

Syria and Chemical Weapons: 2011 and 2012

Draft as of 19.00 GMT, 16 October 2013

Subject to revision as new information becomes available.

Please read the note in the shaded box, bottom right.

20110300

H March 2011 [Syrian uprising starts]

20110319

19 March 2011 Syrian government security forces are reported to fire tear gas at a funeral in the southern city of Deraa. Large crowds are said to have been gathering at the funeral of two people killed in anti-government protests the day before and are reported to have been chanting anti-government slogans.[1]

[1] [No author listed], 'Syria unrest: Tear gas fired at Deraa funeral', BBC News, 19 March 2011.

20110325

25 March 2011 In Geneva, Rupert Colville, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), tells reporters that the office was concerned by the use of live ammunition and tear gas by government authorities against peaceful protesters in Syria.[1]

[1] United Nations Department of Public Information, 'Syria: UN human rights office voices concerns about situation', press release, 25 March 2011.

20110810

10 August 2011 Susan Rice, US ambassador to the United Nations, says that Washington has evidence of 'crimes' in Syria and is ready to step up pressure on Assad. 'He has lost his legitimacy ... and Syria would be a better place without him', she says.[1]

[1] Ian Black, 'Obama poised to tell Assad to step down', *Guardian* (London), 11 August 2011, p 22.

20110819

Q 18 August 2011 Numerous statements calling for Assad to resign. Cameron, Sarkozy and Merkel issue joint statement. Obama makes public call and adopts Executive Order on sanctions.[1] [**get originals**]

[1] Chris McGreal (from Washington) and Martin Chulov (from Beirut), 'Syria: Assad must resign, says Obama', *Guardian* (London), 19 August 2011.

20110822

22 August 2011 The Human Rights Council of the United Nations establishes the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. The HRC does this through the adoption of resolution S-17/1 at its 17th special session. The Commission has a mandate to investigate all alleged violations of international human rights law in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

20110823

Q 23 August 2011 Spector *Foreign Policy* piece.[1] Prompts flurry of further reporting.[2] [**anything specific prompt Spector?**]

[1] Leonard Spector, 'Assad's Chemical Romance', *Foreign Policy*, 23 August 2011

[2] [no author listed], 'Syrian Unrest Leads to Worries Over Chemical Weapons', *Global Security Newswire*, 25 August 2011; Joby Warrick, 'Syrian unrest raises fears about chemical arsenal', *Washington Post*, 28 August 2011; Oren Kessler, 'Worries grow over fate of Syrian chemical weapons', *Jerusalem Post*, 29 August 2011

20111030

30 October 2011 The League of Arab States puts forward a peace plan. This calls for the government of Syria to take

security forces off the streets and to allow Arab League monitors into the country. On 2 November the Syrian government indicates its compliance with the plan, but does not withdraw the security forces as called for. On 12 November the Arab League suspends Syria from membership of the organization. On 14 November King Abdullah of Jordan becomes the first Arab leader to publicly call for Assad to resign.[1]

[1] Ben Smith, *In Brief: Syria*, Standard Note SN/IA/6134, House of Commons Library [United Kingdom], 25 November 2011, 3 pp.

20120421

Q 21 April 2012 The United Nations Supervision Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic (UNSMIS) is brought into being through the adoption by the UN Security Council of resolution 2043. It's mandate is to monitor a cessation of armed violence in all its forms by all parties and to monitor and support the full implementation of the Joint Special Envoy's six-point plan to end the conflict in Syria, initially for a 90-day period. On 15 June 2012, UNSMIS activities are suspended following an increase in violence around the country. On 20 July 2012, the

Please note that this is a snapshot of an unfunded work in progress. It has been circulated in draft form in order to assist understanding of developments in Syria as they unfold. Entries are updated on a regular basis, therefore, ***please check with the author before quoting or citing as more information on any particular event may have become available.*** Comments are welcome. Copies of the chronology will be made available via <<http://www.cbw-events.org.uk/syria.html>>.

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Entry formatting

As this is a working draft there are a number of types of entry: finished entries, based on the information available at the time; those have been put in place as a holding entries; and those containing something that needs checking or adding to. The entries in the above categories appear thus:

00 XXXXXXX 0000 An entry considered ready for publication — i.e., with content and cross-referencing complete, although still subject to change if new information becomes available.

H 00 XXXXXXX 0000 [Holding entry, essentially rough information to help build the details of the chronology and needing further work — text is included in square brackets.]

Q 00 XXXXXXX 0000 An entry containing something needing checking factually (or further information to be obtained), or which contains suggested edits to be considered. May also include changes or corrections that should be entered into the *CBW Events* source files.

mission is extended for further 30 days with the Security Council adding the proviso that any further extension would be possible only 'in the event that the Secretary-General reports and the Security Council confirms the cessation of the use of heavy weapons and a reduction in the level of violence sufficient by all sides' in order to allow the UNSMIS monitors to implement their mandate. As those conditions are not met, the UNSMIS mandate comes to an end at midnight on 19 August 2012.[1]

Later in the year, the Syrian Ambassador to the UN, writes that it requested assistance from the UNSMIS to secure a toxic industrial chemical that would have a potential use as a chemical weapon: *[*Any more details?**]

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic ... requested the United Nations Supervision Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic (UNSMIS), when it was active in Syria, to visit a private sector chlorine laboratory east of Aleppo in order to inspect and secure the contents, which terrorist groups were planning to bring under their control. However, UNSMIS was unable to visit the facility because its team came under fire from terrorist groups. The facility, which contains tons of toxic chlorine, was recently seized by terrorist groups. The fact that they did so during this latest American and Western campaign means that the situation is all the more dangerous.[2]

[1] Details as provided on the UNSMIS page on the UN website.

[2] Syria, *Identical letters dated 8 December 2012 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council*, S/2012/917 and A/67/628, 10 December 2012.

20120713

H 13 July 2012 [*Wall Street Journal* reports that US intelligence had detected movement of chemical weapons stocks in Syria.]

20120716

16 July 2012 Nawaf al-Fares, described as 'the most senior Syrian politician to defect to the opposition', tells the BBC that the government would not hesitate to use chemical weapons if it were cornered and that unconfirmed reports indicated such weapons might have already been used. Al-Fares is reported to be Syria's former ambassador to Iraq.[1]

[1] [No author listed], 'Syria "will not use" chemical weapons on its own people', BBC News, 23 July 2012.

20120720

20 July 2012 Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak says in a television interview that he has ordered the armed forces to be ready to intervene should Syria start to transfer missiles and chemical weapons to Hezbollah. He is quoted as saying: 'Syria has advanced anti-aircraft missiles, surface-to-surface missiles and elements of chemical weapons', and: 'I directed the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to prepare for a situation where we will need to consider the possibility of an attack'. [1]

[1] Adam Gonn, 'News Analysis: Israel fears Syrian missiles', nerve gas reaching Hezbollah, Xinhua, 23 January 2013.

20120723

23 July 2012 In Syria, Foreign Ministry spokesman Jihad Makdissi makes a comment on unconventional weapons held by the Government. The comment, in Arabic during a live news conference is reported in English in a variety of forms. For example, one news source reports the comment in the following terms: 'Any stock of W.M.D. or unconventional weapons that the Syrian Army possesses will never, never be used against the Syrian people or civilians during this crisis, under any circumstances' and: 'These weapons are made to be used strictly and only in the event of external aggression against the Syrian Arab Republic'. [1] Another news source renders the statement thus: 'No chemical or biological weapons will ever be used, and I repeat, will never be used, during the crisis in Syria no matter what the developments

inside Syria', and: 'All of these types of weapons are in storage and under security and the direct supervision of the Syrian armed forces and will never be used unless Syria is exposed to external aggression'. [2] A third rendition is given thus: 'Any chemical or biological weapons will never be used, I repeat, will never be used in the Syrian crisis, no matter what the internal developments in this crisis are', and: 'All varieties of these weapons are stored and secured by the Syrian armed forces and under its direct supervision, and will not be used unless Syria is subjected to external aggression'. [3]

The comment provokes considerable international reaction. US President Barack Obama says any use of chemical weapons by Syria would be a 'tragic mistake' and Assad would be held accountable if this occurred, adding: 'The world is watching'. [4] State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland is reported as saying: 'Look, any talk about any use of any kind of a weapon like that in this situation is horrific and chilling', and: 'The Syrian regime has a responsibility to the world, has a responsibility first and foremost to its own citizens to protect and safeguard those weapons. And that kind of loose talk just speaks to the kind of regime that we're talking about'. [5]

UK Foreign Secretary William Hague is quoted as saying: 'This is typical of the complete illusion of this regime that they are the victims of external aggression', and: 'What is actually happening is their own people are rising up against a brutal police state. It is nothing to do with any aggression from anywhere else in the world and in any case it is unacceptable to say that they would use chemical weapons under any circumstances'. [6]

The following day, the Syrian Foreign and Expatriates Ministry issues a statement suggesting that 'negative media outlets' were dealing with the comment by Makdissi 'deliberately taking it out of context and portraying it as a declaration of possessing non-traditional weapons by Syria'. The statement also includes: 'The ministry said that the goal of the statement and the press conference wasn't to declare but rather to respond to a methodical media campaign targeting Syria to prepare world public opinion for the possibility of military intervention under the false premise of weapons of mass destruction (similar to what happened with Iraq) or the possibility of using such weapons against terrorist groups or civilians, or transporting them to a third party'. [7]

[1] Neil MacFarquhar and Eric Schmitt (from Beirut), 'Syria Threatens Chemical Attack on Foreign Force', *New York Times*, 23 July 2012.

[2] Ben Hubbard, Paul Schemm (from Beirut), Associated Press, as in: 'Syria says will use chemical weapons if attacked', Yahoo News, 23 July 2012.

[3] [No author listed], 'Syria "will not use" chemical weapons on its own people', BBC News, 23 July 2012.

[4] Ian Black, 'Syria insists chemical weapons would only be used against outside forces', *Guardian* (London), 23 July 2012.

[5] Neil MacFarquhar and Eric Schmitt (from Beirut), 'Syria Threatens Chemical Attack on Foreign Force', *New York Times*, 23 July 2012.

[6] Ian Black, 'Syria insists chemical weapons would only be used against outside forces', *Guardian* (London), 23 July 2012.

[7] [No author listed] (from Damascus), 'Foreign and Expatriates Ministry: Some Media Outlets Deliberately Put Its Statement Delivered by Makdissi Out of Context', SANA, 24 July 2013.

20120724

H 24 July 2012 [Free Syrian Army warns that Assad's government has been moving its chemical weapons to new locations along the Syrian border. 'We in the joint command of the Free Syrian Army inside the country know very well the locations and positions of these weapons', and: 'We also reveal that Assad has transferred some of these weapons and equipment for mixing chemical components to airports on the border'. Also: 'According to our information, the regime began moving its stocks of weapons of mass destruction

several months ago ... with the goal of putting pressure on the region and the international community’.]

20120820

Q 20 August 2012 In Washington, DC, US President Barack Obama describes indicates a red line regarding the situation in Syria ‘if we start seeing movement on the chemical weapons front or the use of chemical weapons’.[1]

The President is speaking at a press conference in the White House. A question from a reporter includes: ‘Mr. President, could you update us on your latest thinking of where you think things are in Syria, and in particular, whether you envision using U.S. military, if simply for nothing else, the safe keeping of the chemical weapons, and if you’re confident that the chemical weapons are safe?’ Obama’s response includes:

On Syria, obviously this is a very tough issue. I have indicated repeatedly that President al-Assad has lost legitimacy, that he needs to step down. So far, he hasn’t gotten the message, and instead has double downed in violence on his own people. The international community has sent a clear message that rather than drag his country into civil war he should move in the direction of a political transition. But at this point, the likelihood of a soft landing seems pretty distant.

What we’ve said is, number one, we want to make sure we’re providing humanitarian assistance, and we’ve done that to the tune of \$82 million, I believe, so far. And we’ll probably end up doing a little more because we want to make sure that the hundreds of thousands of refugees that are fleeing the mayhem, that they don’t end up creating — or being in a terrible situation, or also destabilizing some of Syria’s neighbors.

The second thing we’ve done is we said that we would provide, in consultation with the international community, some assistance to the opposition in thinking about how would a political transition take place, and what are the principles that should be upheld in terms of looking out for minority rights and human rights. And that consultation is taking place.

I have, at this point, not ordered military engagement in the situation. But the point that you made about chemical and biological weapons is critical. That’s an issue that doesn’t just concern Syria; it concerns our close allies in the region, including Israel. It concerns us. We cannot have a situation where chemical or biological weapons are falling into the hands of the wrong people.

We have been very clear to the Assad regime, but also to other players on the ground, that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus. That would change my equation.

A follow up question is asked: ‘So you’re confident it’s somehow under — it’s safe?’ to which he responds:

In a situation this volatile, I wouldn’t say that I am absolutely confident. What I’m saying is we’re monitoring that situation very carefully. We have put together a range of contingency plans. We have communicated in no uncertain terms with every player in the region that that’s a red line for us and that there would be enormous consequences if we start seeing movement on the chemical weapons front or the use of chemical weapons. That would change my calculations significantly.

[1] [*INSERT*]

20120919

H 19 September 2012 [Defected SY general Adnan Sillu interview with *Times* published – original behind paywall.]

20121203

Q 3 December 2012 US President Barack Obama says in a speech to the National Defense University: ‘I want to make it absolutely clear to Assad and those under his command: The world is watching. The use of chemical weapons is and would be totally unacceptable. And if you make the tragic mistake of using these weapons, there where be consequences, and you will be held accountable’.[1] [Note: these are similar words to

those used by Obama in response to the Makdissi comment on 23 July.]

The following month, the *New York Times* publishes an article that puts the timing of this speech into a broader context, saying: ‘In the last days of November, Israel’s top military commanders called the Pentagon to discuss troubling intelligence that was showing up on satellite imagery: Syrian troops appeared to be mixing chemicals at two storage sites, probably the deadly nerve gas sarin, and filling dozens of 500-pounds bombs that could be loaded on airplanes’. The article continues: ‘In briefings, administration officials were told that if Syria’s increasingly desperate president, Bashar al-Assad, ordered the weapons to be used, they could be airborne in less than two hours — too fast for the United States to act, in all likelihood’. The article describes ‘a remarkable show of international cooperation’ that included the combination of ‘a public warning by Mr. Obama and more sharply worded private messages sent to the Syrian leader and his military commanders through Russia and others, including Iraq, Turkey and possibly Jordan’ and that this ‘stopped the chemical mixing and the bomb preparation. A week later Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta said the worst fears were over’.[2] [Note: Ehud Barak is in the Pentagon on 29 November, according to contemporary press reports.]

[1] [*INSERT White House release*]; See also: Peter Finn and Anne Gearan, ‘Obama warns Syria amid rising concern over chemical weapons’, *Washington Post*, 3 December 2012. [*Add from*] Noah Shachtman and Spencer Ackerman, ‘U.S. Sees Syria Prepping Chemical Weapons for Possible Attack’, *Wired*, 3 December 2012.

[2] Eric Schmitt and David E Sanger, ‘Hints of Syrian Chemical Push Set Off Global Effort to Stop It’, *New York Times*, 8 January 2013 [print edition].

20121204

Q 4 December 2012 In London, during foreign affairs questions on the floor of the House of Commons, Foreign Secretary William Hague says: ‘I want to reiterate what President Obama has said—that any use of chemical or biological weapons would be even more abhorrent than anything we have seen so far. We have made it clear that this would draw a serious response from the international community. We have made that very clear to representatives of the Syrian regime and have said that we would seek to hold them responsible for such actions’.[1]

Some minutes later there is a further exchange on recent events in Syria. The Foreign Secretary is asked: ‘In view of heightened international anxiety about the possible use of chemical weapons in Syria, the United States has indicated that it is preparing contingency plans. Can the Foreign Secretary say whether the British Government’s assessment of that potential threat has been heightened in recent days, and whether the United Kingdom is contributing, or has already contributed, to international contingency planning?’ The Secretary of State responds: ‘Yes, our understanding of the threat has been heightened in recent days. We have seen some of the same evidence as the United States. I cannot give any more details, but I can say that we have already reacted diplomatically. We have expressed in no uncertain terms, directly to the Syrian regime, the gravity of any use of chemical weapons. In our view, as the Prime Minister has said before, that would require us to revisit our approach to Syria. I cannot, of course, discuss contingency plans in any detail, but we in the UK, including those in the Ministry of Defence, are always ready with a wide range of such plans’.[2] [*add note on questioners??*]

[1] William Hague, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 4 December 2012, Oral Answers, *Hansard* (Commons), vol 554, c719, in response to a question from Mike Gapes MP.

[2] William Hague, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 4 December 2012, Oral Answers, *Hansard* (Commons), vol 554, c721-22, in response to a question from Douglas Alexander MP.

20121204

H 4 December 2012 [In Brussels, NATO Foreign Ministers meet and approve a request from Turkey to deploy Patriot missiles in that country. NB, is after Hague in HoC.]

20121206

6 December 2012 Syrian deputy foreign minister, Faisal Maqdad, is reported to state: 'Syria stresses again, for the tenth, the hundredth time, that if we had such weapons, they would not be used against its people. We would not commit suicide'. His comments are said to be a translation of an interview on Lebanon's Al Manar television, described as the voice of Hezbollah. He is also reported to say: 'In fact, we fear a conspiracy ... by the United States and some European states, which might have supplied such weapons to terrorist organizations in Syria, in order to claim later that Syria is the one that used these weapons' and: 'We fear there is a conspiracy to provide a pretext for any subsequent interventions in Syria by these countries that are increasing pressure on Syria'.[1]

[1] Erika Solomon (from Beirut), Reuters, as in: 'Syria calls chemical weapon reports pretext for intervention', *Christian Science Monitor*, 6 December 2012.

20121206

H 6 December 2012 [From Beirut, *Asharq Al-Awsat* publishes details from an interview with Captain Abdul-Salam Abdul-Razzaq, described as a Syrian army defector who was part of the 'Chemical Weapons Department' under the Assad regime.]

20121207

H 7 December 2012 [Turkish newspaper *Yurt* article]

20121208

H 8 December 2012 [Letter from Syria to UNSG and PSC, S/2012/917, posted on Saturday, Syria, *Identical letters dated 8 December 2012 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council*, S/2012/917 and A/67/628, 10 December 2012.]

20121223

H 23 December 2012 [Alleged attack in Homs. This alleged attack is specifically referred to in the letter to the Secretary-General from the governments of France and the United Kingdom on 21 March 2013; but not by the report of the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic published on 4 June 2013; nor in a letter from US Ambassador Susan Rice to the UN Secretary-General on 14 June 2013. An allegation is made of an attack two days later in Zafarana, but this seems to attract little attention. This second allegation is made by the Syrian Network for Human Rights, said to be based in London.]