

US, Russia reach deal for chemical weapons inspections in Syria

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The United National Security Council approved a new inspection program to identify the perpetrators of alleged chemical weapons attacks inside Syria in a unanimous vote Friday.

Under the resolution, which was written by US government officials over a period of months, a UN inspection panel will have “full access” to alleged attack sites across Syria for a trial period of one year, and will present an initial report on its findings within three months.

The inspections will aim to uncover evidence of chemical weapons use by the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad.

The inspections will also examine evidence of chemical weapons usage by the various US-backed Islamist factions that have been fighting for power in Syria since the outbreak of the US-fomented civil war in 2011.

The inspections will “actually find out who used it and designate accountability for its use,” Secretary of State John Kerry said Thursday.

UN inspectors will seek to “identify to the greatest extent feasible individuals, entities, groups or governments who were perpetrators, organizers, sponsors or otherwise involved in the use of chemicals as weapons,” the resolution states.

The Russian government agreed to support the resolution during private meetings between US Secretary of State Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Wednesday.

Moscow’s agreement with the US proposal manifested “a change of tone” by the Russian leadership, a Security Council member told AFP. The inspections initiative marks “a rare instance of cooperation by the United States and Russia,” the *New York Times* noted.

The new inspections come under conditions where senior US officials and lawmakers are stepping up their war rhetoric against Damascus. US Senator John McCain

issued renewed accusations that Syrian government forces are using “barrel bombs” filled with chlorine against civilians, during recent hearings with top US General Martin Dempsey and Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter.

This Thursday, influential Republican Senator Lindsey Graham called for deployment of US ground troops to Syria, reiterating previous demands for at least 10,000 US ground troops to be deployed to Syria, along with an additional 10,000 to Iraq.

“If I am president of the United States, we’re going to send soldiers back to Iraq, back to Syria, to keep us from being attacked here and keep soldiers in Afghanistan because we must,” Graham said.

In light of recent history, any claims about Syrian chemical weapons must be taken with a heavy dose of salt. Two years ago, the US government nearly launched a full scale war against Syria based on unsubstantiated assertions that Damascus had ordered chemical attacks against civilians.

Plans for a direct attack against Syria by US forces were so far advanced that Obama announced their impending launch in a national address in September 2013, before canceling the operation at the last moment for tactical reasons.

The Obama administration has escalated its proxy war in Syria since backing down from direct intervention against Assad in 2013, while pounding Syria and bordering areas with thousands of airstrikes since June 2014, as part of “Operation Inherent Resolve.”

Washington and its allies have continued to pour weapons and money into the Syrian civil war, with the US introducing yet another mercenary army into the country, known as the “New Syrian Army,” this summer. In the name of defending the tiny US-backed force of less than 60 volunteers, President Obama granted a sweeping authorization for expanded US airstrikes inside Syria on July 31.

Available evidence points to the fact that claims about Assad's chemical weapons usage by the Obama administration were transparent lies, aimed at justifying a massive escalation of the US regime change operations against Assad.

The August 21 sarin attacks, that became the focus of US war propaganda at the time, occurred in residential areas on the outskirts of the Syrian capital, only miles from the seat of the Syrian government, in the Damascus suburb of Eastern Ghouta. No one has been able to provide a plausible reason why Syrian forces would execute such an operation, handing their adversaries an ideal pretext to invade.

Responsibility for the slaughter in Ghouta more likely rested with the US-backed militant groups that have taken over large areas of the country since 2011. These forces had everything to gain from a further escalation of US efforts to topple Assad.

Months before the Ghouta attacks, fighters with the Al Nusra Front, the Al Qaeda-linked group which has played the leading role in the US-backed insurgency against Assad, were caught transporting weaponized sarin poison gas. An investigation by the Associated Press concluded that the Ghouta incident resulted from chemical weapons transferred to Al Nusra by the Saudi intelligence bureau.

US Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter Seymour Hersh published a lengthy exposé in the *London Review of Books* detailing efforts by Turkey to stage a provocation to bring the US military directly into the civil war in Syria. The article described efforts by the Turkish government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to assist Syrian "rebels" of the al-Nusra Front in staging the poison gas attack on Ghouta.

The Syrian government vehemently denies using the illegal weapons. The Assad government "has never used and will never use chemical weapons," Syria's UN ambassador Bashar Jaafari insisted in response to the resolution Friday.



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