Explanation of Vote by the U.S. Mission to the U.N. on a Draft UN Security Council Resolution to Extend the Mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism

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Ambassador Nikki Haley

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https://usun.state.gov/remarks/8111

Thank you, Mr. President. Chapter Seven of the UN Charter gives this Council the responsibility to “determine the existence of any threat to peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and…make recommendations…to maintain or restore international peace and security.” Among the greatest threats to peace and security is the use of chemical weapons. That’s why, for more than two decades, the international community has outlawed the production, stockpiling, and use of chemical weapons. And for almost half a decade, this Council has worked tirelessly to put an end to the use of these weapons in Syria.

But for the tenth time on Syria and the fourth time on chemical weapons, Russia has actively obstructed the international community’s ability to identify the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks. Russia has issued vetoes before to prevent Council action and accountability in Syria. Russia has invented reasons not to support a mechanism it helped create because it did not like its scientific conclusions. Russia has acted to obstruct these investigations many times. But today, it strikes a deep blow.

Russia has killed the Joint Investigative Mechanism, which has overwhelming support of this Council. And by eliminating our ability to identify the attackers, Russia has undermined our ability to deter future attacks. Assad and ISIS will no longer be on notice for the use of chemical weapons by Russia’s actions today. The message to anyone listening is clear: in effect, Russia accepts the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

How, then, can we trust Russia’s supposed support for peace in Syria? How can anyone take Russia’s proposal of political talks in Sochi seriously? I’ve lost count of how many times I’ve stood in this chamber and implored Russia to do the right thing in Syria. But instead, Russia has played games.

Russia wants a mechanism, but not an independent one. They want reporting, but not if it blames Syria. If you pay attention, you will notice that the Russians think the JIM works great when it finds ISIS at fault for chemical weapons. But when it is one of their friends who is the perpetrator, the problem is suddenly the JIM, not their friend who committed the crime. But Russia knows how bad this looks to defend a regime’s use of chemical weapons. So they attempt to create a distraction. In this case, the distraction is the resolution that they offered. It would also allow Russia or any other member to micromanage the JIM. It puts this Council in the absurd position of putting the fox in charge of the hen house; having countries like Russia and Syria dictate how, when, and where we investigate the use of chemical weapons.

In recent weeks, the United States has worked with great effort to work with Russia in drafting this resolution. It’s a shame that we found out today they had planned to veto it the entire time. We revised our resolution three times to incorporate the concerns of Russia and all Council members. At the same time, Russia refused to hold a single consultation on its own draft, while we held many consultations. It is clear now that the only concern Russia had was that the JIM even existed and that it was capable of finding the truth. Russia had hoped to bury the truth about chemical weapons in Syria, but they have failed. We know who is behind these attacks; the JIM has provided that information time and time again.

The United States will not give up trying to achieve justice for the victims in Syria.

Tragically, these attacks are ongoing. New cases are being alleged.

Russia has destroyed our best tool for attributing these attacks, but it is not our only tool to end this barbaric practice. There is the Commission of Inquiry on Syria. There is the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria, which is mandated to generate the evidence to bring fair and independent criminal proceedings against those who commit atrocities in Syria. And, if and when it is necessary, there is the United States of America.

Regardless of what its Russian protectors do here in the Security Council, the Assad regime should be on clear notice: the United States does not accept Syria’s use of chemical weapons. As we did in April, we will do it again if we must. We will defend the international standard against chemical weapons use. It would be wise for the Assad regime to heed this warning.

This Council created the JIM in a rare moment of unity. Thank you to the rest of the Council for their support. But what a shame it is that Russia has brought us to this point. What a shame it is that Russia has revealed itself to be a government whose allegiance is to the Syrian regime, not the truth or the protection of innocent civilians.

Russia may have succeeded in silencing one independent voice in Syria today, but there are others who will carry on this work. And we will not stop until there is justice for the victims and accountability for the perpetrators of the chemical weapons attacks in Syria.

Thank you, Mr. President.