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

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In a world in which the Council’s time and attention could be productively devoted to a hundred different things, Russia is wasting our time. Conflicts are raging. Outlaw states are acquiring nuclear weapons. The human dignity of millions is violated every day. Brutal regimes are using chemical weapons on their own people.

All the members of this Council and their staff have worked for months on preserving and strengthening the Joint Investigative Mechanism. We have worked knowing that lives were at stake. We have worked knowing the international chemical weapons nonproliferation regime was also at stake. And all that time – hundreds of hours – has been for nothing.

As we have long suspected, Russia does not now and has never had any intention of making this time productive for this Council and the international community. Russia’s veto – its second in 24 hours – shows us that Russia has no interest in finding common ground with the rest of this Council to save the JIM. Russia will not agree to any mechanism that might shine a spotlight on the use of chemical weapons by its ally, the Syrian regime. It’s as simple and shameful as that.

Japan’s draft resolution – a short-term measure to buy us more time to find a way forward – was a stop-gap measure. But it was our last, best chance to stay united. Adoption of this resolution would have shown the world that this Council will always try to overcome our differences, especially when confronted by the most serious threats to peace and security.

In recent weeks, all Council members have professed an interest in credible, impartial investigations of chemical weapons use in Syria. And all Council members have underscored the need for the JIM to employ high standards and present credible evidence. Japan’s resolution tried to build on these points of agreement.

Russia was one of the voices calling for an independent and impartial JIM. In the resolution they offered yesterday, they called on the Secretary-General to solicit recommendations from Council members to strengthen the JIM. As a sign of their willingness to compromise and their openness to addressing Russia’s concerns, the Japanese included in their resolution a provision that is virtually identical to the Russian language.

I invite my colleagues to examine the two resolutions side-by-side: the language in the resolution just vetoed by our Russian friends was virtually the same as the text in their own resolution. And still they saw fit to waste our time.

Russia’s actions – today and in recent weeks – have been designed to delay, to distract, and ultimately to defeat the effort to secure accountability for chemical weapons attacks in Syria. Russia never invited Council members to provide input on its own draft resolution – a resolution that yesterday received only four votes in favor. And Russia declined to propose any textual edits to the U.S. draft. We even incorporated elements of the Russian draft into our own in the hope that they would engage with us.

Indeed, from the very beginning, Russia has not negotiated with any of us. Russia has just dictated and demanded. That’s not how the Security Council is supposed to work. That’s not how the Security Council can work.

I want to extend the sincere thanks of the United States to those Council members who worked so hard – and gave Russia a second, third, fourth, and fifth chance – to protect innocent civilians from chemical attacks. It is a credit to you – and a win for the cause of the nonproliferation of chemical weapons – that this resolution received such broad support.

There remains overwhelming international support for investigating chemical weapons attacks in Syria and for holding accountable the perpetrators.

And to the families of the victims of chemical weapons in Syria – and to the Syrian children, women, and men who may be victims of future attacks – I extend our most sincere apologies. Know that the United States, along with the rest of this Council, will not give up on seeking justice for your lost loved ones and protection for your families. Know that Russia can obstruct this Council but it cannot obstruct the truth. With the unity of this Council, or alone and unrestrained by Russia’s obstructionism, we will continue to fight for justice and accountability in Syria.

Thank you.