

Syria and Chemical Weapons: Third Quarter 2013

*Draft as of 11.00 GMT, 12 September 2013
Subject to revision as new information becomes available.
Please read the note in the shaded box, bottom right.*

20130701

1 July 2013 In the UK House of Commons, the Foreign Office is asked if they will ‘publish in full the evidential basis for the Prime Minister’s statement [see 14 June] that the Syrian Government has used chemical weapons against Syrian people’. The Minister replies:[1]

We have physiological samples from inside Syria which have been tested at Porton Down and which have tested positive for sarin. We believe that chemical weapons have been used by the Assad Regime. However, the process of gathering more information is ongoing and we have been working with others to obtain more and better evidence.

Where we own important evidence or information ourselves, such as the samples received and analysed by UK officials, we have briefed the UN investigation team, shared the information with international partners, and made appropriate details public. We will look at further information and consider whether it is possible to do so again. However, we cannot publish details regarding samples or specific incidents where to do so could put our sources of information at risk.

The Prime Minister has tasked the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee to give the National Security Council frequently updated assessments of the information we and our allies have.

[1] Alistair Burt, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Written Answer, 1 July 2013, *Hansard* (Commons), vol 565, c509-10, in response to Paul Flynn MP.

20130704

H 4 July 2013 [SNC claims use of ‘toxic gases’ by government forces to gain a tactical advantage in the the battle for Homs. Wassif Shemali, an SNC representative quoted: ‘They are using weapons of mass destruction against Homs, while the international community does nothing’ — Damien McElroy, ‘Syria: West seeks to secure evidence chemical weapons used in Homs’, *Daily Telegraph* (London), 6 July 2013.]

20130708

8 July 2013 Syria’s Ambassador to the UN, Bashar Ja’afari, claims that Syrian authorities have discovered a cache of toxic chemicals of about 280 containers filled with various toxic substances, ‘enough to destroy a whole city, if not the whole country’, in an area ‘controlled and supervised by armed anti-government groups’.[1] The industrial chemicals, said to have been found on 7 July in the coastal town of Bania, were listed as 79 barrels of polyethylene glycol (PEG), 67 barrels of mono ethylene glycol, 25 barrels of mono ethanol (or ethanolamine) and 68 barrels of diethanolamine (DEA) and 42 barrels of triethanolamine (TEA).[2]

[1] [No author listed], ‘Syrian Gov’t Claims Massive Seizure of Toxic Chemicals’, RIA Novosti, 8 July 2013.

[2] [No author listed], ‘Syria claims discovery of enough chemical weapons to “destroy a country”’, Xinhua, 9 July 2013.

20130709

Q 9 July 2013 Russia presents to the United Nations Secretary-General its analysis of one incident of alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria [see 19 March].[1]

Russia’s Ambassador to the UN, Vitaly Churkin, is reported as saying that Syria had asked Russian experts to examine evidence in relation to the alleged Khan al-Assal

attack and that these experts had visited the location where it is suggested the projectile had landed; samples had been analysed at a Russian laboratory certified by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). He indicates that a report has been submitted to the UN Secretary-General. He is further reported to say that the chemical agent was carried by a ‘Bashair-3 unguided projectile’, allegedly produced by the Bashair al-Nasr Brigade, one of the opposition units associated with the Free Syrian Army, and that the projectile involved is not a ‘standard one for chemical use’. He is quoted thus: ‘The results of the analysis clearly indicate that the ordnance used in Khan al-Assal was not industrially manufactured and was filled with sarin’ and: ‘Hexogen, utilised as an opening charge, is not utilised in standard ammunitions. Therefore, there is every reason to believe that it was armed opposition fighters who used the chemical weapons in Khan al-Assal’.[2] [Note: Hexogen is also known as RDX.]

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>>.

Richard Guthrie
richard@cbw-events.org.uk

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 includes changes or corrections that should be entered into the *CBW Events* source files.

Some two months later, further details of the report are made public.[3] *[*add more*]*

[1] Robert H. Serry, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Briefing to the Security Council On the Situation in the Middle East, 23 July 2013.

[2] [No author listed], 'Russia claims Syria rebels used sarin at Khan al-Assal', BBC News, 9 July 2013. *[*primary source available??*]*

[3] [No author listed], 'Russia releases key findings on chemical attack near Aleppo indicating similarity with rebel-made weapons', Russia Today, 4 September 2013; Matthew Schofield, 'Russia gave UN 100-page report in July blaming Syrian rebels for Aleppo sarin attack', McClatchy Washington Bureau, 5 September 2013.

20130717

17 July 2013 The report of the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic is re-issued in a final version. There are a number of minor edits in relation to chemical weapons issues compared with the 'Advance Unedited Version' released the previous month [see 4 June].[1]

[1] A/HRC/23/58, dated 17 July 2013

20130722

22 July 2013 A further claim of use of chemical weapons is made. From Turkey, the Syrian Coalition releases a statement which includes: 'According to video footage uploaded by activists inside the capital of Damascus, Assad's forces are using chemical and toxic gas bombs to shell the Yarmouk Palestinian Camp. The strategic, systematic use of chemical weapons in order to achieve military gains only proves the desperate state that Assad's regime has reached'. [1]

[1] Syrian Coalition, 'Assad's Use of Chemical Weapons in the Yarmouk Palestinian Camp', media statement, 22 July 2013.

20130723

H 23 July 2013 [The UN has thus far received 13 reports of allegations of use of chemical weapons in Syria — Robert H. Serry, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Briefing to the Security Council On the Situation in the Middle East, 23 July 2013]

20130724

24 July 2013 The head of the United Nations Secretary-General's investigation into alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria, Åke Sellström, and the head of the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs, Angela Kane, visit Damascus for talks on the work of the mission which has, thus far, been unable to enter Syria. They meet with Deputy Prime Minister Qadri Jamil, Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem, and the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Faisal Mekdad. The visit lasts two days and discussions are described as 'thorough and productive'. [1]

[1] United Nations Department of Public Information, 'Talks on chemical weapons probe "productive" – UN and Syria jointly say', press release, 27 July 2013.

20130802

2 August 2013 From Istanbul, the Syrian Coalition issues a statement [1] on the possibility of an on-site visit as part of an investigation by the UN Secretary-General into allegations of use of chemical weapons:

The Syrian Coalition has sent a letter to the UN's Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, reiterating the need to immediately begin investigations into the use of chemical weapons in Syria. In the letter to the UN, the Syrian Coalition reiterates its offer of full cooperation with the investigation team, particularly in assuring their unfettered access into liberated areas.

As the Free Syrian Army has recently liberated the Khan al-Assal area, we urge the UN team to begin its investigation in this area and hope to welcome their arrival without any further delays.

The Syrian Coalition is firmly committed to upholding international humanitarian and human rights laws and demands

that any individuals found to be involved in the deployment of chemical weapons in Syria be held accountable for these crimes.

[1] Syrian Coalition, 'The Syrian Coalition Urges the UN to Immediately Begin Investigations into the use of Chemical Weapons in Syria', Media Statement, Istanbul, Turkey, 2 August 2013.

20130805

Q 5 August 2013 The Syrian National Coalition alleges an attack in Adra and Duma in the Damascus suburbs. [1] British television service ITV News interviews a Syrian doctor, Abu Ghafer, by telephone. He says: 'Locals believe the that regime forces dropped shells filled with Sarin gas onto neighbouring deserted fields and farms. The wind blew across remnants of the chemical. Many people began to panic in a highly populated area. Some had severe respiratory attacks and were given local drugs. The majority of people treated themselves with water and damp cloths. Symptoms included breathlessness, suffocation and blurred vision. Many also had panic attacks'. [2]

The Syrian government issues an official denial and calls the allegations 'lies and groundless'. [3]

The Brown Moses blog, run by British-based blogger Elliot Higgins, contains photographs of rockets alleged to have been used at this location on this day. The rockets appear to be visually similar to those reported in Daraya on 4 January and Adra on 11 June. [4]

[1] *[*CHK details of SNC claim*]*

[2] [No author listed], 'Syrian doctor describes aftermath of "chemical attack"', ITV News, 5 August 2013

[3] [No author listed], 'Syrian gov't denies using chemical weapons against citizens', KUNA, 6 August 2013.

[4] Martin Chulov, Ian Sample, Angelique Chrisafis and Peter Beaumont, 'Syria deaths: powerful asphyxiant in strike was probably sarin, say experts', *Guardian* (London), 23 August 2013, pp 4-5.

20130811

11 August 2013 It is reported that the UN investigation team has delayed its trip to Syria owing to logistical issues. An unnamed source tells CBS news that the team was facing some 'technical hitches and would rather postpone the visit to Damascus for a while'. [1] The United Nations issues a denial that the investigation has been postponed. UN spokesman, Eduardo Del Buey, is quoted as saying: 'The team has gathered in The Hague, and logistics for their visit are being worked out with the Syrian authorities'. [2]

[1] George Baghdadi, 'U.N. chemical weapons experts postpone trip to Syria', CBS News, 11 August 2013.

[2] [No author listed], 'UN Denies Chemical Weapon Experts Delayed Syria Trip', RIA Novosti, 12 August 2013.

20130812

12 August 2013 The chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin E. Dempsey, says the Syrian government is moving chemical munitions 'from time to time', according to the *New York Times* today. It is suggested that this may be a reflection the Assad regime's concerns that if the stocks remain in one place they could be located and seized by opposition forces. General Dempsey, who is on a visit to the Middle East, is also quoted as saying: 'It appears the regime is moving it to secure it', adding, 'But that could change'. [1]

After referring the Obama 'red line' [see 20 August 2012], the paper says: 'The most feared outcome would be for the government's large stockpile of chemical arms to be seized by radical groups amid the chaos, and there appears to be a tacit assent for the Assad government to do all it can to secure those weapons, even if that requires shifting them around the country'.

[1] Thom Shanker (from Tel Aviv), 'Syrian War Shapes Trip by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff', *New York Times*, 12 August 2013.

20130813

Q 13 August 2013 The United Nations announces: 'the team probing the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria has completed all the necessary logistical arrangements for its visit to the country and is now awaiting the Government's acceptance of the modalities for the mission' and: 'Once the Government of Syria confirms its acceptance of the modalities, the mission will depart without delay'.[1] There is press speculation regarding the on-going negotiations with the Syrian government.[2]

[1] United Nations Department of Public Information, 'With logistics complete, UN chemical weapons investigators await go-ahead from Syria', press release, 13 August 2013.

[2] [*add*]

20130814

14 August 2013 In New York, the UN Secretary-General announces: 'the Government of Syria has formally accepted the modalities essential for cooperation to ensure the proper, safe and efficient conduct of the Mission. The departure of the team is now imminent'. The public statement continues: 'As agreed with the Government of Syria, the team will remain in the country to conduct its activities, including on-site visits, for a period of up to 14 days, extendable upon mutual consent'.[1]

[1] United Nations Secretary-General, 'Statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic', 14 August 2013.

20130818

18 August 2013 The team of UN investigators arrive in Damascus. The official announcement states: 'The United Nations team investigating allegations about the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic arrived in Damascus today, Sunday, 18 August. The mission will begin its work on Monday. Further updates may be given in due course from New York. Please note the team will not be speaking to the media'.[1]

The team is described in the press as containing 20 members.[2] Questions are raised as to whether there will be sufficient evidence remaining for the team to arrive at clear conclusions.[3]

[1] United Nations Secretary-General, 'Note to Correspondents in response to questions on the United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic', 18 August 2013.

[2] Patrick J McDonnell, 'U.N. inspectors in Syria to begin probe into chemical weapons', *Los Angeles Times*, 18 August 2013; Ben Hubbard and Hwaida Saad (from Beirut), 'U.N. Team Arrives in Syria to Assess Possible Chemical Arms Use', *New York Times*, 18 August 2013.

[3] Aryn Baker (from Beirut), 'U.N. Chemical-Weapons Experts Arrive in Syria: Are They on a Fool's Errand?', *Time*, 19 August 2013.

20130819

19 August 2013 General Dempsey, the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, writes to Congressman Eliot Engel, in response to a letter sent by Engel on 2 August, asking for 'further clarification regarding the possible use of limited stand-off strikes' in Syria.

The letter from the General includes:

To the specific point in your letter, there are certainly actions short of tipping the balance of the conflict that could impose a cost on them for unacceptable behavior. We can destroy the Syrian Air Force. The loss of Assad's Air Force would negate his ability to attack opposition forces from the air, but it would also escalate and potentially further commit the United States to the conflict. Stated another way, it would not be militarily decisive, but it would commit us decisively to the conflict. In a variety of ways, the use of U.S. military force can change the military balance, but it cannot resolve the underlying and historic ethnic, religious, and tribal issues that are fueling this conflict.

Syria today is not about choosing between two sides but rather about choosing one among many sides. It is my belief that the side we choose must be ready to promote their interests and ours when the balance shifts in their favor. Today, they are not. The crisis in Syria is tragic and complex. It is a deeply rooted, long-term conflict among multiple factions, and violent struggles for power will continue after Assad's rule ends. We should evaluate the effectiveness of limited military options in this context.

The letter is made public on 21 August.[1]

[1] General Martin E. Dempsey, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, letter to Congressman Eliot Engel, Ranking Democratic Member, Committee on Foreign Affairs, US House of Representatives, 19 August 2013, as posted on the Committee website, 21 August 2013.

20130821

21 August 2013 Opposition forces claim that chemical weapons have been used in the Gouta region which contains some suburbs of Damascus. Initial reports suggest attacks have killed 'dozens of people' by rockets with toxic agents[1] and that the grassroots Local Coordination Committee reports at least 30 bodies being brought to one field hospital in Kafr Batna neighbourhood a few kilometres east of central Damascus.[2]

The number of alleged casualties rises rapidly, with an opposition claim of 1300 fatalities being widely circulated by the end of the day.[3]

A large number of photographs and videos are circulated via the internet, although few have any indication of time or location they were taken. Early information available is inconsistent and initial expert commentary notes some initial anomalies. Jean Pascal Zanders, previously sceptical of claims of chemical weapons attacks in Syria writes: 'The footage from the current alleged attack(s) in the Ghouta district seems to offer more convincing evidence of poisoning through asphyxiation (witness the pinkish-bluish hue on the faces of some of the fatalities)'. However, he notes: 'I have not seen anybody applying nerve agent antidotes. Nor do medical staff and other people appear to suffer from secondary exposure while carrying or treating victims'; nonetheless, he concludes: 'It is clear that something terrible has happened'.[4] Paula Vanninen, director of Verifin, the Finnish Institute for Verification of the Chemical Weapons Convention, is quoted as saying: 'At the moment, I am not totally convinced because the people that are helping them are without any protective clothing and without any respirators', adding: 'In a real case, they would also be contaminated and would also be having symptoms'.[5] As the day progresses there are reports of secondary contamination. For example, a British newspaper reports that a doctor, Abu Omar, has dealt with a number of casualties including nine rescuers who died. The paper quotes another Syrian doctor, Majid Abu Ali, reporting his words as: 'The injuries correspond with sarin gas – difficulty breathing, perspiration, convulsions and loss of consciousness to the point of death'.[6]

The government of Syria denies it used chemical weapons and suggests that opposition forces are making false claims.[7] SANA reports a telephone call from the Information Minister Omran al-Zoubi to Syrian television and summarises the call in the following terms: 'what was reported about the use of chemical weapons on Wednesday morning never took place anywhere in Syria, and while the Armed Forces are carrying out operations against terrorist in several areas, the reports of some media outlets on this matter are illogical, untrue and completely fabricated'.[8] The Minister is quoted as telling the Lebanese Hezbollah-run al-Manar TV that the 'pictures that were shown were fabricated and the campaign was planned in advance'.[9]

The United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, declares himself to be 'shocked' by the allegations.[10] The head of the Secretary-General's investigation into alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria, Åke Sellström, is quoted as telling Swedish media sources that the allegations 'sound suspicious' and that this 'sounds like something we need to look into'. [11] Later in the day there are indications that the team is negotiating with the government of Syria for possible access.[12]

The allegations prompt considerable international response.

The Secretary-General of the Arab League, Nabil ElAraby, is quoted as saying the UN investigation team should 'go immediately to Eastern Ghouta to see the reality of the situation and investigate the circumstances of this crime'. [13]

The European Union's Foreign Ministers are meeting in Brussels as the Foreign Affairs Council. Catherine Ashton, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, issues a statement which includes: 'I have seen with grave concern the reports of the possible use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime. I reiterate that any use of chemical weapons, by any side in Syria, would be totally unacceptable. Such accusations should be immediately and thoroughly investigated by the United Nations expert mission which arrived recently in Syria. ... I have also noted invitations by the opposition for the mission to visit rebel-held areas'. [14] Outside the meeting, UK Foreign Secretary William Hague describes the allegations, 'if confirmed' as marking 'a shocking escalation in the use of chemical weapons in Syria'. [15]

A spokesman in Moscow for the Russian government is quoted as saying: 'This cannot but suggest that once again we are dealing with a pre-planned provocation ... We call on all those who can influence the armed extremists to make every effort to end provocations with chemical agents'. [16] Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich is separately quoted as saying that a homemade rocket 'with an unidentified chemical agent' was launched from positions held by rebels. [17]

In Washington, the White House issues a statement, noting that the United States is 'deeply concerned' by the reports and that it 'strongly condemns any and all use of chemical weapons. Those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable. Today, we are formally requesting that the United Nations urgently investigate this new allegation. The UN investigative team, which is currently in Syria, is prepared to do so, and that is consistent with its purpose and mandate'. [18]

The Security Council meets in private session to discuss the allegations. Speaking after the meeting, Maria Cristina Perceval of Argentina, the current holder of the rotating Security Council Presidency, tells reporters: 'There must be clarity on what happened and the situation must be followed closely' and that Council members 'welcomed the determination of the Secretary-General to ensure a thorough, impartial and prompt investigation'. [19]

[1] [No author listed], 'Syria conflict: "Chemical attacks" near Damascus', BBC News, 21 August 2013 (07.48 GMT).

[2] Dominic Evans, 'Syrian activists accuse Assad forces of using chemical agents', Reuters, 21 August 2013 (07.43 GMT).

[3] [No author listed], Agence France Presse, as in: 'Syria opposition says 1,300 dead in chemical attacks by army', Yahoo News, 21 August 2013.

[4] Jean Pascal Zanders, 'Apparently major chemical weapons attack near Damascus reported', The Trench, 21 August 2013.

[5] [No author listed], Agence France Presse, as in: 'Syria opposition says 1,300 dead in chemical attacks by army', Yahoo News, 21 August

2013; [No author listed], 'Q&A: Syria "toxic attacks" near Damascus', BBC News, 22 August 2013.

[6] [No author listed], 'Syria: Slaughter of the innocents as children among over 1,000 civilians gassed to death', *Daily Mirror* (London), 22 August 2013.

[7] Dominic Evans and Khaled Yacoub Oweis, 'Syria gas "kills hundreds"', Security Council meets', Reuters, 21 August 2013.

[8] [No author listed], 'Media source: Reports on chemical weapons use in Ghouta untrue', SANA, 21 August 2013.

[9] [No author listed], 'Q&A: Syria "toxic attacks" near Damascus', BBC News, 21 August 2013.

[10] United Nations Secretary-General, 'Secretary-General, "Shocked" by Reports from Syria, Reiterates that Any Use of Chemical Weapons Would Violate International Humanitarian Law', SG/SM/15227, 21 August 2013.

[11] Bassem Mroue (from Beirut), Associated Press, as in: 'UN team in Syria wants to probe gas attack claim', Yahoo News, 21 August 2013; Niklas Pollard (from Stockholm), Reuters, as in: 'U.N. inspector says reports of Syria gas attack should be investigated: TT news agency', Yahoo News, 21 August 2013.

[12] [No author listed], Agence France Presse, as in: 'Syria opposition says 1,300 dead in chemical attacks by army', Yahoo News, 21 August 2013.

[13] [No author listed], 'Syrian opposition: 1,300 killed in chemical attack on Ghouta region', *AlArabiya*, 21 August 2013.

[14] European Union, 'Statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on the latest reports of use of chemical weapons in Damascus', A 427/13, 21 August 2013.

[15] [No author listed], 'Syria conflict: "Chemical attacks kill hundreds"', BBC News, 21 August 2013 (16.19 GMT).

[16] Dominic Evans and Khaled Yacoub Oweis, 'Syria gas "kills hundreds"', Security Council meets', Reuters, 21 August 2013.

[17] [No author listed], 'Syrian Chemical Weapons Reports May Be "Provocation" - Moscow', RIA Novosti, 21 August 2013.

[18] US White House, 'Statement by Principal Deputy Press Secretary Josh Earnest on Allegations of Chemical Weapons Use in Syria', 21 August 2013.

[19] [No author listed], 'UN: Alleged Syria chemical attacks "serious escalation"', BBC News, 22 August 2013.

20130822

Q 22 August 2013 Reactions to the allegations of use of chemical weapons the previous day continue. Syria continues to deny that it had used such weapons.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon sends an official request to the Syrian Government for the team of chemical weapons investigators to be granted permission and access to 'swiftly' investigate the alleged incident. A spokesman is quoted: 'The Secretary-General believes that the incidents reported yesterday need to be investigated without delay'. The Secretary-General instructs the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Angela Kane, to travel to Damascus. [1]

[*Further eyewitness reports emerge — add. Also add new expert commentary*]

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius discusses the situation in Syria in an interview with French TV channel BFM. He is quoted as saying that if the attack were to be confirmed, 'France's position is that there must be a reaction, a reaction that could take the form of a reaction with force', but rules out the use of ground troops in Syria. [2]

A Russian news agency quotes Foreign Ministry spokesman Lukashevich: 'It all looks like attempts to use any means to persuade the UN Security Council to take the side of the opponents of the [President Bashar Assad] regime and to derail the preparation of the Geneva conference, led by high-ranking Russian and US experts whose meeting is planned for August 28 in The Hague'. [3] Lukashevich is separately quoted as saying Russia had 'an interest in the investigation into what happened happen objectively'. [4] During a telephone conversation, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and US Secretary of State John Kerry express a 'common interest in carrying out an unbiased investigation by UN experts who are currently in the country into the reports of the alleged use of chemical weapons near Damascus',

according to a statement issued by the Russian Foreign Ministry quoted in the Russian press.[5]

The UK notes that it and 36 other countries had formally referred the latest allegations to the US Secretary-General.[6]

In Washington, State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki tells reporters 'At this time, right now, we are unable to conclusively determine CW [chemical weapons] use' and adds: 'The President has directed the intel community to – here in the United States, to urgently gather additional information'. Referring to the President's 'red line' comments [see 20 August 2012], Psaki says that this had been crossed 'a couple of months ago' and that there were a range of options that Obama and his national security team were considering but no elaboration was given about what such options might be.[7] US Secretary of State John Kerry speaks via telephone with Syrian Foreign Minister Muallim. A few days later, Kerry comments: 'I made it very clear to him that if the regime, as he argued, had nothing to hide, then their response should be immediate – immediate transparency, immediate access – not shelling. Their response needed to be unrestricted and immediate access. Failure to permit that, I told him, would tell its own story'.[8]

[1] United Nations Department of Public Information, 'Syria: Ban sending official request to allow UN probe of alleged chemical weapons use', press release, 22 August 2013.

[2] [No author listed], 'Syria "chemical" attack: France says force may be needed', BBC News, 22 August 2013.

[3] [No author listed], 'Russia Says Syria Chemical Attack Claims May Target Peace Talks', RIA Novosti, 22 August 2013.

[4] [No author listed], 'Syria "chemical" attack: France says force may be needed', BBC News, 22 August 2013.

[5] [No author listed], 'Lavrov, Kerry Call for Unbiased Probe into Alleged Syria Attack', RIA Novosti, 23 August 2013.

[6] [No author listed], 'Syria "chemical" attack: France says force may be needed', BBC News, 22 August 2013.

[7] Jen Psaki, Daily Press Briefing, US Department of State, 22 August 2013; see also [no author listed], 'U.S. says unable to conclusively determine chemical weapons used in Syria', *Daily Star* (Lebanon), 22 August 2013.

[8] John Kerry, 'Remarks on Syria', US Department of State, 26 August 2013

20130823

23 August 2013 United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says: 'Any use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anybody, under any circumstances, would violate international law', adding: 'Such a crime against humanity should result in serious consequences for the perpetrator. Once again, I call for an immediate investigation of this latest incident'.[1]

[1] United Nations Department of Public Information, 'Use of chemical weapons in Syria would be "crime against humanity" – Ban', press release, 23 August 2013.

20130824

Q 24 August 2013 Syrian television shows footage accompanying a claim that authorities have discovered chemical substances in tunnels that are suggested to be part of an attempt by opposition forces to create chemical weapons. The authorities claim a number of soldiers are exposed to the substances while searching the tunnels and are subsequently treated in hospital.[1] Reuters reports the footage in the following terms: 'A presenter said five blue and green plastic storage drums shown in video footage, along with rusty mortar bombs, grenades, domestic gas canisters and vials labeled "atropine", a nerve gas antidote, were proof that rebels had used chemical weapons'.[2]

A further report appears to suggest that Syrian soldiers suffered 'suffocation' in fighting around the suburb of Jobar.[3] The leader of the opposition Syrian National Coalition, Ahmad al-Jarba, and the head of the rebel Free

Syrian Army, General Salim Idriss, deny that rebels had used chemical weapons.[4]

The Associated Press provides the following comment: 'State TV broadcast images of plastic jugs, gas masks, vials of an unspecified medication, explosives and other items that it said were seized from rebel hideouts. It did not, however, show any video of soldiers reportedly affected by toxic gas in the fighting in the Jobar neighborhood of Damascus.'[5]

[1] [No author listed], 'Syrian rebels use toxic chemicals against govt troops near Damascus - state media', *Russia Today*, 24 August 2013. [**primary source??**]

[2] Oliver Holmes (from Washington) and Roberta Rampton (from Beirut), 'Obama weighs possible military response after Syria chemical attack', Reuters, 24 August 2013.

[3] [No author listed], 'Syria to allow UN to inspect "chemical weapons" site', BBC News, 24 August 2013.

[4] Oliver Holmes (from Washington) and Roberta Rampton (from Beirut), 'Obama weighs possible military response after Syria chemical attack', Reuters, 24 August 2013.

[5] Albert Aji (from Damascus), Associated Press, as in: 'Syria Accuses Rebels of Using Chemical Weapons', *RIA Novosti*, 24 August 2013.

20130824

Q 24 August 2013 Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), an international medical humanitarian organization, issues a press release reporting that three hospitals it supports in Syria have indicated that they had received some 3600 patients 'displaying neurotoxic symptoms' in less than three hours on the morning of 21 August. Of these patients, 355 were reported to have died. Dr Bart Janssens, MSF director of operations, is quoted in the statement. 'MSF can neither scientifically confirm the cause of these symptoms nor establish who is responsible for the attack', he says, and adds: 'However, the reported symptoms of the patients, in addition to the epidemiological pattern of the events—characterised by the massive influx of patients in a short period of time, the origin of the patients, and the contamination of medical and first aid workers—strongly indicate mass exposure to a neurotoxic agent. This would constitute a violation of international humanitarian law, which absolutely prohibits the use of chemical and biological weapons'.[1] [**Add follow-up press release**]

[1] Médecins Sans Frontières, 'Syria: Thousands suffering neurotoxic symptoms treated in hospitals supported by MSF', press release, 24 August 2013; [no author listed], 'MSF-backed hospitals treated Syria "chemical victims"', BBC News, 24 August 2013.

20130825

25 August 2013 UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announces that he has instructed the investigative mission led by Åke Sellström, currently in Damascus, 'to focus its attention on ascertaining the facts of the 21 August incident as its highest priority' and that these activities should start on the morning of Monday 26 August. The Secretary-General's statement notes: 'the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic affirmed that it will provide the necessary cooperation, including the observance of the cessation of hostilities at the locations related to the incident'.[1]

The announcement follows discussions between Angela Kane [see 22 August] and the Syrian authorities.

[1] United Nations Secretary-General, 'Statement Attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General on alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria', New York, 25 August 2013.

20130826

H 26 August 2013 [Inspectors head to site of alleged use. Lead vehicle hit by sniper fire, so return to base. Team makes second trip with new vehicle and arrive at location. Interviews undertaken with people injured and some samples taken. Some three hours spent in the location of the alleged attacks. The presence of the inspectors at the location of the

alleged attacks prompts a flurry of commentary as to whether there will be anything detectable by the investigators and what conclusions they may be able to reach [see also 18 August]. No further investigations activities are carried out the following day owing to safety and security concerns.]

20130826

Q 26 August 2013 International reaction to the allegations of use continue, with significant developments from the United States and from a Kurdish group in Syria.

US Secretary of State John Kerry holds a press conference in Washington on the recent events in Syria.[1] His comments include: *[*edit down further??*]*

What we saw in Syria last week should shock the conscience of the world. It defies any code of morality. Let me be clear: The indiscriminate slaughter of civilians, the killing of women and children and innocent bystanders, by chemical weapons is a moral obscenity. By any standard it is inexcusable, and despite the excuses and equivocations that some have manufactured, it is undeniable.

The meaning of this attack goes beyond the conflict in Syria itself, and that conflict has already brought so much terrible suffering. This is about the large-scale, indiscriminate use of weapons that the civilized world long ago decided must never be used at all – a conviction shared even by countries that agree on little else.

He adds: ‘We have additional information about this attack, and that information is being compiled and reviewed together with our partners, and we will provide that information in the days ahead’.

Noting his contact with Syrian Foreign Minister Muallim a few days before [see 22 August] and calls for immediate access for the UN investigation team, he comments:

Instead, for five days, the Syrian regime refused to allow the UN investigators access to the site of the attack that would allegedly exonerate them. Instead, it attacked the area further, shelling it and systematically destroying evidence. That is not the behavior of a government that has nothing to hide. That is not the action of a regime eager to prove to the world that it had not used chemical weapons. In fact, the regime’s belated decision to allow access is too late, and it’s too late to be credible. Today’s reports of an attack on the UN investigators, together with the continued shelling of these very neighborhoods, only further weakens the regime’s credibility.

His concluding comments are:

President Obama believes there must be accountability for those who would use the world’s most heinous weapons against the world’s most vulnerable people. Nothing today is more serious and nothing is receiving more serious scrutiny.

From Berlin, it is reported that the head of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), Saleh Muslim, doubts that the Assad regime was behind the attack. He is reported as saying ‘The regime in Syria ... has chemical weapons, but they wouldn’t use them around Damascus, 5 km from the [UN] committee which is investigating chemical weapons. Of course they are not so stupid as to do so’ and to claim that the chemical attack was a set up.[2]

[1] John Kerry, ‘Remarks on Syria’, US Department of State, 26 August 2013.

[2] Alexandra Hudson (from Berlin), ‘Syrian Kurdish leader doubts Assad would be “so stupid” as to carry out gas attack’, Reuters, 27 August 2013.

20130827

27 August 2013 An Indian press report suggests that the United Nations has asked laboratories in three countries to test any samples from the Syria investigation. The paper says that a laboratory in Gwalior with the Defence Research and Development Establishment is one of three labs in the world that secured the highest grade in the OPCW 21st International Proficiency Test. The paper notes, however: ‘Questions

remain whether a go ahead would be given. A ministry official said the testing may hurt diplomatic ties with Syria’.[1]

[1] P Naveen, ‘Gwalior lab to test Syria chemical attack samples?’, *Times of India*, 27 August 2013.

20130827

Q 27 August 2013 In the UK, it is announced that Parliament will be recalled to debate the Syria situation on 29 August.[1]

Prime Minister David Cameron returns from holiday and states that any use of chemical weapons is ‘morally indefensible and completely wrong’. Any military action taken ‘would have to be legal, would have to be proportionate. It would have to be specifically to deter the future use of chemical weapons’. He adds: ‘This is not about getting involved in a Middle Eastern war or changing our stance in Syria or going further into that conflict. It is nothing to do with that. It is about chemical weapons. Their use is wrong, and the world shouldn’t stand idly by’.[2]

Nick Clegg, Leader of the Liberal Democrats and Deputy Prime Minister, is quoted as saying: ‘If we stand idly by we set a very dangerous precedent indeed where brutal dictators and brutal rulers will feel they can get away with using chemical weapons. What we are considering is a serious response to that. What we are not considering is regime change, trying to topple the Assad regime, trying to settle the civil war in Syria one way or another’.[3]

Ed Miliband, leader of the opposition Labour Party, is quoted thus: ‘The use of chemical weapons on innocent civilians is abhorrent and cannot be ignored. When I saw the prime minister this afternoon I said to him the Labour party would consider supporting international action, but only on the basis that it was legal, that it was specifically limited to deterring the future use of chemical weapons and that any action contemplated had clear and achievable military goals. We will be scrutinising any action contemplated on that basis’.[4]

[1] *Recall notice*

[2] UK Cabinet Office, ‘Syria: transcript of PM’s interview’, press release, 27 August 2013.

[3] Nicholas Watt, Julian Borger, Nick Hopkins (from London) and Paul Lewis (from Washington), ‘UK and US finalise plans for military strikes against Syrian regime’, *Guardian* (London), 27 August 2013.

[4] Nicholas Watt, Julian Borger, Nick Hopkins (from London) and Paul Lewis (from Washington), ‘UK and US finalise plans for military strikes against Syrian regime’, *Guardian* (London), 27 August 2013.

20130828

H 28 August 2013 [Inspectors on the road in Syria; UNSG suggests investigators will need 4 further days in Syria to complete their work; UNSG meets with OPCW DG in The Hague; UK NSC meets, suggestion from UK for UNSC resolution; US intelligence leak suggests an intercepted panic-toned telephone call between Syrian officials indicates the regime had used chemical weapons a week before.]

20130828

Q 28 August 2013 Syria alleges that there have been uses of chemical weapons in in Jobar, Sahnaya and al-Bahariya on August 22, 24 and 25. [Note: this is how the locations are reported. It is not clear from the reporting if this is intended to mean that there was one attack at each location on the respective dates, or multiple attacks on the days.] The allegations are forwarded to the UN Secretary-General by Syria’s ambassador to the UN, Bashar Jaafari. He is reported to say: ‘We are asking UN to incorporate 3 more locations where the Syrian soldiers inhaled the nerve gas also in the suburbs of Damascus. So the spectrum of investigation is increasing compared to the initial phase of investigation’.[1] *[*add more, primary source??*]*

[1] [No author listed], 'Syria asks UN to immediately investigate 3 new "chemical attacks" by rebels', *Russia Today*, 28 August 2013 (edited 29 August 2013).

20130829

29 August 2013 The United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, speaking in Vienna, announces that UN investigative team will finish work in Syria on 30 August and will be reporting to him the following day, meaning he will be cutting short a visit to Austria, where he was due to give a speech that day.[1]

[1] United Nations Department of Public Information, 'UN chemical weapons inspection team to leave Syria on Saturday, will brief Ban', press release, 29 August 2013; Fredrik Dahl and Eric Auchard (from Vienna), 'U.N. chemical weapons team to leave Syria by Saturday morning - Ban', *Reuters*, 29 August.

20130829

Q 29 August 2013 In London, the UK government releases two documents, one an intelligence assessment of the events[1] and one on legal matters.[2] Debates are held in both Houses of Parliament.

The intelligence assessment takes the form of a letter to the Prime Minister from the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, Jon Day [see 1 July]. The letter states that the assessment it contains is based on material presented to the National Security Council for its meeting the day before. The key judgements, are 'based on the information and intelligence available to us as of 25 August ... We have assessed previously that the Syrian regime used lethal CW on 14 occasions from 2012. This judgement was made with the highest possible level of certainty following an exhaustive review by the Joint Intelligence Organisation of intelligence reports plus diplomatic and open sources. We think that there have been other attacks although we do not have the same degree of confidence in the evidence. A clear pattern of regime use has therefore been established.' [Note: compare this with the statement from a United Nations source a month previously [see 23 July] that the UN had received 13 allegations of use by that date (of which at least one had to be from the Syrian government [see 19 March]) and with the letter by the UK and France [see 21 March] that alleged 3 attacks.] The letter continues: 'the JIC concluded that it is highly likely that the regime was responsible for the CW attacks on 21 August. The JIC had high confidence in all of its assessments except in relation to the regime's precise motivation for carrying out an attack of this scale at this time – though intelligence may increase our confidence in the future'.

The single-page assessment attached to the letter includes: 'A chemical attack occurred in Damascus on the morning of 21 August, resulting in at least 350 fatalities. It is not possible for the opposition to have carried out a CW attack on this scale' and: 'There is no immediate time limit over which environmental or physiological samples would have degraded beyond usefulness. However, the longer it takes inspectors to gain access to the affected sites, the more difficult it will be to establish the chain of evidence beyond a reasonable doubt'.

*[*add from legal opinion document*]*

The Parliamentary debates total more than 15 hours. In the Commons there are eight hours of debate that conclude with both the government motion and the official opposition amendment to that motion being voted down.[3] The Lords there are just over seven hours of debate but it does not take a vote as is traditional in these matters.[4] *[*add PM opening remarks*]*[5]

At 10.30 pm, just after the votes, the opposition leader, Ed Miliband, raises a point of order asking if the Prime Minister could 'confirm to the House that, given the will of the House

that has been expressed tonight, he will not use the royal prerogative to order the UK to be part of military action before there has been another vote in the House of Commons?' Mr Speaker allows the Prime Minister time to respond. David Cameron says: 'I can give that assurance. Let me say that the House has not voted for either motion tonight. I strongly believe in the need for a tough response to the use of chemical weapons, but I also believe in respecting the will of this House of Commons. It is very clear tonight that, while the House has not passed a motion, the British Parliament, reflecting the views of the British people, does not want to see British military action. I get that, and the Government will act accordingly'.[6]

A week later, a senior Cabinet Minister, Kenneth Clarke, tells Channel 4 News: 'the Americans wanted us to make this vote very quickly' but that the 'trauma' of Iraq led to the defeat of the call for action.[7]

[1] Letter from the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee to the Prime Minister entitled 'Syria: Reported Chemical Weapons Use', dated 29 August 2013.

[2] Her Majesty's Government, 'Chemical weapon use by Syrian regime: UK government legal position', 29 August 2013.

[3] *Hansard* (Commons), vol 566, 29 August 2013, c1425-1556.

[4] *Hansard* (Lords), vol 747, 29 August 2013, c1719-1826.

[5] *Hansard ref*

[6] David Cameron, Prime Minister, 29 August 2013, *Hansard* (Commons), vol 566, c1555-56.

[7] [No author listed], 'Syria vote: Clarke suggests US wanted "quick" UK decision', *BBC News*, 4 September 2013.

20130830

Q 30 August 2013 The UN investigation team complete their last day of work in Syria. This prompts reporting about what may happen next, including what will be done with the samples taken during the mission. This is the first day in which there is public discussion that highlights the balance to be struck between a political need for a prompt report of the conclusions from the investigation mission and a technical need for enough time to ensure laboratory analysis can provide robust results.

The team visits a military hospital where the Assad government has stated that there are a number of members of the Syrian armed forces that have been affected by exposure to toxic chemicals during the operation that is said to have discovered toxic chemicals in a series of tunnels [see 24 August].[1] [Note: if this is interviewing of soldiers exposed in the tunnel system, it is not clear where this fits within the investigation mandate which is about alleged use and not stored materials.]

The UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, starts consultations with Member States regarding the outcome of the investigation. 'UN Spokesperson' Martin Nesirky is quoted as saying: 'Dr. Sellstrom's team is doing its utmost to expedite the process of analysis, but while keeping this in mind, they also have to keep in mind something else which is the need for rigorous attention to maintaining the integrity of the process, in other words, the scientific side of this process'. He says that the samples will be taken for analysis in designated laboratories in Europe, without specifying which these would be other than that none are located in countries represented by the permanent members of the Security Council. He also notes that Åke Sellström, as investigation team leader, will remain in Europe to oversee the analysis.[2] [Note: compare suggestion here that only European laboratories would be used with the earlier reporting that an Indian laboratory might contribute to the analysis, see 27 August.]

In expert commentary, Ralf Trapp is reported as talking of the testing being a painstaking process that will take several

days and that the laboratories working on the samples won't sacrifice accuracy for the sake of quick results.[3]

[1] *[*printed source? – this was what was said on the radio news*]*

[2] United Nations Department of Public Information, 'Syria: Ban begins consultations with UN Member States as chemical weapons team wraps up probe', press release, 30 August 2013.

[3] Mike Corder, Associated Press, as in: 'UN's Syria samples to undergo meticulous scrutiny', *Sun Herald* (Mississippi), 30 August 2013.

20130830

Q 30 August 2013 In Washington, DC, the White House releases a document[1] intended to summarize the Administration's evidence of what it states is the culpability of the Assad regime in Syria in using chemical weapons. Later in the day, US Secretary of State John Kerry speaks in the Treaty Room in his Department to the document.[2] He describes chemical weapons as 'indiscriminate, inconceivable horror' and suggests that 1429 Syrians were killed in the 21 August attack, including at least 426 children.

The document says ... *[*add*]*

Kerry refers to the document's findings as 'clear as they are compelling' and states: 'Our intelligence community has carefully reviewed and re-reviewed information regarding this attack, and I will tell you it has done so more than mindful of the Iraq experience. We will not repeat that moment. Accordingly, we have taken unprecedented steps to declassify and make facts available to people who can judge for themselves. But still, in order to protect sources and methods, some of what we know will only be released to members of Congress, the representatives of the American people. That means that some things we do know we can't talk about publicly'.

He goes on to say: 'we know that the Assad regime has the largest chemical weapons program in the entire Middle East' and that the regime has used such weapons 'multiple times this year' and that: 'We know that for three days before the attack the Syrian regime's chemical weapons personnel were on the ground in the area making preparations. And we know that the Syrian regime elements were told to prepare for the attack by putting on gas masks and taking precautions associated with chemical weapons. We know that these were specific instructions. We know where the rockets were launched from and at what time. We know where they landed and when. We know rockets came only from regime-controlled areas and went only to opposition-controlled or contested neighborhoods'. He adds: 'We know that a senior regime official who knew about the attack confirmed that chemical weapons were used by the regime, reviewed the impact, and actually was afraid that they would be discovered' and that for all these things, the US intelligence community has 'high confidence'; further adding: 'This is common sense'.

*[*CHECK quotes this para*]* The Arab League pledged, quote, "to hold the Syrian regime fully responsible for this crime." The Organization for Islamic Cooperation condemned the regime and said we needed, quote, "to hold the Syrian Government legally and morally accountable for this heinous crime." Turkey said there is no doubt that the regime is responsible. Our oldest ally, the French, said the regime, quote, "committed this vile action, and it is an outrage to use weapons that the community has banned for the last 90 years in all international conventions." The Australian Prime Minister said he didn't want history to record that we were, quote, "a party to turning such a blind eye."

*[*edit down further??*]* ... But as Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary General, has said again and again, the UN investigation will not affirm who used these chemical weapons. That is not the mandate of the UN investigation. They will only affirm whether such weapons were used. By the definition of their own mandate, the UN can't tell us anything that we haven't shared with you this afternoon or that we don't already know. ...

We also know that we have a President who does what he says that he will do. And he has said very clearly that whatever decision he makes in Syria, it will bear no resemblance to Afghanistan, Iraq, or even Libya. It will not involve any boots on the ground. It will not be open-ended. And it will not assume responsibility for a civil war that is already well underway. The President has been clear: Any action that he might decide to take will be a limited and tailored response to ensure that a despot's brutal and flagrant use of chemical weapons is held accountable. ...

The White House document comes under some scrutiny, issues being raised include *[*add*]* ... [3] [4] [5]

Earlier in the day, a US newspaper reports that the 21 August attack may have been carried out by troops commanded by Assad's brother, citing Kamal al-Labwani, described as a member of the Syrian opposition National Coalition's defence and security committee, who is quoted as saying in a telephone interview: 'The bombing [of Ghouta] came from the area controlled by Assad's brother and air force security'.[6]

[1] *WH doc*

[2] *Remarks*

[3] Lesley Clark, Anita Kumar and Hannah Allam, 'Citing "high confidence" of chemical weapons use, U.S. makes case for attack on Syria', McClatchy Washington Bureau, 30 August 2013

[4] Lindsay Wise and Hannah Allam, 'Kerry says U.S. credibility on the line in Syria', McClatchy Washington Bureau, 30 August 2013

[5] Lindsay Wise and Anita Kumar, 'Chemical weapons experts weigh in on Syria intelligence report', McClatchy Washington Bureau, 30 August 2013.

[6] Ashish Kumar Sen, 'Troops led by Assad's brother likely to blame for chemical weapons, Syrian activists say', *Washington Times*, 30 August 2013.

20130831

31 August 2013 The UN investigation team arrives in The Hague and is greeted by the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Ahmet Üzümcü. The OPCW describes the team as being composed of nine OPCW personnel, three from the World Health Organization, together with Åke Sellström and as having travelled back to the Netherlands on board an aircraft provided by the German government.[1]

On the issue of laboratory testing, the OPCW states: 'The evidence collected by the team will now undergo laboratory analysis and technical evaluation according to the established and recognised procedures and standards. These procedures may take up to three weeks for completion in a systematic, orderly and objective manner. Every effort will be made to expedite this process. Their report will be submitted to the United Nations Secretary General by Dr Sellström'. The press release is reissued two days later without the reference to the three week timescale, to read thus: 'The evidence collected by the team will now undergo laboratory analysis and technical evaluation according to the established and recognised procedures and standards. Every effort will be made to expedite this process. Their report will be submitted to the United Nations Secretary General by Dr Sellström'.[2] However, the original paragraph and its subsequently removed line are widely quoted in the media.[3]

[1] Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Technical Secretariat, 'UN Investigation Team Returns to The Hague from Syria', press release, 31 August 2013.

[2] Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Technical Secretariat, 'UN Investigation Team Returns to The Hague from Syria', press release, 2 September 2013.

[3] See, for example: Thomas Escritt, 'Analysing Syrian chemical weapons evidence could take three weeks: agency', Reuters, 31 August 2013; Peter Cluskey, 'Analysis of Syrian attack evidence to take "up to three weeks"', *Irish Times*, 1 September 2013; and [no author listed], Agence France Presse, as in: 'Three-week wait for UN's Syria analysis', *Australian*, 1 September 2013.

H 31 August 2013 [Statement by Obama on Syria military action. He invites Congress to approve such action and, as Congress does not meet again until 9 September, implies that military action will be delayed until after that date. However, there are indications that some committees may be able to meet before the full Congress reconvenes.]

20130901

1 September 2013 A UK newspaper suggests that two licences had been approved in January 2012 by UK authorities for exports of sodium fluoride and potassium fluoride to Syria, but no exports had taken place as EU sanctions had been applied before the goods had been shipped. The article makes no mention of types or quantities of the materials. Thomas Docherty MP is quoted by the paper: 'MPs will be horrified and furious that the UK Government has been allowing the sale of these ingredients to Syria' and: 'What the hell were they doing granting a licence in the first place?' [1]

Some information is provided to Parliament in the following week: 'The exporter and recipient company demonstrated that the chemicals were for a legitimate civilian end use — which was for metal finishing of aluminium profiles used in making aluminium showers and aluminium window frames. The licences were revoked following a revision to the sanctions regime which came into force on 17 June 2012. HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) records show that no goods were exported to Syria under these licences before they were revoked'. [2]

'The consideration of the licence applications against the Consolidated Criteria included an assessment of the risk that they would be diverted to be used as precursor chemicals in the manufacture of chemical weapons. But there was no evidence that these exports would be so diverted, and the quantities concerned were consistent with their stated end use for commercial purposes. No subsequent evidence has arisen to cast doubt on the assessment made at the time'. [3]

Following further questions, it is revealed that the licences granted in January 2012 were for 1,000kg for each of the materials [4] and that six licences have been authorised for exports of sodium fluoride to Syria in the previous 10 years in 2004, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010 and 2012 with one licence being authorised over the same period for potassium fluoride in 2012. 'Retrieving the information on the amount of chemicals exported over the last 10 years could be provided only at a disproportionate cost'. [5] [Note: the long-term totals of imports of relevant materials would be significant indicators as to whether there was potential for diversion and so it would seem odd that such a figure would be of 'disproportionate cost' to discover.]

A few days later, some further details of quantities are revealed, suggesting that five licences were approved between 2004 and 2010 for the export of more than 4,000kg of sodium fluoride to Syria. These details were apparently revealed by Vince Cable, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, in a letter to John Stanley, Chair of the House of Commons Committee on Arms Export Controls. [6]

[1] [No author listed], 'Britain sold nerve gas chemicals to Syria 10 months after war began', *Sunday Mail*, 1 September 2013 [Note: the *Sunday Mail* should not be confused with the *Mail on Sunday*.]

[2] Michael Fallon, Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Written Answer, 5 September 2013, *Hansard* (Commons), vol 567, c521, in response to Katy Clark MP.

[3] Alistair Burt, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Written Answer, 6 September 2013, *Hansard* (Commons), vol 567, c572, in response to Caroline Lucas MP.

[4] Michael Fallon, Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Written Answer, 9 September 2013, *Hansard* (Commons), vol 567, c642, in response to Chukka Umunna MP.

[5] Michael Fallon, Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Written Answer, 6 September 2013, *Hansard* (Commons), vol 567, c536-37, in response to Angus Robertson MP.

[6] Dan Roberts (from Washington) and Julian Borger (from London), 'Syria crisis: US welcomes "significant" Russian proposal on chemical weapons', *Guardian* (London), 12 September 2013.

20130901

H 1 September 2013 [Kerry claims US has samples that have tested positive for the presence of sarin and that this supports his government's suggestion that the Assad regime used chemical weapons on 21 August.]

20130902

H 2 September 2013 [France releases *Synthèse nationale de renseignement déclassifié, Programme chimique syrien, Cas d'emploi passés d'agents chimiques par le régime Attaque chimique conduite par le régime le 21 août 2013* — its intelligence assessment of the events of 21 August; *Der Spiegel* reports that the German intelligence services have concluded that the chemical weapons used on 21 August were used by the Assad regime; NATO chief says he believes the 21 August attacks were carried out by the regime. It is not clear whether these statements derive from the same source material being exchanged through established intelligence sharing arrangements or whether these various statements are from nationally-derived information.]

20130902

H 2 September 2013 [Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, speaking at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, is reported to say: 'We were shown certain pieces of evidence that did not contain anything concrete, neither geographical locations, nor names, nor evidence that samples had been taken by professionals' — NYT.]

20130903

3 September 2013 Press reports suggest that a defector has come forward with information that shows the Assad government carried out a chemical attack in Khan al-Assal, Aleppo, on 19 March. However, he is said not have appeared at a press conference scheduled by opposition groups based in Turkey owing to security concerns. The story centres on Abdeltawwab Shahrouh, described as the head of the forensic medicine committee in Aleppo who is said to have documents proving the attack took place.

[1] [No author listed], 'Syria Defector "Exposes Assad Chemical Attack"', Sky News, 3 September 2013.

20130903

H 3 September 2013 [UNSG briefs non-permanent members of the Security Council; laboratories start receiving samples for analysis; two Syrian officials have travelled to Europe to follow the process of the analysis of the samples.]

20130903

H 3 September 2013 [Meeting between Obama and senior Congressional figures. Later in the day Senate hearings with John Kerry; many of the points made are those made in his earlier statements [see 26 and 30 August].]

20130904

H 4 September 2013 [Putin says he would support military action if there was proof that the Assad government had used chemical weapons. House hearings with John Kerry. Senate Foreign Relations Committee vote. Obama speech in Stockholm. Questions raised on US casualty numbers, e.g., LAT.]

20130905

H 5 September 2013 [G20 summit opens in Russia. Further press attention to 9 July report by Russia. UK claims clothing samples from 21 August test positive for sarin]

20130906

Q 6 September 2013 On the margins of the G20 summit in St Petersburg, Russia, a statement is issued by eleven of the countries attending. The leaders that sign up to the statement are from: Australia, Canada, France, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Turkey, the UK and the USA. The statement includes: [**edit down further??**]

We condemn in the strongest terms the horrific chemical weapons attack in the suburbs of Damascus on August 21st that claimed the lives of so many men, women and children. The evidence clearly points to the Syrian government being responsible for the attack, which is part of a pattern of chemical weapons use by the regime.

We call for a strong international response to this grave violation of the world's rules and conscience that will send a clear message that this kind of atrocity can never be repeated. Those who perpetrated these crimes must be held accountable.

Signatories have consistently supported a strong U.N. Security Council Resolution, given the Security Council's responsibilities to lead the international response, but recognize that the Council remains paralyzed as it has been for two and a half years. The world cannot wait for endless failed processes that can only lead to increased suffering in Syria and regional instability. We support efforts undertaken by the United States and other countries to reinforce the prohibition on the use of chemical weapons.

We commit to supporting longer term international efforts, including through the United Nations, to address the enduring security challenge posed by Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles. Signatories have also called for the UN fact finding mission to present its results as soon as possible, and for the Security Council to act accordingly.

... Recognizing that Syria's conflict has no military solution, we reaffirm our commitment to seek a peaceful political settlement through full implementation of the 2012 Geneva Communiqué. We are committed to a political solution which will result in a united, inclusive and democratic Syria. ...

The eight states at the G-20 summit not listed as signing this statement are: Argentina, Brazil, China, Germany, India, Indonesia, Mexico and Russia. [*Note: the 20th entity at the G-20 meetings is the European Union.*]

A senior BBC correspondent notes: 'the statement was carefully crafted to omit the controversial crux of the American plan: punitive airstrikes on Syria, to be led by the US, quite possibly without UN backing'.[2]

A day later, Germany indicates it would sign the statement, suggesting that there had been a desire to reach an EU position in relation to Syria first.[3]

[1] US White House, 'Joint Statement on Syria', press release, 6 September 2013

[2] Bridget Kendall, 'Syria crisis: No clear winner in Russia-US G20 duel', BBC News, 7 September 2013.

[3] Arshad Mohammed, 'Germany backs G20 statement on Syria a day late', Reuters, 7 September 2013.

20130907

Q 7 September 2013 The European Union issues a statement on the situation in Syria. [**edit down??**]

On 21 August, a large-scale chemical attack was perpetrated in the outskirts of Damascus, killing hundreds of people, including many women and children. That attack constituted a blatant violation of international law, a war crime, and a crime against humanity. We were unanimous in condemning in the strongest terms this horrific attack.

Information from a wide variety of sources confirms the existence of such an attack. It seems to indicate strong evidence that the Syrian regime is responsible for these attacks as it is the only one that possesses chemical weapons agents and means of their delivery in a sufficient quantity.

In the face of this cynical use of chemical weapons, the international community cannot remain idle. A clear and strong response is crucial to make clear that such crimes are unacceptable and that there can be no impunity. We must prevent creating a dreadful precedent for the use of chemical weapons in Syria again, or elsewhere.

The EU underscores at the same time the need to move forward with addressing the Syrian crisis through the UN process. We note the on-going UN investigation on the 21st of August attack and further investigations on other chemical weapons attacks carried out in this conflict. It hopes a preliminary report of this first investigation can be released as soon as possible and welcomes President Hollande's statement to wait for this report before any further action. The EU urges the UN Security Council to unite in its efforts to prevent any further chemical attack. To that effect, it encourages the UNSC to fulfil its responsibilities and take all initiatives to achieve this goal. The EU and its member states intend to play a full and active part in that context.

The EU recalls the individual responsibility of the perpetrators of attacks of this type, who must be held accountable, and the role of the ICC in investigating and judging such acts.

Only a political solution that will result in a united, inclusive and democratic Syria can end the terrible bloodshed, grave violations of human rights and the far-reaching destruction of Syria. An encompassing diplomatic process leading to a political solution is now more urgent than ever. The initiative for a "Geneva II" peace conference must move ahead swiftly. The EU is ready to provide all support needed to achieve a political settlement and work with partners and international actors, particularly the United Nations.

The EU will uphold its commitment, as the largest donor, to provide aid and assistance to those in need due to the Syrian conflict. It will maintain its readiness to help the recovery, rehabilitation and transition in Syria, in accordance with the needs of the Syrian people.

[1]

20130909

Q 9 September 2013 The day is dominated by discussion of proposals to have Syrian chemical weapons put under some form of international supervision. The situation is initially confused and it later becomes apparent that proposals had been discussed in the margins of the G20 summit a few days earlier.[1]

In Moscow, (approx 07:30 GMT) during a press conference held by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, and his Syrian counterpart, Walid Muallem, there are hints that there may be a proposal for some sort of plan regarding chemical weapons.[2] Less than two hours later (approx 09:12 GMT) US Secretary of State, John Kerry, holding a press conference in London, says Syria could avert an attack if Assad 'could turn over every single bit of his chemical weapons to the international community'.[3] Some hours later Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, speaking in a further press conference says he has urged Mr Muallem to 'not only agree on placing chemical weapons storage sites under international control, but also on their subsequent destruction'.[4] Mr Muallem expresses support for the proposal and is quoted as saying: 'We are also confident in the wisdom of the Russian government, which is trying to prevent an American aggression against our people'.[5] During the afternoon, UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, says: 'I'm considering urging the Security Council to demand the immediate transfer of Syria's chemical weapons and chemical precursor stocks to places inside Syria where they can be safely stored and destroyed'.[6]

During the afternoon, the US Department of State stresses that Kerry was making a rhetorical argument.[7] Jen Psaki, for the State Department, is quoted as saying: 'His point was that this brutal dictator with a history of playing fast and loose with the facts cannot be trusted to turn over chemical weapons, otherwise he would have done so long ago. That's why the

world faces this moment'. [8] Later in the day, Mr Obama says a military strike is 'absolutely' on pause if Syria yields control of its chemical weapons.[9] The US Congress resumes today but it is not clear what the timetable of activities will be during the week as earlier plans appear to be amended in light of the international developments.

The UK Prime Minister tells the House of Commons: 'If Syria were to put its chemical weapons beyond use under international supervision, that would clearly be a big step forward and should be encouraged. We must be careful to ensure that this is not a distraction tactic to discuss something other than the problem on the table, but if it is a genuine offer, it should be genuinely looked at'.[10]

[1] *[*add source*]*

[2] Bridget Kendall, 'How feasible is Russia's proposal on Syria?', BBC News, 10 September 2013.

[3] [No author listed], 'Russia urges Syria hand over chemical weapons to intl control to avoid strike', Russia Today, 9 September 2013.

[4] [No author listed], 'Give up weapons, Russia urges Syria', BBC News, 9 September 2013.

[5] Matt Smith and Catherine E Shoichet, 'Syria chemical arms plan promising "if it's real," Obama says', CNN, 10 September 2013.

[6] Louis Charbonneau, 'U.N. floats plan to destroy Syrian chemical weapons stocks', Reuters, 9 September 2013. *[*ADD FROM UN*]*

[7] Patrick Wintour, 'John Kerry gives Syria week to hand over chemical weapons or face attack', *Guardian* (London), 9 September 2013.

[8] Matt Smith and Catherine E Shoichet, 'Syria chemical arms plan promising "if it's real," Obama says', CNN, 10 September 2013.

[9] Matthew Lee and Julie Pace (from Washington), Associated Press, as in: 'State Department: U.S. Will Take A "Hard Look" At Russian Proposal On Syrian Chemical Weapons', Huffington Post, 9 September 2013.

[10] David Cameron, Prime Minister, Oral Answer, 9 September 2013, *Hansard* (Commons), vol 567, c704, in response to Tom Blenkinsop MP.

20130910

H 10 September 2013 [France suggests it will put a resolution to the UN Security Council regarding the proposals to put Syrian chemical weapons under international supervision with a draft that puts blame for the 21 August attack on the Assad regime. Later in the day announcement that there would be a joint FR, UK & US res. RU implies it would draft a resolution. Scheduled informal UNSC meeting does not take place. Obama makes speech during evening US time.]

20130911

H 11 September 2013 [RU presents more details of plans. UNSC informal discussions. French proposal that Syria should give up its chemical weapons within 15 days, providing an 'exhaustive, complete and definitive declaration of the locations, amount and types of all items related to its chemical warfare programme', and that there should be a referral to the International Criminal Court. Late in the day even more details are given by Russia which prompts positive reaction from the US — 'The proposal they have put forward is very specific and the Syrian reaction is a total about-face. This is significant'. — Jay Carney, as quoted in Dan Roberts (from Washington) and Julian Borger (from London), 'Syria crisis: US welcomes "significant" Russian proposal on chemical weapons', *Guardian* (London), 12 September 2013.]

20130912

H 12 September 2013 [Putin OpEd in NYT {Vladimir V Putin, 'A Plea for Caution From Russia', *New York Times*, 12 September 2013, p A31}. Lavrov and Kerry scheduled to meet in Geneva]