

Disarmament Committee

Measures to eradicate the production, stockpiling and use of all forms of chemical weapons in Syria



Forum:	Disarmament Committee
Issue:	Measures to eradicate the production, stockpiling and use of all forms of chemical weapons in Syria
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Introduction

The use of chemical weapons in warfare began during World War I, where militaries used common and well-known chemical agents and placed them into standard munitions, such as artillery shells. Chemical weapon use has drastically been modernized and changed in order to become a deadly and agonizing force. Chemical weapon use in Syria is a detrimental issue that needs addressing. The use of such chemical weapons in the Syrian civil war has been confirmed by the United Nations, and thus measures of preventing further such use must be put into place. The first confirmations of the use of chemical weapons originated in the Ghouta attack outside of Damascus and an attack in the suburbs of Aleppo both taking place in 2013. Since these allegations, the UN and the OPCW have worked together in order to investigate these and many other attacks which have allegedly involved chemical weapons, however, despite this, the Syrian Government has not been forced to take responsibility for these attacks.

The issue has many nuances and is not straight forward due to the many parties that are involved in the Syrian civil war, there are no longer purely two sides against each other, as many groups and nations have now become involved. This indicates that Syrian forces may no longer be merely responsible for arranging their own arms or chemical weapons but can rather get them from other places and nations and placing blame then becomes difficult.

Definition of Key Terms

Chemical Weapons

The simple definition of a chemical weapon is a weapon (usually contained in a delivery system of a bomb or a shell), which contains a toxic chemical. Toxic chemicals that have been developed for chemical weapons are often blistering, blood, nerve, or choking agents. Known agents are as follows: blistering agents such as vesicants, blood agents such



as hydrogen cyanide, nerve agents: sarin and soman, and choking agents: chlorine and phosgene.

Chemical Warfare

Involves using toxic chemicals and not to be confused with biological and nuclear warfare. This type of warfare is different from nuclear warfare and biological warfare, which together make up NBC, the military acronym for nuclear, biological, and chemical (warfare or weapons).

Nerve Agents

The most toxic and rapidly acting of the known chemical warfare agents. Poisoning by a nerve agent can cause heavy salivation, seizures, involuntary urination, and loss of control of respiratory muscles leading to eventual death. Nerve agents can be absorbed through respiratory pathways or through the skin. For example, sarin.

Sarin

Nerve agent, which is difficult to detect due to its odourless, tasteless and colourless character. It is considered 20 times more deadly than cyanide as it can cause death within minutes of exposure.

Stockpiling

Stockpiling indicates the accumulation of a large number of chemical weapons. If countries were stockpiling this would mean that they were collecting a large amount for later use. The Geneva Protocol also officially bans the stockpiling of chemical weapons.

Human Rights Watch

An international non-governmental organisation that strives to conduct research and advocate for human rights.

General Overview

The start of the issue begins at the origins of the Syrian civil war and how many parties are involved and that then brings us to the events that are more recently occurring.



Start of the Civil War

The unrest in Syria began during the 2011 Arab Spring, a large wave of anti-government protests along the Middle East and North Africa. Protests began in March 2011 which then further escalated into violent suppression of such protests. The protestors demanded new democratic reforms and the guarantee of human rights which included an increase of freedoms. They wanted an end to corruption and fought for the freedom of political prisoners. After not getting any response, the protests quickly evolved to be a call to overthrow the Assad government altogether. The protests became more and more violent as the country saw a rise in armed militias.

While the UN aimed to broker a ceasefire, the conflict escalated and became a full-fledged civil war on June 12, 2012. The protests quickly evolved and turned into a war fought by a multitude of groups, the Syrian government and its allies, the Sunni Arab rebel groups such as the Free Syrian Army, the Kurdish forces, and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). While the civil war is still being fought with many groups involved, the accusations of chemical weapon usage has been mostly against the Syrian government itself.

1925 Geneva Protocol and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)

After the horrendous use of chemical weapons in World War I, the Geneva Protocol was created and signed in order to stop the use and production of chemical agents. This prohibits the use of chemical weapons and biological weapons, unless nations are retaliating with chemical weapons if they had already been attacked with such weapons. The Geneva Protocol was drafted and signed in 1925, at the Conference for the Supervision of the International Trade in Arms and Ammunition.

The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) is a multilateral treaty which bans the production, development, stockpiling, acquisition, transfer, or use of chemical weapons and requires all states to destroy their stockpiles safely. The CWC was opened for signature in 1993 and entered into force in 1997, the treaty has 192 members, including Syria as it joined the CWC on September 12, 2013.

Allegations of Chemical Weapon Use

The allegations of chemical weapons attacks in Syria began in 2013, when attacks were reported in Aleppo and Damascus where about 25 people were killed, and dozens were injured. The Assad regime claimed that it was the opposition forces that were using chemical weapons while fighting there and not the government forces. After this incident, many more



claims and reports of chemical weapons attacks surfaced. According to Human Rights Watch, an international non-governmental organization that strives to conduct research and advocate for human rights, documents that there have been at least 85 chemical weapons attacks in Syria since 2013. The Syrian government has never claimed responsibility for these attacks.

After the accusations of attacks surfaced, UN launched international investigations into the chemical weapons attacks and by 2014 concluded with a high degree of confidence that many chemicals, such as chlorine gas, Sulphur mustard, and sarin, had been used to kill or injure civilians.

International Intervention

The UN and OPCW has always strived to be involved in the chemical weapon situation in Syria. In 2015, the UN Security Council established the OPCW-UN Joint Mechanism in Syria (JIM) in order to further investigate and determine responsibility for the chemical weapons use. Yet the international intervention escalated after a serious chemical weapons attack in Douma. In April of 2018, after a reported chemical weapons attack, the United States, France, and the United Kingdom all launched strikes on three of the Syrian Chemical Weapons factories, in the first coordinated Western military defense. This attack came after many leaders of all these nations had condemned the use of chemical weapons previously. The attack was strictly targeting the chemical weapons factories in order to prevent further creation and use of such. Syria responded to the air strikes by claiming that the defense systems in Syria shot down most of the rockets.



Major Parties Involved

Syrian Government

The government is still in an ongoing civil war with many parties involved. The Syrian government is the main faction that has been accused of using chemical weapons against the civilians. They have fervently denied any wrongdoing or confirmed any attack using chemical weapons.

OPCW (Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons)

The OPCW is the implementing body of the CWC (Chemical Weapons Convention), which began in 1997. The OPCW and its member states have the goal of preventing chemical weapons to ever be used in warfare. In regard to Syria, the OPCW has worked closely with the state in order to aid in the destruction of the chemical weapons that Syria possessed. From 2013-2017 the OPCW oversaw the chemical weapon destruction in Syria and claimed that all of the chemical weapons had been removed from the country. However, the OPCW could only authenticate the destruction of chemical weapons that had been declared by the Syrian government in the first place. The OPCW has also been involved in many fact-finding missions that have been conducted in regard to any report of chemical weapons attacks. Through these fact-finding missions, the OPCW has found overwhelming evidence that indicates that such chemical weapons have been used.

United States

The United States has consistently made it clear that the use of such chemical weapons is not tolerated, and severe retaliation will occur. Thus, the United States has always been on the forefront against the Syrian government and has enacted retaliation. The USA has banned the production or transport of chemical weapons in 1969 and began eradication of its chemical weapons disposal in the 1960s.

The Russian Federation

The Russian Federation is one of few nations that has openly supported the Syrian government and President Bashar Al-Assad. Russia has given military backing to President Assad's official army, claiming that they wish to fight the threat of ISIL. Russia has also continued to defend the Syrian government in the UN Security Council, often vetoing against propositions or resolutions drafted by the United States or other nations regarding the use of chemical weapons. Russia and other nations have often clashed at the topic of chemical



weapons in Syria as Russia has disputed findings of the JIM and OPCW and has vetoed in favor of Syria 12 times at the Security Council.

Furthermore, after the air strikes on the factories of the chemical weapons by the UK, USA, and France, Russia responds claiming that there will be consequences after the attack as their warnings were ignored by the western nations.

France

After complications with the JIM, and its abolishment, France took action and launched the International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, which was a new initiative designed to replace the JIM and increase information about reported attacks and publically sanction individuals for their involvement. However, this initiative has no power outside of the UN and is heavily criticized by Russia. France was also one of the nations, which along with the UK and the USA carried out precision strikes on the factories.

United Kingdom

Along with France and the United States, the United Kingdom coordinated with these nations in order to carry out air strikes on the production facilities of chemical weapons. Furthermore, the United Kingdom strongly encourages the Syrian Republic to get rid of their chemical weapons.

Timeline of Key Events

Timeline of events in reverse chronological order leading up to present day.

Date	Description of Event
December 2010	The overthrow of the government and revolution in Tunisia marks the starts of the "Arab Spring". The protests begin in Syria when demonstrators take the streets after school children paint anti-government graffiti and get arrested for it. The army of President Bashar al-Assad is involved.
July 23 2012	Syria's Foreign Minister confirms that Syria has chemical weapons yet that these weapons would not be used against their own people but rather only against external forces.
December 23 2012	The first of many suspected chemical attacks take place in Syria, where people were killed in Homs by a poisonous gas. Chemical weapon attacks were reported in Aleppo and Damascus



March 19, 2013 where about 25 people were killed and dozens were injured. The Assad regime claimed that it was the opposition forces that were using chemical weapons while fighting there.

March 21, 2013 Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General, announces that the UN will conduct an investigation into the possible use of chemical weapons in Syria. This investigation would be in cooperation with WHO (World Health Organization) and the OPCW (Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons).

September 2013 In accordance with terms negotiated by the United States and Russian, Syria states that they are willing to submit a declaration of its stockpiles of chemical weapons to the OPCW.

November 30, 2013 The OPCW claims that the chemical weapons in Syria will be destroyed through hydrolysis.

July 2014 The OPCW states that all chemical weapons have been removed from Syria.

April 4, 2017 Reports emerge that the chemical weapon and nerve agent, sarin gas, was used in the Idlib province and the attack has believed to be perpetrated by the Syrian government yet the government denied its responsibility.

April 12, 2017 Russia vetoes a UN Security Council Resolution to condemn the April 4 chemical attack as they claim that the attack was prematurely attributed to Assad.

April 7, 2018 Reports surface about large chemical weapons attack in Douma killing several dozens. Human Rights Watch claims has documented 85 chemical weapons attacks since 2013 in Syria.

April 14, 2018 France, the United Kingdom, and the United States all launched strikes on three Syrian chemical weapon facilities. Russian Ambassador Anatoly Antonov did not condone the actions taken.



Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Previously, the United Nations has attempted multiple times to eradicate the stockpile and use of chemical weapons in general and in Syria. As seen by the creation of the CWC and OPCW, the UN is committed to eradicate the use of chemical weapons in warfare. The destruction of Syria's chemical weapons began in September, 2014 after Syria entered into several international agreements, proposed by Sergei Lavrov, the foreign affairs minister of Russia, and joined the CWC and thus the OPCW. After passing Security Council Resolution 2118, the OPCW implementation in Syria became binding and Syria vowed to abide by the resolution. Under OPCW guidance and supervision, Syrian forces began transporting and destroying chemical weapons. However, the OPCW could only supervise and destroy what the Syrian government had declared at the time. Thus, these efforts proved not to be fully effective as chemical weapon attacks continued to occur after the government claimed that all chemical weapons had been destroyed.

Possible Solutions

Future possible solutions must stress the cooperation between all other nations and further transparency. The world, and not just a few Western nations must show the Syrian government and the Assad regime that these actions are met with consequences. The solution may be difficult to find as Syria has not been responding to the previous UN interventions or Security Council documents. The UN must present a multilateral intervention plan that will effectively deter the Syrian government, but this plan can no longer be narrow. Yet military action alone may not be what will solve the issue, there must be multidisciplinary action that attacks all aspects of creating, distributing, transferring, and using chemical weapons.

Furthermore, there should be a legal process that focuses on the government and Assad himself, sanctioning him politically and indicating that he could be indicted for chemical and humanitarian crimes in the future.

Appendix I

Useful links:

<https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Timeline-of-Syrian-Chemical-Weapons-Activity>



<https://www.armscontrol.org/files/images/08.30.2013-Map-Accompanying-USG-Assessment-on-Syria.jpg>

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"Brief Description of Chemical Weapons, Chemical Weapon as Defined by the CWC, CW Agent Group, Persistency Rate of Action." Types of Chemical Agent, www.opcw.org/about-chemical-weapons/what-is-a-chemical-weapon/.

"Chemical Weapons – UNODA." United Nations, United Nations, www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/chemical/.

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