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Washington's UN Temper Tantrum

| [More](#) ^[1]

|
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Dmitri Medvedev with Hu Jintao

(www.kremlin.ru) ^[3] U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice huffed that her country was “disgusted” by Russia and China’s decision to veto a UN Security Council resolution condemning the violence in Syria and calling for an immediate end to that bloodshed. Their actions, ^[4] [she](#) ^[4] ^[4] [added](#) ^[4], were “shameful” and “unforgivable.” Not only could Ambassador Rice apparently use a refresher course in diplomatic language, Washington’s response also betrays a troubling arrogance on two levels.

First, U.S. officials seem to believe that even such major powers as Russia and China should simply kowtow to the United States and adopt whatever measure Washington and its allies want on any subject, even when such a measure might be contrary to the interests of Moscow and Beijing. That is an offensive attitude that is provoking more and more irritation and resentment not just in those capitals but in such places as Ankara, Brasilia and New Delhi as well. Someone needs to convey a message to Rice and other Obama-administration officials—and much of the U.S. foreign policy community—that America’s “unipolar moment” is over and that other powers

in the international system are increasingly unwilling to take dictation from Washington.

Second, U.S. leaders apparently assume that their Russian and Chinese counterparts have severe cases of amnesia and, therefore, do not recall how the United States and its NATO allies repeatedly exploited and perverted previous UN Security Council resolutions regarding other situations. Vitaly Churkin, Russia's ambassador to the UN, clearly had suspicions about the prospect that even a seemingly mild resolution on the violence in Syria could be twisted for more ambitious policy goals. Although he condemned the bloodshed in Syria, Churkin cited Russian concerns about "regime change" intentions by "influential members of the international community."

Given the track record of the United States and its NATO partners, Churkin was hardly being paranoid. He very likely recalled the 1999 UN Security Council resolution on Kosovo, which Moscow and Beijing reluctantly accepted following NATO's unauthorized air war against Serbia, and how Washington and the European powers later ignored the provision that explicitly considered Kosovo still to be Serbian territory, albeit under international occupation. In blatant violation of that provision, the United States and key NATO countries bypassed the UN Security Council and recognized Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in February 2008. Moscow and Beijing both complained vehemently that the action of the Western powers was not only illegal, it set a terrible international precedent that could cause problems for numerous countries, including Russia and China.

And Churkin likely recalled the more recent episode in which Moscow and Beijing foolishly accepted a UN Security Council resolution authorizing limited air strikes in Libya, supposedly for the purpose of protecting civilian populations. The ink was barely dry on that resolution before the United States, Britain and France used extensive air strikes to assist rebel forces opposing the regime of Muammar Qaddafi. In other words, an ostensibly humanitarian mission became a cynical fig leaf for a regime change strategy that NATO was pursuing.

Having been burned on those and other occasions when they went along with UN initiatives favored by the United States and its allies, it is hardly surprising that Moscow and Beijing would be suspicious and hypercautious about even a seemingly innocuous resolution on Syria's violence. Susan Rice's temper tantrum in response to their vetoes will certainly not allay suspicions about U.S. motives. Indeed, that reaction will likely intensify Russian and Chinese wariness.

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