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[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

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## With Arabs taking control of their fate, is the UN still relevant?

Sarah Mousa

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In a December interview with Barbara Walters, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad commented that the United Nations was not a credible institution, that it is just a "game" in which countries partake. While "credible" may not be the most apt description, certainly not for the entirety of the UN, Assad's questioning of the sanctity of the institution is not as off-key as his political record.

The recent [rejection](#) of a UN Security Council proposal to support the Arab League peace initiative for Syria due to Russian and Chinese veto is not as much of a nadir for the Syrian revolution as it is for the UN as an institution.

The UN Security Council stands as a relic of a past age; rather than voicing global concerns, it is a platform for permanent members to confirm the hierarchy of the world order. The five permanent members, those countries that were deemed as the greatest powers at the post-World War II establishment of the UN, each individually have the authority to [veto](#) any resolution.

The veto is often used by these great powers not out of concern for keeping peace, as the council was supposedly created to do, but to secure perceived interests - however contradictory they may be to basic principles of humanity. This recent resolution on Syria can be added to a long list of rejected Security Council Resolutions that have been detriment to the populations in the Arab world.

The United States has often used its power to veto resolutions associated with Israel. In February 2011, a resolution condemning Israeli settlements, deemed illegal by the UN itself, was rejected when the United States used its veto power. Last autumn, President of the

Palestinian National Authority Mahmoud Abbas' bid for statehood at the UN was tainted by US threats to veto.

## **Arab revolutions**

Although it is not as clearly entrenched in its structure, the Arab League is similarly an institution which, rather than achieving its goal of facilitating closer ties within the region, is often influenced by the interests of the governments it represents - in proportion to their economic and strategic power. This is especially problematic when the issues at hand threaten, either directly or indirectly, the survival of the very governments that constitute the organisation.

It took the Arab League more than seven months to significantly react to the Syrian revolution, and most, if not all, of its efforts have been deemed failures. The observer mission sent to the country issued contradictory messages, did not autonomously visit turbulent areas and finally halted its mission in the context of escalating violence and withdrawal of support from Gulf states.

The Arab League has failed to play any leading role in the revolutions of member states, often reacting only when the unsustainability of a leader is absolutely evident. Throughout most of the Egyptian revolution, the league went no further than calling for reform.

The global community, outside of formal institutions, dealt with each revolution differently - as short term individual interests took precedence over principles. In the case of [Tunisia](#), a country of less strategic importance than some of its neighbours, the revolution was widely praised. The [Egyptian](#) revolution was greeted with more hesitation, before its overwhelming popularity became evident.

Resource-wealthy [Libya](#) was readily targeted by NATO troops. In [Yemen](#), a crucial partner in the United States' battle with terrorism, the reaction was less enthusiastic. And many have forgotten that a movement even exists in [Bahrain](#), where empowerment of the Shia majority could make way for Iranian influence.

But the Arab revolutions have shown that while international condemnation, military actions or sanctions can hasten the downfall of a regime, the people and their willingness to continue demanding their rights is the determining factor of success.

As Russia and China vetoed a resolution that took 11 months and more than 5,000 deaths to even be discussed, hundreds were being killed in a military attack on the city of [Homs](#). But the day was not a loss for the revolution, as Syrian protesters [across the world](#) took matters into their own hands.

## **Attack on Syrian Embassy**

In Egypt, Syrian exiles mobilised upon hearing news of the attacks on Homs that left over 200 dead in just a few hours. In the early hours, on February 4, more than 100 young protesters

gathered at the Syrian Embassy in Cairo, with the goal of staging a sit-in that would result in the expulsion of the Syrian ambassador to Egypt. Some protesters stormed the embassy, demolishing parts of the entry floor.

The protesters were then greeted by thugs, who those present were convinced were hired by the ambassador himself. This was the second attack on the Syrian embassy, and, while Egyptian security guards stood aside as protesters smashed portraits of Bashar al-Assad the previous week, a dozen Syrian protesters were detained this time.

As news of their trial circulated, along with fear that they would be sent to Damascus, where they would likely, if not certainly, be executed upon arrival, protesters gathered once again. More than 50 young Syrian exiles boarded a train from Alexandria to join those in Cairo who gathered in front of the Abdeen courthouse, a few blocks away from Tahrir Square.

The protesters stood in front of the courthouse for more than 12 hours, calling for the release of the detainees, the expulsion of the Syrian ambassador and chanting against the Assad clan and the ruling Baath party. At one point during the protests, courthouse employees reportedly opened the second floor windows and joined in with the chants, to the euphoria of the crowd. The detainees were released shortly afterwards, with minor charges for the damage. The protesters considered the day a victory, because it was clear they had support from the most valued entity - the people, both Syrians and Egyptians who rallied in support of the cause.

A few blocks away from the courthouse, at Tahrir Square, people were also taking things into their own hands. The Ultras, the soccer fans known for their crafty anti-government chants, have been staging protests and sit-ins for the past several days over the government's most atrocious post-revolution act, the Port Said massacre which left more than 70 soccer fans dead in just a few hours.

The role of the state was lucid and widely considered the military's revenge on the youth who mobilise change. As they continue to get hit with tear gas, which the US will not cease arming the Egyptian government with (because of State Department claims that there is no evidence of misuse), the Egyptian youth are not waiting for international outrage or UN resolutions to rid their country of military rule.

The UN Security Council's rejection of the Syria plan fell on the [anniversary of the Hama Massacre of 1982](#), in which up to 40,000 residents were killed in a military attack on the city. It was a stark reminder for Syrians of the domestic and international silence that reigned then, and of their responsibility to react now - even if no one else will.

The regime in Syria will not fall at the hands of outside entities, but at the hands of the Syrian people inside and outside of the country, and the Free Syrian Army, a brave force that helps shield citizens from the brutality of the Assad regime. While international pressure may have saved some bloodshed in Syria, a lack thereof will certainly not doom the revolution.