

Kremlin Opposes UN Vote on Syria

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The Kremlin has emphasized its opposition to a UN resolution condemning Syria's crackdown on pro-democracy protesters and urged the opposition to sit down with President Bashar al-Assad's government for talks on reform.

In an interview published Monday in the Financial Times, President Dmitry Medvedev strongly suggested that Russia would not back any resolution on Syria in the UN Security Council but stopped short of vowing a veto.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called on Assad to implement promised reforms faster but also said opponents must not reject the idea of talks with the government. "This is a bad position," he told reporters.

Medvedev accused Western countries of turning the Security Council resolution that authorized limited military intervention in Libya into "a scrap of paper to cover up a pointless military operation."

He said Russia, which abstained from the March vote on that resolution, would not make the same mistake again.

"I would not like a Syrian resolution to be pulled off in a similar manner," he said.

Britain, France, Germany and Portugal have drafted a UN resolution that would condemn Syria for the crackdown but would not impose sanctions or authorize military action.

Medvedev said Russia was wary of any resolution, but he did not specify whether it would use its veto power as a permanent Security Council member.

"We will be told the resolution reads 'denounce violence,' so some of the signatories may end up denouncing the violence by dispatching a number of bombers," Medvedev said, according to a Kremlin transcript of the interview. "In any event, I do not want this on my conscience."

British Prime Minister David Cameron has warned that any country in the 15-nation council that votes against the resolution or vetoes it will have it "on their conscience."

Syrian rights groups say at least 1,300 civilians have been killed since demonstrations began in March.

But Russia, which has faced criticism from the United States and EU over its treatment of political opponents and its human rights record, is wary of setting a precedent for international involvement in what it says are nations' internal affairs.

Instead, Lavrov said, Russia and Western nations should "call on the opposition not to ignore the offer of discussion of proposed reforms, but to sit down and begin a conversation."

In a speech on Monday, Assad pledged to pursue a national dialogue on reform.

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