



Security Council Fails to Renew Mandate of Joint Investigative Mechanism on Chemical Weapons Use in Syria, as Permanent Member Casts Veto

11 Favour Action, 2 Oppose, 2 Abstain, as Bolivia Adds to Russian Federation's Negative Vote in Rejecting Draft Resolution

Following a negative vote cast by the Russian Federation today, the Security Council failed to renew the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism of the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), formed to determine the perpetrators of chemical-weapons attacks in Syria.

The Council rejected the draft resolution following a vote of 11 in favour to 2 against (Bolivia, Russian Federation), with 2 abstaining (China, Kazakhstan). Had it been adopted, it would have extended the Mechanism's mandate — established by resolution 2235 (2015) and set to expire on 17 November — for a further one year.

In an earlier procedural action, the Council defeated the Russian Federation's proposal to adjourn the meeting by 4 votes in favour to 8 opposed, with 3 abstentions.

Speaking before those actions, the Russian Federation's representative proposed adjourning the meeting until 7 November, saying his delegation wanted to wait for the Mechanism's report on the chemical attacks carried out in Um Housh and Khan Shaykhun, Syria, before extending its mandate. Only two days remained until its release, he noted, emphasizing that the Council should discuss the Mechanism's work and then vote on renewing its mandate. Doing it the other way would be putting the cart before the horse, he said, insisting that tabling the draft today was intended to paint his country in a bad light. The Russian Federation expected an honest, impartial, complete investigation, and would accept clear, incontrovertible evidence of guilt. The United States had already determined who was guilty, and its actions were politicizing the issue, he added.

Bolivia's representative, while condemning any use of chemical weapons, said technical concerns raised about the Mechanism must be resolved and its report evaluated before its mandate could be renewed. Asking why draft resolutions were tabled in the knowledge that they would be vetoed, he insisted that he had not cast his negative vote against the Mechanism but as an appeal for greater efforts for unity in the Council.

Ethiopia's representative said he had voted in favour of the draft resolution, but those responsible for the use of chemical weapons should be punished on the basis of robust and conclusive evidence. However, it was impossible to overlook the concerns voiced by the Russian Federation and Bolivia, which was the reason why politicization must be avoided. Cautioning that today's outcome should not be interpreted as an a priori endorsement of the Mechanism's report, he emphasized that its final version was expected to establish clear responsibility for the two incidents mentioned.

Other supporters of the draft resolution claimed that an early vote was in the interest of continuity in the Mechanism's work and of ensuring impartiality in the critical task of preventing impunity for the use of a terrible weapon. The representative of the United States argued that the Mechanism was under attack by Syria's allies in an attempt to hide the truth and to shield the perpetrators of some of the worst war crimes of the century.

Most of those in favour of the draft called for salvaging Council unity and renewing the Mechanism's mandate at a later date, before it expired. Japan's representative said he had listened carefully to the statements of the draft's opponents, which gave a cause for hope that renewal was still possible. However, Uruguay's representative expressed fear that the pattern of the delayed 2016 extension was repeating itself, recalling that the Mechanism was been unable to operate during that period and many of its experienced staff had left.

Those abstaining from the vote prioritized Council unity, with China's representative arguing that the desire of some Council members to continue consultations on improving the Mechanism should have been accommodated in order to maintain unity.

Other speakers today were representatives of the United Kingdom, Ukraine, Italy, Kazakhstan, Sweden, Senegal, Uruguay, Egypt, and France.

The meeting began at 10:27 a.m. and ended at 11:50 a.m.

[Action on Draft Resolution](#)

VASSILY A. NEBENZIA (Russian Federation) proposed, under Rule 33.3 of the Security Council's Provisional Rules of Procedure, to adjourn the meeting until 7 November, saying it was clear why the premature adoption of the draft resolution had been proposed — to once again dishonour the Russian Federation. Emphasizing that today's decision would in no way have an impact on the future of the Joint Investigative Mechanism, he said that entity would continue to operate independently of any decision. Before voting on the draft, the Mechanism's report should be submitted and discussed, he said, noting that the report would be published in two days. The Russian Federation suggested adjourning the meeting until 7 November and discussing an extension in a calm way, without undue pressure.

MICHELE J. SISON (United States) said her delegation did not agree to the procedural proposal and wanted the vote today since the Mechanism's mandate must be renewed as soon as possible to keep its work on track, without interruption.

MATTHEW RYCROFT (United Kingdom) described the proposal as a cynical attempt to link the mandate to the Mechanism's report, saying that attempting such a link was politicization. To vote today was to avoid politicization, he added, reminding the Council that a year ago, the Mechanism's staff had left and it had been unable to operate for some months.

SACHA SERGIO LLORENTY SOLÍZ (Bolivia) said that, on United Nations Day, the Council should not send a negative signal to the world through its disunity. Putting a draft resolution to the vote while knowing it would be vetoed would not serve any good purpose at all, he emphasized.

The Council then held a procedural vote on the Russian Federation's proposal, rejecting it by 4 in favour to 8 against, with 3 abstentions.

Mr. NEBENZIA (Russian Federation) said what was happening today was not pleasant. "It stinks, in fact," he added, noting that the actions of the United States were politicizing the issue. The Mechanism had been created, with the Russian Federation's participation, to conduct thorough investigations, and its eagerly awaited report should be seen and discussed calmly before the mandate expired, he said, asking: "Why put the cart before the horse?" Recalling the attack by the United States against a Syrian air base, he said it had been carried out after a hasty determination that Syria was guilty. That rush to judgement had, therefore, been predetermined, as had strategies to impugn the Russian Federation. An early vote was the reason behind politicization. Stressing that his delegation expected an honest, impartial, complete investigation by the Mechanism, he said that if there was clear, incontrovertible evidence of guilt, the Russian Federation would accept it on the basis of its professional and impartial nature, not on the basis of who was to blame for Khan Shaykhun. The United States had already determined who was guilty, he said. Introducing the draft resolution today was breaking the Council's unity, which would have negative effects, he added, underlining that the proper order was first the report, then the discussion and then the extension.

The Council then took action on the draft resolution, seeing 11 votes in favour to 2 against (Bolivia, Russian Federation), with 2 abstentions (China, Kazakhstan). The text was not adopted due to the permanent member's negative vote.

Statements

Ms. SISON (United States) said it was not every day that the Council considered an issue so shocking to the conscience of everybody as the use of chemical weapons against civilians. Recalling that the Council had condemned the chemical weapons attacks in Syria and created an impartial and independent investigative body using professional means to investigate attacks and identify those who were guilty, she said that body was under attack by Syria's allies. Was it because its conclusions had been politically inconvenient? There was more work to be done and more chemical weapons attacks to investigate, she said, emphasizing that the Mechanism's vital work must continue without interruption. Expressing deep regret that one member had vetoed the text, she said claims of lack of impartiality would not survive scrutiny. She called upon the Council to reject attacks on the Mechanism, saying they were intended to hide the truth and shield the perpetrators of some of the worst war crimes of the century. The United States called upon the Council to preserve its unity and vote to extend the Mechanism's mandate.

Mr. RYCROFT (United Kingdom) recalled that some four years ago, a Council member had declared that the Council must carefully investigate the use of chemical weapons. Those words had been spoken by the Russian Federation's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, he said, adding that they had lost their meaning because of today's veto. Because of the Russian Federation, the investigation was destined to end prematurely, and the report on Khan Shaykhun would be its last, despite other chemical attacks. When faced with the prospect of the Mechanism revealing the truth, why had the Russian Federation sought to "shoot the messenger"? That country alone had chosen to abuse its veto in support of a regime that had no regard for its own people, he said, underlining that it was not the 11 members who had voted in favour of the draft who had broken the Council's unity, but the Russian Federation, which protected the Syrian regime.

Mr. LLORENTY (Bolivia) condemned the use of chemical weapons as unjustifiable and criminal, underlining that his delegation did not oppose renewal of the mandate. However, the Mechanism should work with a mandate that would be considered after it published its report, he said, adding that technical concerns had been raised and should be resolved. The report should be evaluated before the mandate was renewed, he reiterated, noting that two days remained before the report's publication. Time was therefore not a factor, he said, asking why draft resolutions were put to the vote in the full knowledge that they would be vetoed. The negative vote had not been directed against the Mechanism but had been an appeal for greater effort in order to demonstrate unity, he said.

KORO BESSHO ([Japan](#)) said the Mechanism's work was clearly not finished and his delegation had voted to renew its mandate in order to ensure continuity. At the same time, the delegation had listened to the statements of those who had voted against the draft and hoped the mandate could still be renewed before it expired. It was the responsibility of the Council and all humanity to ensure that chemical weapons were never used, he emphasized.

VOLODYMYR YELCHENKO ([Ukraine](#)) said that he had voted in favour of the draft to ensure that the Mechanism could continue its important work. Rejecting the arguments advanced for opposing the renewal, he said what was really happening was that international norms were being ignored and impartial investigations disparaged by one particular Council member. There were now three weeks left to find a way to preserve the Mechanism's mission, he noted, emphasizing that it was the Council's duty to ensure that international law was respected.

SEBASTIANO CARDI ([Italy](#)) said he had voted in favour of the draft to ensure that accountability for violations of international law remained an important part of the Council's work. The Mechanism was an important instrument in that regard, he said, expressing hope that today's division could be overcome and that the Mechanism's mandate would still be extended. Ending impunity and holding perpetrators of horrendous crimes accountable should unite the Council, not divide it, he stressed.

TEKEDA ALEMU ([Ethiopia](#)) expressed regret that the Council had not been able to adopt the draft resolution since the Mechanism had been created on the basis of consensus. Ethiopia had voted in favour of the text because there remained credible allegations of chemical weapons use in Syria, he said, adding that renewing the mandate should ensure continuity of the Mechanism's work. Despite today's outcome, Ethiopia was hopeful that the Council's unity would be restored and compromise found, because failure to renew the mandate would send the wrong message to the perpetrators. However, today's outcome should not be interpreted as an a priori endorsement of the Mechanism's report, he cautioned, emphasizing that its final version was expected to establish clear responsibility for the two incidents mentioned. Those responsible for the use of chemical weapons should be punished on the basis of robust and conclusive evidence, he said, underlining, however, that it was impossible to overlook the concerns of the Russian Federation and Bolivia, which was the reason why politicization must be avoided.

KAIRAT UMAROV ([Kazakhstan](#)) said his delegation fully endorsed the Mechanism's work, adding that its mandate should be extended in view of continued use of chemical weapons in Syria. The Mechanism's work had lost momentum in 2016 because of a delayed extension, he recalled, emphasizing that such a situation should not be repeated. It was regrettable that common approaches to improving the Mechanism's work had not been found, he said, adding that greater political will was necessary to find the necessary compromise. Since taking a position today would not have led to a solution, Kazakhstan had abstained from the vote, he said, while encouraging the Council to speak with one voice.

OLOF SKOOG ([Sweden](#)) voiced regret at the Council's inability to agree on a technical mandate extension. Sweden fully supported the Mechanism, which played a critical role in the non-proliferation architecture. A timely mandate renewal was essential because there were still 60 cases of alleged chemical weapons use in Syria, he said. Now was the time for the Council to speak with one voice in support of the Mechanism, an effort that demanded good-faith negotiations on the part of everyone.

FODÉ SECK ([Senegal](#)), expressing disappointment that the Council had not been able to retain its unity, said he had voted in favour of the draft because the Mechanism played an essential role in the international non-proliferation architecture and in conducting impartial investigations of chemical substance use in Syria. Continued allegations of the use of such substances demonstrated the need for the Mechanism to continue its work, he said, expressing hope that after its report was released, the Council would still be able to extend its mandate.

ELBIO ROSSELLI ([Uruguay](#)) emphasized that continuity was necessary for the retention of the Mechanism's experienced staff, noting that the human beings who made up the Mechanism must know whether they would still have their jobs in a month's time. In 2016, six months had passed before the Mechanism had been reconfigured and it had not been possible for it to operate during that period, he recalled, stressing that that was not what was needed. Accountability for the use of chemical weapons was critical.

WU HAITAO ([China](#)) said his delegation was deeply concerned about the use of chemical weapons in Syria and opposed their use by anyone, anywhere. Whereas China supported the Mechanism's role as impartial investigator, unity in the Council was crucial to preventing further use of chemical weapons, he emphasized. Some members had wished to continue consultations with a view to improving the Mechanism's performance, and they should have been accommodated in order to maintain unity, he said. It was in that light that China had abstained, he added, calling on all Council members to keep the objective of a political settlement foremost in their minds and to maintain unity towards that goal.

AMR ABDELLATIF ABOULATTA ([Egypt](#)) said he had voted in favour of the draft because of his country's interest in ensuring that those involved in using chemical weapons in Syria were identified. The use and growing proliferation of chemical weapons in that country posed a threat to security in the region and around the world, he said, noting the non-existence of an international system to deter non-State groups from acquiring such weapons. The Mechanism's methodologies must be improved and sites in Syria visited, he said, adding that conducting such visits and collecting available evidence in a timely manner would help in creating a strong foundation for any findings to be issued. The Council could still renew the Mechanism's mandate and improve its methodology, he said, emphasizing that its work must be carried out in an impartial and independent manner, and must not be politicized.

Mr. NEBENZIA ([Russian Federation](#)) took the floor once more, saying he had voted against the draft and regretted that its authors had chosen confrontation. That choice constituted the politicization and cynicism to which the representative of the United States had referred. He said he was very concerned about the use of chemical weapons in Syria, and the Russian Federation's Foreign Minister had indeed said that those responsible must be found. However, that had nothing to do with today's meeting, he said, reiterating that the vote would not have had any impact on the Mechanism's work, which would continue.

Addressing a concern raised by the representative of Uruguay, he said sympathy for the Mechanism's staff and their families should not be an issue for the Council to consider. Noting that some delegations had read from already-prepared statements, he said that apparently they had known in advance that the veto would be used. The meeting had been a spectacle to embarrass one country, he said, voicing regret that it had taken place at all. Those who had requested it had known the scenario in advance. After calm discussion of the report, the extension could be submitted again for a vote, he said.

FRANÇOIS DELATTRE ([France](#)), Council President for October, spoke in his national capacity, saying he deeply regretted the vote's outcome. Chemical weapons attacks in Syria had never stopped, which justified the investigation aimed at finding and punishing those responsible. Today was a missed opportunity to determine responsibility for the use of chemical weapons, whether by the Syrian army or by non-State actors, he said. Since 192 States had committed themselves to renounce the use of chemical weapons, they must all protect and strengthen that particular non-proliferation regime. Describing the non-proliferation commitment as one of the most important pillars of international relations and one of the great achievements of the last decades, he noted that today it was being tested by the nuclear programme of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Today's negative vote could not be the last word, he declared, urging the Council to re-establish the necessary consensus before the Mechanism's mandate ended in November.

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