

# U.S. Says It Has Proof of Gas Attack in Syria

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Syrian refugees passing through a gate at the Turkish border on Saturday. **Gregorio Borgia**

*Correction appended*

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry on Sunday said the case for military intervention in Syria was getting "stronger and stronger" as Washington had proof of Sarin gas use by the Syrian government, while Syria openly mocked U.S. "confusion" and President Vladimir Putin called for diplomatic means.

Kerry told CNN that hair and blood samples taken from victims in eastern Damascus had "tested positive for signatures of sarin." The results cited by Kerry came from samples given directly to the U.S., not from UN experts, AP reported.

Kerry's statement came a day after U.S. Ambassador Michael McFaul met with Russian officials to present the U.S. case for intervention in Syria, a case which Putin quickly dismissed

as "foolish nonsense."

The U.S. has accused Syrian President Bashar Assad's government of involvement in the attack on the outskirts of Damascus on Aug. 21 that killed 1,429 civilians, while Russia has cautioned against jumping to conclusions and said it may have been rebel forces.

At a meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov on Saturday, McFaul "stated arguments supporting the accusations of the U.S. administration against the Syrian government about the alleged involvement in an incident in which chemical weapons were possibly used" in eastern Ghouta, the Foreign Ministry's website reported.

The ministry's statement did not elaborate on what the "arguments" involved, whether any kind of concrete evidence was provided or just verbal pleas.

Ryabkov called on the U.S. side to "abstain from using the mentioned incident to justify the growing military pressure" in Damascus and "provide for the full realization of agreements" made at the G8 Summit in Northern Ireland in June to peacefully settle the conflict.

About an hour after the ministry's statement was released, news agencies quoted Putin as saying the U.S. had no proof that Assad's troops had used chemical weapons, since it had provided no evidence.

"If there is proof, it should be presented. If it is not presented, that means there isn't any," Putin said, adding that "allegations that they have such proof but it is classified and can't be provided are beneath criticism, it's simply disrespectful to their partners," Interfax reported Saturday.

On the same day, Obama announced that he would seek the approval of Congress for a military attack on Assad's forces, ruling out a strike for at least nine days, as Congress only reconvenes from summer recess on Sept. 9.

Obama's announcement was labeled "a historic American retreat" by Syria's state-run al-Thawra newspaper, and Assad mocked Obama's "hesitation and confusion," Reuters reported.

Britain and France last week promised military support to the U.S. in Syria, but only if a UN panel of experts found proof of the use of chemical weapons by government forces. Turkey also vowed to send troops .

The UN commission returned from Syria on Saturday with blood samples from the victims of the alleged chemical attack and from the soil at the site of the attack, and a UN spokesman said Sunday that the testing would be expedited to ensure a speedier result.

Yet, the UN team will not be able to determine who actually conducted the chemical gas attack, according to spokesman Martin Nesirky.

Russia has suggested that the chemical weapons may have been used by opposition militants, while some television reports showed witnesses who said there was no gas attack in the presumed district at the presumed time.

Putin urged Obama to discuss the Syria crisis with Russian officials on the sidelines of the upcoming G20 Summit in St. Petersburg on Thursday and Friday.

The U.S. Embassy on Friday said many independent sources testified that a chemical weapons attack took place on the outskirts of Damascus on Aug. 21, including U.S. intelligence, international and Syrian medical personnel; videos; witness accounts; thousands of social media reports from at least 12 different locations in the Damascus area; journalist accounts; and reports from "highly credible" nongovernmental organizations.

Obama said Saturday that he was "comfortable going forward without the approval of a United Nations Security Council that, so far, has been completely paralyzed and unwilling to hold Assad accountable," he said, the U.S. Embassy reported.

"I'm confident in the case our government has made without waiting for UN inspectors," Obama said.

As for the decision to court congressional authorization — which many have seen as a sign of hesitation — Obama said it would make the country stronger and its actions more effective.

Due to an editing error, an earlier version of this story incorrectly stated that Jordan gave the U.S. permission to launch a potential strike from its territory. In fact, Jordan said it would not allow U.S. forces to use its territory for any military intervention.

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