

US presses for UN resolution to justify war on Syria

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23 September 2013

Barely a week after the US and Russia reached a deal to destroy Syria's chemical weapons, the Obama administration is engaged in a new round of bullying to force Russia and China to agree to a UN Security Council resolution that would give the green light for US military action against Syria.

In line with the tight deadlines contained in the agreement, the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad handed over details of its chemical weapon stockpiles to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague on Saturday. The Syrian document followed an initial statement on Friday.

The OPCW announced that the "expected disclosure from the Syrian government" had been received, but postponed an executive committee meeting on Sunday to discuss the implementation of US-Russia deal. The *Washington Post* reported that the postponement took place "amid an increasingly heated dispute between Russia and the United States over how to establish Syrian violations of the weapons agreement."

According to the *Post*, the US was insisting that the OPCW be authorised to determine if Syria had violated the agreement, while Russia wanted the UN Security Council to have the final say. Russia is clearly concerned that the US would exploit any OPCW ruling of a Syrian "violation" to justify a US attack on Syria and bypass the UN Security Council.

The dispute over the OPCW's role goes hand in hand with disagreements over the wording of a UN Security Council resolution to back the US-Russia agreement. The Obama administration is demanding that a resolution under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter that authorises the imposition of penalties, including the use of military force. Russia and China have repeatedly opposed this.

US deputy national security adviser Benjamin Rhodes told the media yesterday that the Obama administration would push for a UN Security Council resolution that enforces "consequences" if Syria failed to cooperate. "Our position is that Chapter 7 is necessary so that there are consequences. We would argue for the strongest possible enforcement," he said.

The Obama administration only latched onto the deal with Russia over Syria's chemical weapons amid widespread antiwar opposition at home and the prospect of a defeat in Congress for a resolution authorising an attack. Its attention has now switched to exploiting the chemical weapons disarmament process to generate a new pretext for war, preferably with a legal fig leaf provided by the UN.

The Russian government is well aware that the US will use any Chapter 7 resolution for its own purposes. In the case of Libya, the Obama administration exploited UN authorisation for a no-fly zone as the justification for a full-scale air war against the Libyan military and air attacks on Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and his family.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov criticised the US as "irresponsible and unprofessional" yesterday, saying: "They see in the US-Russian deal not a chance to save the planet from significant quantities of chemical weapons in Syria, but as a chance to do what Russia and China will not allow, namely to push through a resolution involving force against the regime and shielding the opposition."

Speaking on the Russian state-owned Channel One network, Lavrov bluntly declared: "The US partners are blackmailing us. They say they will quit the work at the OPCW in The Hague if Russia does not back the resolution based on Chapter 7 at the UN Security Council ... This is absolutely contrary to what we agreed

with [US Secretary of State] John Kerry.”

Lavrov also accused the US of wanting to specifically blame the Syrian regime in the UN resolution for the August 21 chemical weapons attack near Damascus. The Russian foreign minister rejected the US allegations, saying: “All the information they have released so far to back up their claim hasn’t been convincing.” Moscow has consistently accused US-backed anti-Assad forces of carrying out the atrocity to provide the pretext for a US air war against the Syrian regime.

Writing in the *Independent* yesterday, veteran Middle East journalist Robert Fisk reported that “grave doubts are being expressed by the UN and other international organisations in Damascus that the sarin gas missiles were fired by Assad’s army. While these international employees cannot be identified, some of them were in Damascus on August 21 and asked a series of questions to which no one had yet supplied an answer. Why, for example, would Syria wait until the UN inspectors were ensconced in Damascus on August 18 before using sarin gas little more than two days later—and only four miles from the hotel in which the UN had just checked in?”

Fisk cited the comments of one Syrian journalist last week who did not definitively rule out government involvement, but added: “We are sure the rebels have got sarin. They would need foreigners to teach them how to fire it. Or is there a ‘third force’ which we don’t know about? If the West needed an excuse to attack Syria, they got it right on time, in the right place, and in front of UN inspectors.”

As Fisk noted, for the Syrian government to launch the attack made no military sense. “As it is, Syria is now due to lose its entire strategic long-term chemical defences against a nuclear armed Israel—because, if Western leaders are to be believed, it wanted to fire just seven missiles almost a half century old at a rebel suburb in which only 300 of the 1,400 victims (if the rebels themselves are to be believed) were fighters.”

The Syrian government now confronts the task of handing over its chemical weapons for destruction on a tight deadline. Next month its stockpiles have to be placed under international control and must be destroyed in the first half of next year. The US is determined to ensure that the entire process proceeds under its supervision and control, thereby providing the

opportunity to manufacture a new pretext for war.



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