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Russia Airlifts Trucks to Syria as Part of Chemical Weapon Destruction Plan

By The Moscow Times

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Russia has begun airlifting armored trucks to Syria to transport its chemical weapons for destruction at sea, the Russian ambassador to the country said.

Russian transport planes have completed 10 flights to the Syrian port of Latakia and more deliveries are planned before the end of the year, Ambassador Azamat Kulmukhametov said, Itar-Tass reported on Wednesday.

Under a multinational plan approved by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, or OPCW, to destroy Syria's chemical weapons by June, Russia is providing trucks and other equipment to carry toxic agents from 12 sites around the country to the seaport of Latakia.

Danish and Norwegian ships will then pick up the chemicals — including mustard gas and sarin — and transport them to Italy, where they will be transferred to a U.S. ship

for destruction at sea.

The plan has already seen a series of delays, partly due to a lack of security in the country ravaged by civil war, OPCW head Ahmet Uzumcu told the organization's executive council on Tuesday, The New York Times reported.

Chemical weapons shipments, hazardous under any circumstances, become particularly dangerous during a war, and Russian armored trucks and other equipment, along with thousands of special containers provided by the U.S., are all part of an attempt to reduce risks.

Under the OPCW plan, U.S. satellite equipment and Chinese surveillance cameras will also track the progress of the Russian trucks as they carry the toxic materials to Latakia, BBC reported.

Russia has offered to provide security for in Latakia and Syria's territorial waters during the operation, a Russian deputy envoy to the OPCW, Vasily Titushkin, said, Itar-Tass reported. It remained unclear whether Russia would provide troops as part of that effort.

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