

# Russia-France talks on Syria end in clash over chemical warfare claims

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Russian and French officials clashed in meetings yesterday in Moscow, as French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius continued the US-led campaign to manufacture a case for war against Syria.

In the run-up to debate over a UN Security Council resolution to oversee the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons, Fabius traveled to Moscow to meet yesterday with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov.

The French government—one of the most rabid partisans of a war of aggression against Syria, its former colony—pressed the Kremlin to accept a UN resolution that would allow Washington and its allies to create some pretext go to war against Syria, a key Russian ally. Paris met with a curt refusal, however.

After the meeting, Fabius acknowledged a “difference in approach on methods” between Moscow and Paris, but stuck to his government's call for a “strong and constraining” resolution with “consequences” for the Syrian regime if it does not obey every demand. He also repeated claims that the recent UN report showed that the Syrian regime carried out the August 21 chemical attack in Ghouta—even though the UN investigation was deliberately designed not to reach a conclusion as to who carried out the attack.

“When you look at the amount of sarin gas used, the vectors, the techniques behind such an attack, as well as other aspects, it seems to leave no doubt that the regime [of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad] is behind it,” Fabius said. He presented no evidence or detailed argument to support this assertion, however.

In fact, several independent reports and observers have made clear that it was the US-backed opposition in Syria that used poison gas in Ghouta, which would be blamed on Assad, so Washington could claim Assad had crossed a “red line” justifying an attack. Saudi

intelligence provided opposition fighters near Ghouta with chemical weapons shortly before the attack.

Journalists Domenico Quirico and Pierre Piccinin, who were detained by Al Qaeda-linked opposition forces in Syria, reported that Islamist fighters speaking among themselves said the opposition had carried out the attack to provoke a US intervention on their side.

Lavrov said that no decision on military intervention could be taken until evidence regarding the attack in Ghouta was carefully examined. “We want objective, professional assessment of the events of August 21. We have serious grounds to believe this was a provocation ... But the truth needs to be established, and this will be a test of the future work of the Security Council,” Lavrov said.

He added that Russia had “serious grounds” to believe that the attack was a provocation by US-backed opposition forces inside Syria.

Russian officials have also asked why no Syrian opposition fighters died in Ghouta, if they were indeed targeted by a chemical attack by the regime.

Noting the “many provocations” by opposition forces inside Syria, Lavrov said: “They were all aimed, over the last two years, at provoking foreign intervention.”

Russian officials are not spelling out the implications of such statements. However, it makes clear that Washington and Paris are involved in a crime of Hitlerian proportions: collaborating with terrorist groups in the opposition to fabricate a case for a war of aggression.

While maintaining a professional tone in public, Russian officials have made clear behind closed doors that they see Paris as acting as a junior partner in a war launched on false pretenses by the United States. When French Ambassador to Russia Gérard Araud said he would go public with supposed proof from French

intelligence that Assad carried out chemical weapons attacks this spring, a Russian diplomat reportedly laughed and replied: “Gérard, don’t embarrass the Americans.”

Stunned by the deep popular opposition in America and Europe to such a war in Syria, and the risk of starting a broader war with Iran and Russia, the Obama administration and its allies have put off their plans for an immediate attack. There are now bitter recriminations as differences emerge in the NATO capitals over how to step up the pressure on the Assad regime and how quickly to start a war with Syria.

In France, figures from the opposition Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) are pressing President François Hollande of the Socialist Party (PS) for a faster war drive, also criticizing Obama. This prominently includes Nicolas Sarkozy, the incumbent president defeated in last year’s elections, who has come back into political life amid a bitter crisis inside the UMP’s top leadership over how to manage the UMP’s growing ties to the neo-fascist National Front.

In August of last year, a few months after his defeat, Sarkozy issued an unusual public statement calling for international intervention in Syria. He also had a long phone conversation with opposition Syrian National Council leader Abdulbasit Seida, to pressure Hollande for military action against Syria.

“I notice unfortunately that I was right, we have lost time,” Sarkozy said, referring to his August 2012 statement. He criticized Hollande for not assembling a broader pro-war coalition: “There is no UN or NATO mandate, the British are absent without leave, the Europeans too. We should have spoken more to the Russians to try to convince them. One can always talk with Putin. It happened in the past, on [wars in] Georgia or Libya.”

Sarkozy also criticized the “constant hesitations” of the American president, saying: “There is no leadership on this question.”

Former PS presidential candidate Ségolène Royal, a critic and ex-partner of Hollande, warned that the war drive against Syria could start a world war and called for diplomacy. Nonetheless, she stressed that she wanted diplomacy to feature “deterrence”—that is, precisely the type of military threats that have brought the world to the brink of a major war.

“Yes, we may start a world war, there is a risk of that

if we intervene, but there is also a risk of non-intervention. That is why the diplomatic solution is the best. But deterrence must be strong enough for tyrannies to give up on nuclear and chemical weapons,” she said.



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