascus to try to find ways of stopping the violence.) The press statement stressed the need to give Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos access to assess the humanitarian situation in Syria. Although previously denied access, four days after the press statement was issued Amos was granted permission by the Syrian authorities to visit between 7 and 9 March.

However, while it seems the P5 negotiations on the draft resolution on Syria have been vigorous, divisions remain. Although the Chinese and Russian position on the political aspects have become more isolated since the 4 February vote (all other Council members voted in favour as opposed to four abstentions on 4 October 2011), it appears that the current text still has red lines that cannot be crossed by both countries and compromise has been difficult.

Two major issues of contention in previous attempts to find consensus on a Council approach to Syria —military intervention and regime change—appear to have been addressed.

Taking into consideration the concerns of a number of Council members, the current draft, as did the 4 February text, contains explicit language ruling out the use of force. The current draft does not make reference to the 22 January decision by the Arab League calling on President Bashar Al-Assad to transfer power to his Vice-President.

This was a major stumbling block in the last draft resolution as it was interpreted as a call for regime change.

Morocco has made clear that the current draft needs to reflect support of the UN and Arab League role in facilitating a Syrian-led political transition but does not seem to be arguing for an explicit reference to the 22 January Arab League decision.

There is a divide over a number of other points. Issues that have been a problem in the past apparently dominated the P5 plus Morocco discussions, particularly language in the draft text establishing parity for the intensity of and responsibility for the violence between the government and the armed opposition. It appears that Russia feels that

Council members are not taking into sufficient consideration that the Syrian government is defending itself against armed rebellion. However, a significant number of Council members appear to share the view that the use of force against the civilian population by the authorities led to armed opposition. This also appears to be the position of the UN conveyed by DPA head, B. Lynn Pascoe, on 28 February when he briefed the Council on Syria. He also indicated that the opposition's firepower appeared to be minimal as compared to the heavy weapons being used by the Syrian army and highlighted a disproportionate use of force.

Language over the sequencing of the withdrawal of the Syrian military and armed opposition also has been problematic. It is possible that those who have an issue with this might be satisfied by an impartial monitoring mechanism coordinating implementation of such a withdrawal. This appears to be a new element in the current draft.

Continuing areas of disagreement are regular follow-up by the Council and the possibility of considering further measures.

Kofi Annan, the UN-Arab League Joint Special Envoy for Syria, is expected to visit Damascus over the weekend. He met Council members in New York last week and apparently expressed the view that, while a unanimously adopted resolution by the Security Council would strengthen his ability to carry out his mandate, another veto would not be helpful. On 8 March, while meeting the Arab League in Cairo, he called for an immediate end to the killings and warned against the use of force to bring an end to the crisis. Media reports indicate that Annan will meet with Assad tomorrow (10 March).

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