



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on September 18, 2013

Syria Tells Russia that Rebels Used Chemicals

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov (shown, at left) said that Syria's government has provided Russia with new materials pointing to rebels' involvement in a chemical attack that occurred outside Damascus on August 21.

"The corresponding materials were handed to the Russian side. We were told that they were evidence that the rebels are implicated in the chemical attack," Ryabkov was quoted by Russian news agencies and AFP. Ryabkov spoke with the media after talks with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem.



AFP reported that Ryabkov said Russia "was disappointed with a UN report into the chemical weapons attack, saying it was selective and had ignored other episodes."

"Without a full picture ... we cannot describe the character of the conclusions as anything other than politicized, biased and one-sided," said Ryabkov.

The United States and Russia have taken opposite sides in assigning the blame for the chemical attacks in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta.

AFP reported that on September 17 the United States accused Russia of "ignoring the facts" related to the chemical attacks, but that Russia insists the attack was a "provocation" by rebels fighting President Bashar al-Assad's government and was designed to incite military strikes by the United States.

The UN team investigating the chemical attack found that the potent nerve agent sarin had been used. (Production and stockpiling of sarin was outlawed by the Chemical Weapons Convention of 1993.) However, the UN report, compiled by chief investigator Ake Sellstrom, did not assign blame for the attack.

[Sellstrom told the BBC](#) that he believed that the task of finding and destroying Syria's chemical stockpile would be "stressful work," but was "doable."

Under the [Kerry-Lavrov agreement](#) brokered by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Damascus is supposed to provide an inventory of its chemical arsenal by Saturday, September 21.

In an interview with Russian media quoted by the BBC, Ryabkov said the Assad government had provided him with new evidence that rebel forces had used chemical weapons.

"Just now we were given evidence. We need to analyze it," said Ryabkov, without providing further details.

However, reported BBC, Ryabkov criticized the UN report, saying it was "distorted" and "one-sided."

"The basis of information upon which it is built is not sufficient, and in any case we would need to learn and know more on what happened beyond and above that incident of 21 August," he said.



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Responding to Ryabkov's statements, UN investigator Sellstrom told the BBC he thought Russia was not criticizing the report itself but the process, which he described as a political matter outside his purview.

"What I think — as I interpret it — is that there are other allegations by the Syrian government which have to be looked into," said Sellstrom.

Selstrom also told CNN that the next visit to Syria by his inspection team could take place as early as next week.

"This analysis is not finished, so the point here is not about accusing parties. But the point is ... that those inspectors of the U.N. should come back to Syria to complete their investigation," Ryabkov told Russia Today.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad met Wednesday with a U.S. delegation in Damascus, telling its members that the "U.S. administration policies in the region do not serve the American people," reported the state-run Syrian Arab News Agency.

Syria's state-run television also reported a meeting between Assad and Ryabkov, during which the Syrian president "expressed his and the Syrian people's gratitude for the Russian positions supporting Syria in confronting the aggressive attack and the terrorism that is aided by Western, Arab and regional states."

CNN also quoted a statement made on September 17 by U.S. State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki that assigned blame for the nerve-gas attacks on the Assad forces. "Based on our preliminary review of information contained in the report, several crucial details confirm the Assad regime's guilt in carrying out this attack," said Psaki.

Psaki said that one of the munitions identified in the report, a 120 mm improvised rocket, has been linked to previous attacks by Assad's forces, and "we have no indications that the opposition has manufactured or used this style rocket."

[CBS News](#) reported a statement made by U.S. Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power, who said that the "technical details" found in the 41-page UN inspector's report "make clear that only the regime could have carried out this large-scale chemical weapons attack."

"It's very important to note that the regime possesses sarin," added Power, "and we have no evidence that the opposition possesses sarin."

NATO adopted Sarin in the early 1950s as a standard chemical weapon, and both the U.S.S.R. and the United States produced sarin for military purposes.

A [CNN report](#) on September 12 cited a statement from a U.S. official who would not speak publicly claiming that CIA-funded weapons have begun flowing to Syrian rebels. "That is something we are not going to dispute, but we are not going to publicly speak to it," the official said.

The CNN report was linked to a September 11 [Washington Post article](#) reporting that "the CIA has begun delivering weapons to rebels in Syria, ending months of delay in lethal aid that had been promised by the Obama administration, according to U.S. officials and Syrian figures."

The *Post* reported:

The arms shipments, which are limited to light weapons and other munitions that can be tracked, began arriving in Syria at a moment of heightened tensions over threats by President Obama to order missile strikes to punish the regime of Bashar al-Assad for his alleged use of chemical



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weapons in a deadly attack near Damascus last month.

Considering that sarin is a highly concentrated substance, might it not have been possible for the CIA to have included supplies of it among the arms shipped to the Syrian rebels?

There is another possibility.

Another CBS News report on July 9 reported that Russia's UN ambassador, Vitaly Churkin, said on that day that Russian experts determined that Syrian rebels made sarin nerve gas and used it in a deadly attack on the government-controlled Aleppo suburb of Khan al-Assal on March 19.

"It was established that on March 19, the rebels launched an unguided Bashar 3 projectile towards Khan al-Assal controlled by the government forces," Churkin told reporters.

The ambassador, reported CBS, said the results of the analysis indicate the Bashar 3 rocket "was not industrially manufactured and was filled with sarin." He said the samples indicated the sarin and the projectile were produced in "cottage industry" conditions. The absence of chemical stabilizers, which are needed for long-term storage and later use, indicated its "possibly recent production," Churkin said. "Therefore, there is every reason to believe that it was the armed opposition fighters who used the chemical weapons in Khan al-Assal," he continued.

"According to information at our disposal," said Churkin, "the production of Bashar 3 unguided projectiles was started in February 2013 by the so-called Bashar al Nasser Brigade affiliated with the Free Syrian Army."

We are obviously unable to verify the veracity of any of the statements quoted by the media, whether of U.S., UN, Russian, or Syrian origin.

What remains obvious, however, is that the conflict in Syria is a complex one not likely to be helped by U.S. intervention. This reinforces the wisdom of our leaders during America's early years, among them John Quincy Adams, who said in 1821 that America "goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own."

Photo of Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad: AP Images

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