

Russia, West Clash Over Syria Attack

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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UNITED NATIONS — U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Thursday announced that the United Nations will launch an investigation as requested by the Syrian government into allegations that chemical weapons were used in Syria.

“I have decided to conduct a United Nations investigation into the possible use of chemical weapons in Syria,” Ban told reporters. He said the investigation will focus on “the specific incident brought to my attention by the Syrian government.”

Russia clashed with Britain and France at the UN Security Council on Wednesday over the scope of the investigation, accusing Western powers of trying to torpedo a potential UN probe.

Syria asked UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to investigate an alleged chemical weapons attack by “terrorist groups” near the northern city of Aleppo, Syrian UN Ambassador Bashar Ja’afari said. Russia supports that request.

Britain and France cited Syrian opposition claims that there were two chemical weapons

attacks, one in Damascus and another in Aleppo, on Tuesday and demanded that both be investigated. Russia's UN envoy disagreed strongly with the idea of focusing an urgently needed UN investigation on multiple incidents.

Ban made clear that the focus of the investigation he announced would be the Aleppo attack.

"I am of course aware that there are other allegations of similar cases involving the reported use of chemical weapons," he said, adding that the United Nations would be cooperating with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The dispute highlighted the chasm between Russia's position toward the Syrian government, its ally, and that of the Western powers that support the opposition trying to oust President Bashar Assad. The deadlock on the 15-nation council has left it powerless to act on Syria's two-year-old civil war.

Syria's government and rebels accused each other of launching a deadly chemical attack, but U.S. and European officials say there is no evidence to suggest there was such an attack. If confirmed, it would be the first use of such weapons in the conflict.

The Security Council discussed the issue Wednesday, Russian Ambassador Vitaly Churkin told reporters after the closed-door session. He complained that Britain and France wanted to focus on two alleged chemical weapons attacks rather than the one in Aleppo, which he said was a delaying tactic.

British Deputy Ambassador Philip Parham and French Ambassador Gerard Araud said their position, and that of the majority of council members, was that the UN must investigate both alleged chemical weapon attacks.

"The [Syrian] National Coalition issued a statement today saying that there had been two cases of chemical weapons being used in Syria yesterday, one in the Damascus area and one in the Aleppo area," Parham said.

"The facts are not clear at the moment," he said. "What we have are reports and allegations. They are very serious, and they need to be investigated."

Ja'afari said he was not aware of a second alleged chemical weapons attack Tuesday.

"This [second] allegation was set up on purpose to torpedo the investigation on the real use of chemical weapons which took place in Aleppo," he told reporters.

Churkin said France, the United States and Britain also wanted to saddle their request for a UN probe into chemical weapons attacks with additional matters such as humanitarian access in Syria.

"To me, a concern which I expressed in the council, was that this was really a way to delay the need for immediate, urgent investigation of allegations pertaining to March 19 by raising all sorts of issues," he said.

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