

John Kerry in Moscow: The Syria Chemical Weapons Saga and the Israeli Air Strikes

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Russian condemnation of Israeli air strikes preceded Kerry's arrival. Moscow's Foreign Ministry called them "a threat to regional stability."

It wants politicizing chemical weapons use stopped. On May 6, Russian Security Council head [Nikolai Patrushev](#) said "no one has reliable information about the use of chemical weapons in Syria."

"If anyone does, we would like them to show their evidence that such weapons have indeed been used."

On May 5, UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria (COI) investigators said testimonial evidence indicates "rebel forces" used sarin. A day later they reported "no conclusive findings" of their use.

On June 3, they'll comment further. Don't expect confirmation of their first assessment.

According to [Press TV](#), Kerry came "to press top Russian officials against backing the Syrian government amid the recent US-backed Israeli aggression against the nation."

Russia wants diplomatic conflict resolution. It opposes US-led NATO intervention. It fears it's coming. Obama's incrementally heading toward doing so.

Assad's more victim than villain. Wrongfully accusing him of Western-backed insurgent crimes advances the ball for war. On Monday, Senate Foreign Relations Chairman Robert Menendez (D. NJ) introduced legislation to arm opposition forces.

It's been ongoing covertly all along. Menendez and likeminded congressional members want it done officially. They claim they're only for "vetted rebel groups."

On the one hand, Al Qaeda and its al-Nusra affiliate are called foreign terrorist organizations. On the other, they're actively recruited, armed, funded, trained and directed. They're de facto US-led NATO ground forces. Obama heads closer to giving them air support.

Kerry met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and President Vladimir Putin. He and Lavrov announced convening an international conference aimed at ending conflict. They'll urge both sides to attend.

According to Kerry, Washington wants it "as soon as possible, possibly, hopefully as soon as the end of this month."

America and Russia have conflicting interests. Obama wants Assad ousted. All options are

open to do so. Russia wants its strategic regional interests protected. Lavrov explained this way:

“I would like to emphasize we do not, we are not interested in the fate of certain persons. We are interested in the fate of the Syrian people.”

Moscow wants Syrians to decide who'll lead them. Foreign intervention is rejected. It doesn't want another allied regional government toppled. Doing so leaves others more vulnerable. It gives Washington greater control. It harms Russia's strategic interests.

Convening another conference reflects the latest exercise in futility. It won't fare better than earlier attempts. Kofi Annan's peace plan was one-sided. Violence increased. It did so because Washington planned it that way.

Last June's Geneva agreement failed. Washington, key NATO partners and regional allies prevented it from succeeding.

They criticized Syria's new constitution and parliamentary elections. They did so unjustly. They ignored real change. Milestone events were ridiculed. They were called farcical.

For Syrians, they were historic. They expressed their will freely. They did so despite daily violence.

Another conference won't fare better than other conflict resolution attempts. It's coming as Washington heads closer to full-scale intervention. False accusations make it more likely. Perhaps it'll follow another failed peace initiative.

Russia's justifiably concerned. On May 5, Foreign Ministry spokesman [Alexander Lukashevich](#) expressed grave concerns over Israel's air strikes.

“We are seriously concerned by the signs of preparation of global public opinion for possible armed intervention in the long-running internal conflict in Syria,” he said.

“The further escalation of armed confrontation sharply increases the risk of creating new areas of tension, in addition to Syria, in Lebanon, and the destabilization of the so far relatively calm atmosphere on the Lebanese-Israeli border.”

China strongly opposes force. It wants Syria's national sovereignty respected. So do most other countries. Washington, Israel, key NATO partners, and rogue regional allies have other ideas.

On May 7, [DEBKAF](#) (DF) headlined “US to arm Syrian rebels: Putin's rebuke, Chinese ‘peace plan’ mar Netanyahu's Chinese trip.”

Hezbollah's committed to aid Assad. It vows not to let his government fall. During Netanyahu's China visit, he “was given a sharp dressing-down by President Vladimir Putin,” said DF.

Perhaps it suggests “Russia would not tolerate further Israeli attacks on Damascus and would respond.”

China was also critical. Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said:

“We are opposed to the use of force and believe that the sovereignty of any country should be respected.”

Her criticism came as Netanyahu arrived. He’s there on a five day visit. It coincides with Mahmoud Abbas’ Sunday arrival. He left on Tuesday. He was afforded full head of state ceremonial honors.

Chinese state-run media called his trip a “state visit.” Netanyahu’s was described as an “official visit.” President Shimon Peres is Israel’s head of state. The office is largely ceremonial.

Two days before Netanyahu arrived, China introduced a four-point Israeli/Palestinian [peace plan](#). It’s one Netanyahu and other Israeli hardliners reject.

It recognizes Palestinian statehood with East Jerusalem its capital. It does so based on pre-June 1967 borders. It calls for ending settlement construction, violence against civilians, lifting Gaza’s blockade, and resolving the issue of Palestinian prisoners equitably.

Resuming peace talks depend on these “necessary conditions.” Negotiations are the only way to achieve it. China wants “land for peace” principles upheld. It urges more international community involvement.

In 1988, China recognized Palestinian statehood. It was four years before establishing diplomatic ties with Israel.

According to DF, Putin “announce(d) he had ordered the acceleration of highly advanced Russian weapons supplies to Syria.”

DF claims he referred to S-300 anti-air systems and nuclear-capable 9K720 Iskander surface missiles. They’re accurate “within a 5 – 7 meter radius” up to 280 km.

Putin called Netanyahu. He “made no bones about his determination not to permit the US, Israel or any other regional force (to) overthrow (Assad).”

He told Netanyahu “to keep this in mind.”

DF said Syrian air defense teams were trained in Russia. They’re able to operate new systems on arrival. “Russian air defense officials will supervise their deployment and prepare them for operation.”

“Moscow is retaliating not just for Israel’s air operations against Syria but in anticipation of the Obama administration’s impending decision to send the first US arms shipments to the Syrian rebels.”

“Intelligence agencies in Moscow and the Middle East take it for granted that by the time Washington goes public on this decision, some of the Syrian rebel factions will already be armed with American weapons.”

Russia’s concerned about foreign military intervention. It happened so often before. Putin wants it prevented. It won’t be easy to do so.

America’s business is war. Obama’s a committed warrior president. He’s waging multiple

daily wars. He's done so every day in office. He's got other targets in mind. He wants Assad ousted. He's not about to change plans now.

A Final Comment

For two days, Syria was disconnected online. Google's Transparency Report said all services it covers were "inaccessible."

Other companies that monitor online traffic globally said Tuesday's shutdown "disconnect(ed) Syria from Internet communication with the rest of the world."

Syrian authorities said "Internet services and phone calls between provinces were cut off Tuesday evening because of a fault in optical fiber cables."

"Efforts are ongoing to fix the faults and to bring Internet and telephone services back as soon as possible."

As of Wednesday evening local time, Internet services were restored. The Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) headlined "Urgent - Internet services back to normal across Syria after repairing optic cable malfunction."

[SANA](#) quoted the 120-nation Non-Aligned Movement's denunciation of Israeli aggression.

A formal statement said "(T)he Non-Alignment Movement Coordination Office condemns in the strongest terms the Israeli aggression against Syria."

The attack was a "grave violation of the international law as it infringes upon Syrian sovereignty and constitutes a blatant violation of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations."

It called for follow-up Security Council action. It wants Israel held responsible. It threatens regional peace and security. America does most of all. Together they menace humanity.

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