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Subject: Russia digs in heels on Syria resolution (Reuters)

MOSCOW, Jan 17 (Reuters) - Russia signalled on Tuesday it would not make major concessions over its draft Security Council resolution to end bloodshed in Syria, sticking by its key ally in the Middle East.

Moscow and Western members of the U.N. body have been deeply divided over the uprising against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov did little to suggest there was sufficient common ground to agree a resolution with France, Britain and the United States.

Syria is Moscow's chief ally in the region, one of its biggest arms customers and home to naval base it uses. A Russian-operated ship docked in Syria last week that carried ammunition, Russian and Cypriot sources said.

Western capitals are pushing for strong condemnation of Syria and Western diplomats have said they cannot accept Russian wording they say assigns equal blame to the government and opposition for violence the United Nations says has killed more than 5,000 people, mostly civilians.

Gatilov said the West's proposed changes to its Dec. 15 draft resolution had "in essence emasculated" the document, removing text affirming Syria's sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention in its internal affairs.

"These most important, key clauses were simply crossed out by our Western partners," Gatilov told a news conference. "We cannot accept that approach."

Any resolution had to assign blame to both the government and its opponents, he said. "To say only that the Syrian authorities are responsible for everything would be wrong."

At the same time, he added, Russia was "not shutting the door on negotiations on the draft. We are ready to discuss all questions with our Western partners."

Gatilov spoke as mid-level diplomats from Security Council members, including China, prepared for talks on the third version of the draft resolution, a document Western diplomats said on Monday was confusing.

Moscow's surprise presentation of the draft last month raised Western hopes that action was possible after Russia and China in October vetoed a European-drafted resolution threatening sanctions against Syria.

But there has been little progress since then, and Western diplomats have privately accused Moscow of delaying tactics to give Assad more time.

As well as stressing Moscow's opposition to any Western backed intervention in Syria, similar to NATO's campaign in Libya, Gatilov also cautioned against Arab involvement, as Qatar has mooted.

He said anyone thinking about sending troops should "consider very carefully what the use of forces from outside, Arab or otherwise, could lead to".

"I don't think this would lead to anything good, and it certainly would not lead to the resolution of the problems that exist."

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