

UN Says Chemical Arms Report on Syria Attack 'Indisputable'

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations on Wednesday defended a report by UN chemical weapons experts that Russia has criticized as "one-sided," saying its conclusion that rockets loaded with sarin gas were used in an Aug. 21 attack should not be questioned.

"The findings in that report are indisputable," UN spokesman Martin Nesirky told reporters. "They speak for themselves and this was a thoroughly objective report on that specific incident."

UN chemical investigators led by Ake Sellstrom of Sweden confirmed Monday the use of sarin nerve agent in the Aug. 21 attack outside the Syrian capital in a long-awaited report that the U.S., Britain and France said proved Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces were responsible.

Russia denounced Sellstrom's findings as preconceived and tainted by politics, stepping up its

criticism of the report. Russia, like Assad's government, says the rebels carried out the attack, which the U.S. says killed more than 1,400 people, including more than 400 children.

"One cannot be as one-sided and as flawed as we have seen, laying the full [blame for the] incident in Ghouta upon the Syrian government," Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said in Damascus, referring to Western nations' interpretation of the report on the Aug. 21 attack.

The UN defense of the report came as diplomats from the U.S., Russia, Britain, France and China planned to continue negotiations Wednesday on a Western-drafted resolution that would demand the destruction of Syria's chemical arsenal in line with a U.S.-Russian deal agreed on last weekend.

Moscow, Assad's ally, said Wednesday that the U.S.-British-French draft resolution supporting a deal for Syria to scrap its chemical arms should be limited to that purpose, suggesting Moscow would oppose any threat of force in the event of Syrian noncompliance at this stage.

Ryabkov said the resolution should support an expected decision by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, or OPCW, backing the U.S.-Russian deal "and nothing more than that."

Britain's UN ambassador, Mark Lyall Grant, said the point of the Western draft resolution was to require Syria to live up to its pledge to relinquish its chemical weapons program.

"The heart of this resolution and its main purpose is to make the framework agreement reached between the U.S. and Russia in Geneva and the decision that will be taken by the OPCW Executive Council endorsed by the Security Council in a legally binding, verifiable and enforceable form," he said.

'Professionally Made'

UN diplomats said it remained unclear when a vote on the Security Council resolution could take place. They said they hoped to approve it before world leaders arrive next week for the annual meeting of the UN General Assembly.

The current draft does not explicitly rule out the use of force, although Western diplomats said they might be willing to include such language if Russia insists.

Under the U.S.-Russian deal reached over the weekend, any punitive measures would require a second council resolution.

The U.S.-Russian chemical weapons deal came as the U.S. threatened Assad's government with air strikes to deter it from using chemical weapons again, Washington says.

Nesirky said the chain of custody of all environmental and biomedical samples taken by the inspectors was meticulously documented. He added that the experts would return to Syria as soon as possible to continue their investigation into a March incident at Khan al-Asal and all other "credible allegations."

Sellstrom's mandate was limited to investigating whether chemical weapons were used, not who used them. But Western officials say technical details in the report provide clear evidence that Assad's forces carried out the attack.

The advocacy group Human Rights Watch said Tuesday that rocket trajectories detailed in the UN report suggested the sarin-filled shells had been fired from a base belonging to the Republican Guard, run by Assad's brother, Maher.

Western diplomats confirmed the Human Rights Watch report.

Diplomats in New York said Russian UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin questioned some of the findings in Sellstrom's report at a Security Council meeting Monday. Churkin, they said, asked Sellstrom to describe the quality of the weapons that dispersed sarin.

"The rockets found on the site were professionally made and, according to Dr. Sellstrom, they bore none of the characteristics of jerry-rigged, improvised weapons," U.S. Ambassador Samantha Power said Tuesday.

"They had sophisticated barometric fuses to disperse the nerve agent in the air and not on impact," she said. "This was a professionally executed massacre by the regime, which is known to possess one of the world's largest undeclared stockpiles of sarin."

Churkin asked Sellstrom other questions during Monday's council session, council diplomats said. Sellstrom was able to answer Churkin's questions without difficulty, diplomats said, including the chain of custody of the samples and how the inspectors could be sure the victims they took biomedical samples from had been in the area at the time of the attack on Aug. 21.

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