

Lavrov Drives Home Russia Stand on Syria

By [The Moscow Times](#)

June 18, 2012

The  Moscow Times

Russia has caught a mass of flak over its stance on Syria — for not supporting the Western powers in their call for action to stop the bloodshed. Or at least that is how this fight is being pitched. The Kremlin sees it differently.

The problem is very simple. The Russians feel that they were lied to in the last UN resolution over Libya. The UN mandate was to stop the fighting there, too, but the "Allies" (for want of a better word) clearly overstepped the power of the mandate and used it as an excuse to support the rebels militarily — up to and including NATO air forces flying full-on sorties against the government's positions — to bring about a victory for the rebels. That wasn't what the Russians signed up to.

So here we are again with the UN asking the Russians (and don't forget the Chinese are also saying "no" for much the same reasons) for a mandate to "bring peace," when recent experience makes it pretty clear that the actual outcome of signing the resolution would

actually bring war — war specifically tasked with ousting Assad and installing a government that is a bit more friendly to the West.

The Russians' objection is not even a pragmatic one (although there is significant business between Moscow and Damascus and has been for decades) but is based on principle.

Put simply: If the West uses UN mandates to "protect the interests of the people" in other people's countries and these mandates become a fig leaf for violent action to overthrow governments, then at some point someone is going to suggest the UN do the same to Russia (and China), as it is (like Libya and Syria) not a democratic country.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov took to the airwaves last week with a 3,000-word [statement](#) published in the Huffington Post, which makes the case forcefully. It is worth a read. I reproduce the key quote here:

"The point is," Lavrov wrote, "what should be done if the showdown between the authorities and the opposition does assume the form of violent, armed confrontation? The answer seems obvious: External actors should do their best to stop the bloodshed and support a compromise involving all parties to the conflict. When deciding to support UN Security Council Resolution 1970 and making no objection to Resolution 1973 on Libya, we believed that these decisions would help limit the excessive use of force and pave the way for a political settlement. Unfortunately, the actions undertaken by NATO countries under these resolutions led to their grave violation and support for one of the parties to the civil war, with the goal of ousting the existing regime, damaging in the process the authority of the Security Council."

If the West insists on a UN resolution with no guarantees so that UN, NATO or other forces can use the mandate to change the regime rather than stop the fighting, then the Russians are right to refuse to sign off on such a plan. However, they then become the demons for failing to act while the children of Syria die. The truth is that the West's ongoing failure to acknowledge Russia's genuine concerns and interests is the problem here. When will the West finally engage with Russia on terms of mutual respect rather than the bullying and browbeating that has become the standard modus operandi of international diplomacy these days?

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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