

**Russia, China, it's over to you**  
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**By Kevin Rudd**

Believe it - the human cry for freedom and democracy is universal. In Tunisia, what began as a single man's protest, so desperate that he set himself on fire, became a symbol of the yearning for democracy. We have since been moved by the courage of citizens who sought what is naturally theirs in Egypt, Libya and, right now, Syria.

The Assad regime's response has been brutal. An estimated 2900 Syrians now lie dead. Still more have been harmed, imprisoned and tortured. The world was rightly sickened by this. But the Assad regime has shown neither remorse nor any will to change course. Indeed, the violence is escalating.

Australia has consistently called for an end to the violence in Syria, for meaningful political change, and for concerted international pressure. That is why Australia deeply regrets the obstruction of UN Security Council action against Syria.

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On October 4 in New York, China and Russia vetoed a Security Council resolution demanding that the Syrian authorities cease human rights violations, allow fundamental freedoms for the Syrian people, and alleviate the humanitarian situation. Nine of 15 members supported the resolution. Importantly, many of Syria's neighbours are part of the global outcry - the Arab League and the Gulf Co-operation Council have called for an end to the bloodshed.

China and Russia's veto therefore is out of step with the international community's calls on Damascus to stop its brutality and respond to the Syrian people's legitimate aspirations. The veto shows disrespect for the brave Syrians who have risked their lives and perversely, it also hands a victory to the Assad regime at a time it is reportedly making mass arrests. Russia argued the resolution was based on a philosophy of confrontation, while China claimed the threat of sanctions complicated the situation.

China and Russia now bear a particular responsibility for persuading Syria to end the violence and implement meaningful change. Australia will continue to intensify pressure on Damascus and urge further international action. We again call on President Bashar al-Assad to step down immediately, and for political reform to begin. Australia's autonomous sanctions impose travel and financial restrictions against 34 individuals and 13 entities connected to the violence and repression in Syria, including President Assad himself. We will consider suitable opportunities to widen these measures in co-operation with our friends.

Australia will continue to make full use of the multilateral system, including the UN Human Rights Council, to help bring events in Syria to light. The appointment of a UN Special Envoy on Syria, which I first proposed to the UN Secretary-General in April, would be an important complementary step. In an atmosphere of claim and counterclaim, international monitors are required to establish the facts. Australia has consistently called for Syria's referral to the International Criminal Court - consistent with the UN Human Rights Commissioner.

In sum, Australia stands with the Syrian people at this grave moment - as we have with the people of Libya, Egypt and Tunisia. Australia holds that democracy is a universal principle, consistent with the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1976. Our diplomacy will continue to be active in the Middle East - based on our national values and interests, and expressed through the practice of creative middle power diplomacy.

**Kevin Rudd is the Minister for Foreign Affairs.**

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