

# US, UK and France Stress Threat of Force Against Syria

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The US and its two key allies, Britain and France, stressed Monday that there has to be a threat of military attack against Syria if the government of President Bashar al-Assad fails to adhere strictly to the demands contained in a chemical weapons agreement reached Saturday between US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

The bellicose rhetoric from the meeting in Paris between Kerry, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius and British Foreign Minister William Hague underscored sharp differences with Russia, which warned that the threats from the West could undermine any chance of a negotiated end to Syria's two-and-a-half-year-old civil war.

"If Assad fails in time to abide by the terms of this framework, make no mistake, we are all agreed — and that includes Russia — that there will be consequences," Kerry said. Kerry claimed that Russia had indicated its support for a Security Council resolution that would invoke Chapter VII of the UN charter, which authorizes the use of military force, if Syria failed to comply.

The message from the meeting in Paris echoed threats made over the weekend by both US President Barack Obama and French President Francois Hollande, whose government was the only one in the world to commit to joining the US in its planned aggression against Syria.

"If diplomacy fails, the United States remains prepared to act," Obama warned in a television interview on Sunday.

In an address delivered the same day, French President Hollande declared, "The military option must remain; otherwise there will be no pressure."

A US war fleet remains deployed in the eastern Mediterranean poised for striking Syria. The Pentagon has announced that it will remain in place indefinitely.

After a rapid buildup to war last month—using as a pretext the unsubstantiated claim that the Assad government was responsible for an August 21 chemical weapons attack near Damascus—Washington's plans for a unilateral and illegal attack on Syria were upended by the mass popular hostility to war both in the United States and internationally. Reeling from the British Parliament's unprecedented vote on August 29 to reject a resolution backing military action, Obama turned to the US Congress for an Authorization of the Use of Military Force (AUMF) resolution.

Here too, the opposition of the American people to another Middle East war based upon lies

stymied the US president's plans. Members of Congress confronting constituents who in their overwhelming majority demanded no war in Syria found it too dangerous to support the AUMF, and Obama faced the humiliating and unprecedented prospect of being denied Congressional approval for launching a war.

It was under these conditions that the administration stumbled into the negotiations with Russia on a proposal for the chemical disarmament of the Syrian regime. While the agreement reached in Geneva on Saturday has apparently postponed an immediate attack on Syria, the threats emerging from Washington and its allies suggest that the disarmament process—the so-called path to diplomacy—could rapidly lead to a major war.

Weapons experts have warned that the breakneck timetable imposed by the US-Russian deal, which demands the destruction of all Syria's chemical weapons by the middle of next year, is practically impossible under any conditions, much less those of a civil war prevailing in Syria.

The three Western powers also seized upon the United Nations weapons inspectors' report on the August 21 incident released Monday by UN Secretary General Ban ki-Moon as further fodder for war propaganda.

The report, French Foreign Minister Fabius claimed, "leaves no doubt on the origin of the attack," while the US ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Powers said that the details of the report "make clear that only the regime could have carried" it out.

In fact, the report did no such thing. It ascribed no blame, concluding that "chemical weapons have been used in the ongoing conflict between the parties in the Syrian Arab Republic," based on medical evidence, interviews with survivors and recovery of a rocket containing traces of sarin.

A separate body, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria, is preparing to investigate some 14 alleged chemical weapons attack from the standpoint of determining who was responsible. The Syrian regime has charged that its own soldiers as well as civilians have been killed by chemical munitions used by the CIA-backed militias fighting to topple the Assad regime.

One of the senior members of the UN commission, Carla Del Ponte, a former chief prosecutor in two UN war crimes tribunals, revealed last May that evidence pointed to the use of chemical weapons, including sarin, by the so-called rebels.

And last week, Turkish prosecutors presented an indictment against a Syrian member of the Al Qaeda-affiliated Al Nusra Front and his Turkish accomplices charging them with attempting to procure chemicals in Turkey for the manufacture of sarin gas.

The threat of US aggression against Syria was never driven by concern over chemical weapons—that was merely a pretext. Washington's real aim is regime change in Syria as a means of furthering US hegemony over the Middle East and preparing an even wider war against Iran, which it sees as its principal regional rival.

To those ends, the US and its allies meeting in Paris vowed to step up their support for the "rebels," a collection of some 1,000 separate militias and death squads dominated by Al Qaeda and other Islamist elements. Together with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, the US and its NATO allies have poured billions of dollars' worth of weapons and funding into Syria,

stoking a bloody civil war that has claimed over 100,000 lives. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Syrian troops and pro-Assad militias account for over 40 percent of these casualties.

On the same day that the chemical weapons inspectors' report was released, the United Nations committee on Libyan sanctions also came out with a report to the Security Council that found "an increasing number of reported cases of trafficking of arms and ammunition from Libya to the Syrian Arab Republic by sea and air," in the wake of the US-NATO war for regime change that ended in the murder of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi.

This arms pipeline, financed by Qatar and coordinated by the CIA—which established a large secret station in the Libyan city of Benghazi that was attacked by Islamist militants last year—has been a source of large amounts of advanced weaponry for the anti-Assad militias.

Last week, it was reported that the CIA, which had organized the provision of arms bought by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, is now directly arming the "rebels."

Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov dismissed Kerry's claim that Russia was in sync with the West on the use of military force against Syria. "Yes, our American colleagues would very much like there to be a Chapter VII resolution," he said. "But the final declaration, the final document that we approved and which has the guiding principles for how we proceed and for our mutual obligations, makes no mention of it."

"If for someone it is more important to constantly threaten ... that is another path to wrecking completely the chances of calling the Geneva 2 conference," Lavrov added, referring to the proposed conference for negotiating a political settlement of Syria's civil war.

The reality is that Washington has no interest in convening such a conference under conditions in which the "rebels" are suffering mounting defeats and are, according to multiple reports, in a state of disintegration. Rather, it wants to change the facts on the ground, through an increased flow of weapons and, despite the present postponement, direct military intervention.

In addition to prolonging the Syrian bloodbath, this predatory policy poses the threat of igniting a regional war that could draw in neighboring countries, as well as Iran and Russia.

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