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From: OpsNewsTicker
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To: NEWS-Russia; NEWS-China; NEWS-IO; NEWS-Mahogany; NEWS-EUR
Subject: Russia, China veto UN resolution condemning Syria (Reuters)

UNITED NATIONS (Reuters) - Russia and China joined forces Tuesday to veto a European-drafted U.N. Security Council resolution condemning Syria and hinting that it could face sanctions if it continues its crackdown on protesters.

The resolution received nine votes in favor and four abstentions from Brazil, India, Lebanon and South Africa. Russia and China cast the only votes against the resolution, which was drafted by France with the cooperation of Britain, Germany and Portugal.

"We cannot today doubt the meaning of this veto of this text," French U.N. Ambassador Gerard Araud told the 15-nation council. "This is not a matter of wording. It is a political choice. It is a refusal of all resolutions of the council against Syria."

"This veto will not stop us," he added. "No veto can give carte blanche to the Syrian authorities."

Russian Ambassador Vitaly Churkin told the council that Moscow's veto reflected "a conflict of political approaches" between Russia and the European council members.

Churkin said that Moscow was firmly opposed to the threat of sanctions against Damascus, adding that what he described as the confrontational approach of the European delegations was "against the peaceful settlement of the crisis."

He reiterated his concerns that passing the European resolution on Syria could have opened the door to a Libya-style military intervention in the Syrian authorities' six-month crackdown on anti-government demonstrations there.

Churkin added, however, that Moscow would prefer it if Syria was "quicker with implementing the promised changes." He was referring to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's promised democratic reforms.

Chinese Ambassador Li Baodong said that Beijing opposed the idea of "interference in (Syria's) internal affairs."

The decision by Russia and China to use their veto power indicates that the Security Council might be stuck in a longer-term deadlock on issues related to the Middle East and the Arab Spring pro-democracy movements in the region, Western diplomats told Reuters.

For months, Russia, China, Brazil, India and South Africa -- the "BRICS" countries -- have criticized the

United States and European council members for allegedly allowing NATO to overstep its Security Council mandate to protect civilians in Libya.

No BRICS country supported the Syria resolution.

The failed resolution, which was drawn up by France in cooperation with Britain, Germany and Portugal, was a watered-down version of previous drafts that had threatened Syria with sanctions if it ignored international demands that it halt its crackdown on pro-democracy protesters.

Later drafts removed the word sanctions, though this was not enough to satisfy Russia and China.

The United Nations says Syrian military operations against demonstrators have killed at least 2,700 civilians.

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