

Forum: Security Council

Issue: The issue of Chemical Weapons use in Syria

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Introduction

Pope Benedict XVI once said, "Violence against even one human being is violence against all." When this violence against people is dragged out over a course of 7 grueling years with a death toll of over 400,000 people, you have the Syrian war. By far the most brutal area of combat in current times, the Syrian battlefield is plagued with shattered rules of war and ignored cries of outrage by the international community, none bigger than the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons against the civilian populace.

However, the Assad regime cannot be fully blamed for the use of chemical weapons against the civilian population, as the Islamic State of Syria and the Levant (ISL) and other terrorist groups operating in the region have also been reported to use such crude weapons, such as mustard gas and Sarin on enemy controlled territories. Furthermore, the Syrian administration supposedly overturned all of its chemical weapons to the international community under the pressure of multiple UN Security Council resolutions and a report drafted by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), yet some terrorist groups and the regime itself are still claimed to house and detonate chemical weapons within its attacks.

These war rules violations are the worst since the 1993 Biological weapons Convention (BWC) and Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) were made, leading to the deaths of over 1400 people since 2015 alone. Unfortunately, exact numbers and perpetrators cannot be identified by the United Nations nor the international community due to the reluctance of the Syrian regime to grant access into the country and the split viewpoints of the member states of Security Council, although individual country reports indicate possible use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Army and the Islamic State of Syria and the Levant (ISL).

While solutions to the problem have been debated in the United Nations Security Council and voted on by the P5 nations, all of the powers cannot seem to conclude which is within the national interests of their respective nations, thus vetoes keep on flying back and forth leading to further abrasion between major benefactors of the rebels and the Syrian regime.

Definition of Key Terms

Chemical Weapons

These are described by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) as, any chemical [that is weaponized] which through its action on life can kill, cause temporary incapacitation or irreparable damage to humans or other fauna. This includes all chemicals, without discretion of their origin or of manufacture, and regardless of whether they are produced in chemical weapons facilities, in munitions factories or elsewhere.

Transnational terrorism

As defined by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; a group of people who have committed a criminal act in order to spread fear among the general populace or manipulate the national/international community in a decision or act.

Genocide

This is an act like the harming, mass killing or worsening conditions of life for a specific part of or the whole population of a national/international group as defined by the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Precursor Chemical

As defined by the OPCW; these are any chemicals used in the manufacture of other toxic chemicals which may be weaponized to inflict human harm.

Nerve Agents

These are chemicals which directly affect the Central Nervous System of the human body by blocking impulses and having a very high level of toxicity as defined by the OPCW. These chemicals are mainly absorbed through the lungs or skin and can either have long lasting effects or be quick and deadly when in contact with humans.

Background Information

The use of chemical weapons dates back to 2012, when the Syrian government publicly admitted to owning a stockpile of chemical weapons within its borders, as well as having multiple production facilities for weapons-grade chemical ammunitions. Since then, the Islamic State of Syria and the Levant

(ISIL) and the Syrian government have been reported to control and/or use chemical weapons such as sarin gas and mustard gas in war torn areas, usually against civilians, leading to innocent casualties and loss of civilian life.

There have been repeated calls from the global community to prohibit any use of chemical weapons from both sides of the Syrian war and special pressure has been put on the Syrian regime to end the use of their chemical weapons, seeing as the government supposedly registered and destroyed all of the Syrian arsenal in 2014. However, this unfortunately seems to be not the case, as continued reports circulate around the world, both from the OPCW and other media outlets of heinous uses of chemical weapons in attacks, leading to possibly the worst breach in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the 1993 Chemical weapons Convention (CWC).

International Support for the Assad Regime

Within the Syrian war, one wonders how the nation of Syria still continues to manufacture chemical weapons, even with an escalating GDP debt estimated to be \$226 billion and its severe loss of private and public services. While agencies like the Lebanon Syrian Crisis Trust Fund (LSTF) and EU Syria Trust Fund donate monetary investments to neighboring countries as a means to stemming refugee crises in those nations, there is supposedly no charity which aids the Syrian Regime in its continued war.

However, the Syrian government has a very strong alliance with the Russian Federation and so the Assad regime regularly benefits from monetary and military aid provided by their allies. Russia is seen by the global community as the main funder of the Syrian government and so many people think there is a direct link between Russia funding and chemical weapons manufacture in Syria, even going so far as to claim that the Russian are fueling the increment of the Syrian chemical weapons arsenal.

In contrast, the Russian government vehemently denies any direct funding of Syrian chemical weapons dealings, and at present even warn USA and its coalition on backing Al- Qaeda-linked rebels groups in Syria which have the potential to use chemical weapons against government forces. Furthermore, Russia has been a key player in the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons in the 2014 action plan which was initiated by Russian influence and intervention when USA was about to carry out military strikes in Syrian forces.

Funds for Terrorist groups

While it is imaginable that the Syrian government may or may not be funding its chemical weapons programs from external aid, the issue of ISIL funding still plagues the international community. Many papers and reports on the topic enforce that the main source of funding for ISIL remain within bank

looting, taxation of goods and control over oil fields/ refineries, though some new agencies and nations speculate of foreign donors funding ISIL movements.

Arms trafficking

Most of the finance of the ISIL goes into its war efforts in Syria and Iraq, though some of this finance may also end up in Syrian rebel groups. There are many shifting alliances being formed and broken in the Syrian war, which leads to weapons and money swapping hands from Syrian rebels to ISIL fighters. Research into the arms used by ISIL fighters show that much of it is weaponry given to rebel forces by the USA and usually bought from the European Union (EU) even with the EU imposing a weapons embargo on Syria. This shows a very lax mindset among EU weapons manufacturers in tracking the circulation of their products around the world, but also negatively impacts the reputation of the companies due to the ever-changing matrix of alliances being formed and broken within the Syrian conflict, as these changes often result in ISIL fighters acquiring advanced technology which it cannot possible hope to gain from purely monetary means.

Chemicals Used

The most commonly used chemicals before 2014 were nerve agents such as sarin and VX. These chemicals would directly shut down the nervous system of any people who inhale the chemical. They can also diffuse through the skin, making it even more potent in killing. Both the Syrian government and the Syrian opposition forces have been alleged to have used these nerve agents before the Syrian government discharged all the registered 600 tons of chemical weapons out of the country to be destroyed.

Afterwards, the most common place chemicals became chlorine and its organic compounds, as well as mustard gas used by the ISIL fighter. The Assad regime is thought to continue the use of chlorine laced bombs, which are infused with other chemicals such as nerve agents to create an almost certain death bomb which will definitely kill any living person within a sizeable area of its drop. This poses a major concern for any civilians within the vicinity of these bombs as many of these people are unaware of the effects of the chemicals until the effects prove fatal for the person. This has caused many civilian deaths to occur, even without the intention of the bombers. Contrastingly, there has been no direct evidence linking the chemical weapons used in any attacks like Douma in 2018 or Damascus to the Assad regime, which has given Russia the justification to veto any United Nations resolution directly targeting the Assad regime for its use of chemical weapons against unarmed civilians, or allege any cases of genocide against the Syrian populace.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)

The OPCW is very actively involved in the chemical weapons usage issue in Syria as it is the mandate of this organization to end all use of chemical weapons in warfare. Furthermore, the OPCW provide legitimate evidence as well as testification for all United Nations resolutions, especially those issued by the Security Council. This organization tries to decrease the armament of Syria with chemical weapons by gathering information about the deployment and effects of the chemicals being used then presenting these findings to the United Nations to act upon.

OPCW has sent multiple teams of experts to assess soil samples and other factors around an alleged chemical weapons attack to see if actual chemicals were used. The OPCW has confirmed the use of chemical weapons in Damascus, Aleppo, Dhouma and other parts of Syria which are said to be bombed by chemical weapons. This has lead to the United nations Security Council to condemn attack and debate on various methods of combating the issue of Syria, as well as legitimising some military operations which the America and Russia have conducted, though the OPCW still affirms that it cannot blame any party of the war because of this power being above the mandate of the organization.

This organization is crucial in the gathering of unbiased, legitimate information about the chemical weapons usage in the Syrian war and has help to ratify actions taken by the United Nations with clear evidence against the prosecuted nation.

United States of America (USA)

USA leads a group of countries across the globe in a coalition against transnational terrorism as a whole and currently sees Syria as one of the biggest threats to its goal of no terrorism in the world. The US has provided Syrian opposition forces with over one billion dollars in non-lethal goods as well as training and intelligence aid in the war effort. Currently, the US is more reluctant to hand over any more assistance to the rebels due to the increasing connections the rebels have associated with ISIL principles as well as all efforts being focused on the expulsion of Iranian forces from Syria.

However, USA is a continued supporter of the Syrian rebels and provides them with the necessary equipment and aid needed to function and fight against the Syrian government. A key factor for this alliance is the continued tensions between Russia and America. America has a very strong influence in the Middle East and if Russia is able to exert control over the Syrian government, the integrity of the United States foreign policies would be undermined, which may lead to very unstable circumstances for USA in the future.

Russian Federation

In direct opposition to the viewpoint adopted by the United State of America, the Russian government have very close ties to the Assad regime of Syria, leading to some reports claiming Russia to have influenced the starting and continued manufacture of chemical weapons in the Syrian war. However, Russia has also formed a coalition between itself, Syria and Iran, which hopes to expel the rebels and terrorist fighters to restore peace and jurisdiction for president Bashar Hafez-Al Assad. Russia has been a long-standing ally of the Syrian regime and will continue to support the views of the elected government, as its forces are currently winning the war.

Furthermore, Russia has also been one of the most vocal countries against the attacks of Douma, especially as these attacks involve the use of chemical weapons. In addition, Russia also wants to end transnational terrorism within Syria, though the method of approach between USA and Russia differ, leading to bitter wars of words and incrementing tensions between the two nations.

Russia also wants to prevent America from gaining total control over the middle east and thus has supported Syria for a very extensive period of time. In doing so, Russia hopes to combat the power of America in the Middle East while also shoring up support for itself in the international community by solving a large humanitarian crisis going on in the world. Furthermore, Russia may feel threatened at the potential loss of billions of dollars worth in financial support for the Assad Regime, culminating in further tensions between Russia and America.

World Health Organization (WHO)

WHO has had a vested interest in the proceedings of Syria due to their large contribution to the rebuilding of basic health care services in the country. Unfortunately, these efforts have been minimal in helping with civilians who are harmed by chemical weapons. The World Health Organization partnered with the United Nations for a brief period of time from 2013 to 2017 where the organization endeavored to find evidence of the use of chemical weapons in major attacks such as Douma, Damascus and Aleppo. WHO has played a very pinnacle role in providing health services in to the Syrian people and as of the 5th October 2018, provided aid to over 130 healthcare facilities in Northwestern Syria. Many thousands of people have been given life saving medical attention and along with generous contributions from external sources, WHO has been able to re-open facilities in Aleppo to treat civilians with basic healthcare needs

Islamic Republic of Iran

The republic of Iran has played a very crucial role in the support of the Assad regime's push for control. Iran has supported Russia in its coalition and even has forces which are based in the Syrian front lines. However, this has sparked renewed fear and apprehension in USA and coupled with the

losing battle of the opposition forces, America has become very nervous with the Iranian troops in Syria. Russia has repeatedly called for the withdrawal of American military personnel from the war front, but with the situation of Iranian support for the Assad regime, USA seems very reluctant to leave the battle.

Nevertheless, Iran has been crucial in the incremented pace at which the Assad Regime has gained territory in the past couple of years. The Involvement of Iran was a game changer for the Russian government as the support and training of Iranian troops has allowed the Syrian armies to push effectively against the Syrian opposition forces as well as ISIL fighters to gain a very large amount of the Syrian Arab Republic back under the control of the government.

European Union (EU)

The EU oversaw a total weapons embargo from 2011 to 2013 and being the main supplier of arms for America, this embargo restricted the weapons circulation into Syria. However, the EU members began to have differing viewpoints in 2013 as to supplying the rebel forces of Syria with arms or continue to impose a full weapon ban in the country. In the end, many of the sanctions were lifted as of 2013, though there are still very tight restrictions of weapon circulation by the EU on the Syrian forces, especially those of the Syrian government.

The embargoes placed by the EU has led to a largely decreased number of weapons in the Syrian war front than if it where to still supply forces with arms. One the other hand, the EU cannot register all the weapons movements when the arms have entered Syria, leading to much of the arms embargo being broken when Syrian opposition forces defect to ally with ISIL fighters.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
July 23 rd 2012	Syrian government acknowledges its possession of chemical weapons.
March 19 th 2013	Syrian government reports two attack in Damascus and Aleppo using chemicals
March 21 st 2013	The UN in conjunction with the World Health Organization (WHO) and OPCW launches investigations into attacks.
April 13 th 2013	The Syrian Observatory on Human Rights (SOHR) claims two gas bombs were dropped on Aleppo.
August 21 st 2013	Syrian opposition forces reported a large chemical attack which affected over 1000 people deployed by the Syrian Regime

August 31 st 2013	Due to numerous reports by France, England and USA claiming the use of chemicals in the Syrian attacks, USA prepares to vote on military strikes against the Syrian government
September 12 th 2013	As a cause of pressure by Russia, the Syrian government accepts to hand over all of its chemical weapons stockpiles in exchange for no military strikes by USA
September 14 th 2013	A plan for discharging the chemical weapons is made between USA and Russia which is given to the Syrian government to follow
October 31 st 2013	Syria destroys, or incapacitates all of its chemical weapons production plants
January 7 th 2014	The Syrian government starts to export all of its chemical weapons as instructed by the plan and international NGOs or government volunteer to destroy the weapons
April 4 th 2014	The Syrian government has discharged 45 percent of all the chemical weapons registered to the United Nations and OPCW
April 11 th 2014	Alleged reports of a chemical attack on a small village in Northwestern Syria
August 19 th 2014	The OPCW confirms the discharge and destruction of all the chemical weapons registered by the Syrian government
September 10 th 2014	Officials of the OPCW report the continued use of chlorine gas in the attacks of April 11 th
March 6 th 2015	The Security Council adopts a resolution to constitute Chapter VII of the UNSC charter against Syria in order to restore peace to the global society
November 6 th 2015	A press release of the OPCW claims with compelling evidence the use of mustard gas by the Levant
April 4 th 2017	A chemical weapons attack was reported which killed dozens of people, though the Syrian government denies involvement
April 6 th 2017	USA launches long range missiles which destroys a Syrian government air base which is believed to have been the source of the attacks of April 4 th
November 16 th 2017	The UN and OPCW joint mission in Syria ends as the United Nations Security Council fails to adopt a resolution to continue its progress due to a veto passed by Russia
January 20 th 2018	Turkey Launches operation Olive Branch to remove Kurdish forces from the northwest of Syria
April 7 th 2018	Large chemical weapons attack in Dhouma is estimated to have killed over 1,100 civilians
April 14 th 2018	USA, UK and France launch a joint attack against facilities used by the Syrian government to research and manufacture chemical weapons.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Agreement to eliminate Syria's Chemical Weapons, 27 September 2013 (**S/RES/2118**)
- Condemning the use of Chemical weapons in Syria without attributing blame, 6th march 2015, (**S/RES/2209**)
- Establishment of the UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism, 7 August 2015 (**S/RES/2235**)
- Extending the Mandate of the UN-OPCW Joint Investigative mechanism, 31 October 2016 (**S/RES/2314**)
- Renewed mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism of UN-OPCW for a further year, 12 November 2016 (**S/RES/2319**)
- Establishment of impartial Mechanism to assist investigations into those responsible from largest breaches in international law, 21 December 2016 (**A/RES/71/248**)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The most notable attempt to solve the situation of Syria which was accepted by the full United Nations Security Council is the Joint Investigative Mechanism that was unanimously adopted by the Security Council. This resolution legalized the Joint Mechanism, which provided crucial evidence for the United Nations Security Council to act on further.

However, a very noticeable crutch of this Mechanism was its inability to assign blame to the perpetrators of the chemical weapons attacks. This flaw is largely believed to exist because of Russia's reluctance to forming an organization which can clearly act against the chemical weapons situation in Syria. Russian and Chinese reluctance is said to be a protection of the sovereignty of Syria over its land as well as assigning blame being too far above the mandate of the Organization for the Prohibition of chemical Weapons.

Referral of the situation to the International Criminal Court was also suggested multiple times in the General Assembly by Saudi Arabia, yet again failed to pass or was vetoed in the United Nations Security Council by Russia and China as it is seen as a breach in the Sovereignty of the Syrian Republic. Furthermore, the relations between Syria, Russia and China would become very strained should the ICC intervene, leading to a major loss of finances as well as strategic resources for the Kremlin.

Possible Solutions

Uniting both the Russian and American coalitions against the common enemy of the Islamic State could lead to a much swifter ending to the war as both coalitions will be focused on eradicating ISIL fighters instead of each other. Furthermore, this could lead to political, military and tactical cooperation between the Assad regime and the Syrian opposition forces, as both sides will be forced to reach some sort of agreement which will be endorsed by both coalitions, thus helping future peace talks between the two original warring parties of the conflict. In addition, this would create a certain amount of transparency for the international community into the chemical weapons stockpiles of the Syrian government, thus allowing American-led coalition to actually see if the Syrian government is innocent to the alleged charges of chemical weapons use.

However, the involvement of certain member states within each coalition from both sides could make Russia and America balk to any sort of cooperation. With the case of America, working with the Iranian forces situated in Syria would be a definite dissuader in this deal, which may lead to USA rejecting the offer unless a beneficial offer is given to the US coalition. Contrastingly, Assad loyalists fighting under Russian training could refuse to a line with American policies, especially for more transparency into its chemical weapons proliferation program, which would be a very large barrier to overcome. Should the Syrian government be guilty to the use of chemical weapons, the Assad regime will never agree to fight alongside USA in fear of being uncovered. Contrastingly, USA may also reject the offer to align with a government which would be proven guilty to the use of chemical weapons to cause genocide against its populace.

Another solution would be to re-institute the Joint Investigative Mechanism of the United Nations and the OPCW with the additional powers of assigning blame. This would allow for much more transparency into the perpetrator of the chemical weapons attacks, thus allowing for the Security Council to take further action on the matter as well as authorize any aggressive/ military actions taken by either coalition against the perpetrators.

While the United States of America, the Republic of France and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is supportive of this restructuring of the mechanism, the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China are very against this, stating that it is over the mandate of the OPCW to assign blame and such actions can only be taken by the majority vote of the Security Council. It should also be noted that Russia cast a veto against the extending of the mandate of the Joint Mechanism in 2017, leading to the dissolution of the mechanism in Syria. Convincing Russia and China of the benefits to having the Joint Mechanism reinstated would play a very crucial step in solving the Syrian crisis of chemical weapons.

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