

# SYRIA

CHEMICAL WEAPONS ATTACKS IN  
GHOUTA AND KHAN SHAYKHUN

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CONFLICT REPORT

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# Issue overview

The CBAP Conflict Report, whose first issue you are currently reading, is a new project aiming to provide on-point information about problems relevant to the selected conflict. Every issue of the Conflict Report will focus on specific aspects of a selected armed conflict raging around the world, analyse them and offer insight into their inner and outer dynamics.

The topic of this issue is the usage of chemical weapons in Syrian civil war. In particular, the issue inspects the different dimensions of the usage on two cases – the Ghouta attack in 2013 and Khan Shaykun attack in 2017. These two attacks were selected as they are the only two cases of the use of Sarin gas in the war, and therefore offer an ideal option for their comparison and analysis.

In this regard, the presented issue offers three texts providing an insight into distinct aspects of the chemical weapons attacks. The first article, by Radka Roháriková and Samo Žilinčík, addresses the question of the strategic significance of these attacks for the Syrian government. Then, the piece by Michal Myklín and Natália de Figueiredo Coelho Maciel looks into the difference in soft power usage between the responses to the two attacks. Finally, Jakub Kuchar and Tereza Novotná's work analyses how the international actors constructed the discourse in relation to the selected incidents.

**Branislav Mičko**  
CBAP Conflict Report Project Manager

# Strategic Effects of the Chemical Weapons Usage in the Syrian Civil War

Radka Roháriková & Samo Žilinčík

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## Introduction

This section aims to examine strategic effects produced by the employment of chemical weapons in the Syrian civil war. The analysis is tied to two main questions asking what strategic effects did the use of chemical weapons produce and whether the strategic effect for the Syrian government was positive or negative. Authors employ two specific instances of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict, more precisely, Ghouta Chemical Attack (2013) and Khan Shaykhun Chemical Attack (2017). These are examined in detail and with the subsequent analysis of the consequences the weapons produced. The selection of attacks that occurred at the beginning of the Syrian conflict and in the recent past is purposeful, as the authors consider them vital aspects to the final conclusions drawn from the comparison of the two attacks. The research is based on theoretical and methodological background, both of which are explained in the paragraph below. This study concludes with the comparison of selected cases and the assessment of whether the effects of the first attack were strategically more efficient for the Syrian government rather than the effects caused by the second attack.

## Theoretical Background

The strategy of belligerents in any war is what defines each war's unique character. Strategy

means the use that is made of force or threat of force for political purpose<sup>1</sup>. At the core of a strategy is the permanent conversion between force (armed forces) and political consequences. The strategy is done by tactics (use of weapons and forces on the battlefield). One of the main functions of strategy is to direct whatever happens at the tactical level to produce favourable political consequences. Any weapon in every war is always used tactically but also produces strategic (and political) effects.<sup>2</sup> Needless to say, this happens even without strategic guidance. In this regard, chemical weapons are no exception. They too, produce strategic effects, whether intentionally or not. However, due to their rare employment, their strategic effects are seldom examined. This article is an attempt to rectify this gap in knowledge.

## Methodology

In order to measure a strategic effect, two central concepts are necessary. The first one is control; the other one is the freedom of action. Control stands for the ability of one belligerent to influence the actions of another.<sup>3</sup> Freedom of action stands for an ability of belligerent to choose and follow his own plans and policies, and it is necessary in order to control the adversary. The two concepts are closely related, and through them, it is possible to measure strategic effect

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<sup>1</sup> Gray, C.S. 1999. *Modern Strategy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.17

<sup>2</sup> Gray, C.S. 2016. *Strategy and Politics*. London: Routledge. p.3

<sup>3</sup> Wylie, J.C. 1967. *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press. p.77

by analysing the levels of control one has over his opponent.

There are three basic levels of control over an adversary. The first level of control is the weakest one. On this level, the actor is only able to avoid being controlled (coerced or deterred) by the opponent. On the second level, the actor is capable of actively reducing the opponent's freedom of action. On the final level, an actor is capable to influence opponent's policy and force him to accept the former's will.<sup>4</sup>

Using the Case study method to compare two particular cases of chemical weapons usage - Ghouta Chemical Attack (2013) and Khan Shaykhun Chemical Attack (2017) - authors analyse strategic effects produced by the employment of chemical weapons through two central concepts mentioned in the paragraph above. Firstly, the level of control achieved by the employment of chemical weapons is identified. Then the political reactions of other main actors in the conflict and their freedom of actions is assessed. Finally, the comparative analysis of the two case studies is applied in order to examine whether the combined strategic effect benefited the Syrian government or its opponents.

## Case Study 1: Ghouta Chemical attack (2013)

### Overview

Beginning on July 24, rebel forces in Syria launched a major offensive in Damascus city.<sup>5</sup> Throughout early August, they achieved

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<sup>4</sup> Milevski, Lukas. 2015. "Asymmetry is Strategy, Strategy is Asymmetry," Joint Force Quarterly, No. 75, 4th Quarter, p.81

<sup>5</sup> ISW, The Opposition Advances in Damascus, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/>

several important successes within the suburbs of the city. On August 21, 2013, large-scale chemical weapons attack occurred in the Ghouta region, where Syrian forces had been attempting to expel the rebels. The attack had affected two separate opposition-controlled districts and resulted in hundreds of victims either killed or seriously injured. The evidence concerning the type of rockets and launchers used in these attacks strongly suggested that these are weapon systems known and documented to be only in possession of the Syrian armed forces. The Syrian government has denied its responsibility for the attack, and has blamed opposition groups, but has presented no evidence to back up its claims. The evidence examined by Human Rights Watch suggests that the August 21 chemical weapon attacks on Eastern and Western Ghouta were carried out by government forces. However, no official attribution on the international level exists<sup>6</sup>.

### Consequences

Given the unprecedented successes of opposition forces in the early August, the possible use of chemical weapons by Assad was meant to produce positive tactical effects for the government by a mixture of annihilation, terror and control of the territory. But were these tactical effects also positive on the level of strategy?

### Control

By their very nature, the primary purpose of chemical weapons is to cause annihilation and invoke terror in the survivors and observers of the attack. Annihilating opponent's armed

[opposition-advances-damascus](#) Accessed: 25.11.2017

<sup>6</sup>HRW, Attacks on Ghouta, [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/syria\\_cw0913\\_web\\_1.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/syria_cw0913_web_1.pdf), p.1

forces disarms him, which can lead at least to the achievement of the first level of control, that is, avoidance of being controlled by the opponent. But annihilation does not automatically constitute control. If we accept the figure for victims of the attack to be several hundred, a large portion of that number were non-combatants<sup>7</sup>. The evidence further suggests that dozens of combatants were also killed or wounded. However, this number is too small to produce a direct impact on the rebels' capability to exercise control and thus it did not produce control over Syrian opposition for the Syrian government.

While terror could, in theory, lead to any amount of control, this was not the case of the Ghouta attack. The reason being that international community pushed Syrian government into destroying most of its stockpiles of chemical weapons.<sup>8</sup> That meant that Syrian government could not use the threat of another chemical attack to control the behaviour of the opposition. Any threat of terror by the chemical attack would not be seen as credible since the U.S. armed forces were prepared to intervene in case of Syrian dis-obedience.

Control of the territory is a powerful tool for achieving the first level of control. However, chemical weapons cannot guarantee control

of the territory on their own. By annihilation or the threat of it, they can force opponent's forces out of an area. But forcing the opponent out does not automatically translate into one's own control of the territory. The government failed to do so. The fighting continued during the following days.<sup>9</sup>

#### Freedom of action

The attack also did not widen Syrian government's possibilities. Quite the contrary, response by Western governments was very hostile, and the government had to do anything to avoid foreign intervention on the side of opposition forces. Just a few days after the attack, U.S. warships were in position and ready to launch Tomahawk cruise missiles against various targets of the Syrian government<sup>10</sup>. The government had to evacuate several places considered to be tempting targets for the U.S. missiles and redeploy its forces to safe spaces, where they were far less useful<sup>11</sup>. All this led to a situation where lots of government's resources had to be allocated to discourage foreign intervention, and they could not have been used to fight the opposition.

In the long-term, the government destroyed most of its chemical weapons, which led to the lesser possibility for coercion of opposition forces to submission through the

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<sup>7</sup> HRW, Attacks on Ghouta, [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/syria\\_cw0913\\_web\\_1.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/syria_cw0913_web_1.pdf) Accessed, 25.11.2017, p. 13-14

<sup>8</sup> ACA, Fact Sheets, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/syriaprofi> Accessed: 25.11.2017

<sup>9</sup> ISW, Syrian Military Evacuations in and Around Damascus <http://iswresearch.blogspot.cz/2013/08/syrian-military-evacuations-in-and.html> Accessed: 25.11.2017

<sup>10</sup> ISW, U.S. Navy Positions Ships for Possible Strike Against Syrian Targets, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounders/us-navy-positions-ships-possible-strike-against-syrian-targets> Accessed: 25.11.2017

<sup>11</sup> ISW, Syrian Military Evacuations in and Around Damascus, <http://iswresearch.blogspot.cz/2013/08/syrian-military-evacuations-in-and.html> Accessed: 25.11.2017

threat of another chemical attack<sup>12</sup>. As is clear from the second case study, the government has kept some chemical weapons, but it could not use them to produce psychological coercion against opposition forces. Their sole purpose from now on could be annihilation.

### Summary

Government's use of chemical weapons had positive tactical consequences, but their strategic effect seems to be negative. On the tactical level, the attack was able to annihilate a minor portion of the rebel army, possibly invoke terror among the survivors and eliminate portions of rebel forces from specific areas. On the strategic level, the attack led to the increased hostility of international community towards the government and the threat of foreign intervention. The government also lost the possibility to intimidate rebels with chemical attack due to the restrictions imposed by the Chemical Weapons Treaty.

## Case Study 2: Khan Shaykhun Chemical attack (2017)

### Overview

On 4 April 2017, an incident was widely reported in the international press and social media alleging an attack involving the use of a chemical weapon in the Khan Shaykhun area of southern Idlib in the Syrian Arab Republic.<sup>13</sup> The Organisation for the

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<sup>12</sup> ACA, Fact Sheets, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/syriaprofi> Accessed: 25.11.2017

<sup>13</sup> OPCW, Report of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria Regarding an Alleged Incident in Khan Shaykhun, Syrian Arab Republic [https://www.opcw.org/fileadmin/OPCW/Fact\\_Finding\\_Mission/s-1510-2017\\_e.pdf](https://www.opcw.org/fileadmin/OPCW/Fact_Finding_Mission/s-1510-2017_e.pdf) Accessed: 26.11.2017

<sup>14</sup> OHCHR, Chemical Weapons' Attacks Documented by the U.N. Commission of Inquiry

Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) found that victims in the Khan Shaykhun attack were exposed to sarin, a deadly nerve agent and subsequently the U.N Commission of Inquiry attributed the attack to the Syrian government<sup>14</sup>. Syrian air force used sarin in Khan Shaykhun, Idlib, killing dozens, the majority of whom were women and children. The commission based its findings on interviews with 43 witnesses, satellite imagery, photographs, and videos, and claims it has evidence the attack was conducted by a Sukhoi SU-22 aircraft, a type that only Syrian government forces use. Syrian and/or Russian forces continued to target hospitals and medical personnel<sup>15</sup>.

### Consequences

As in the first case study, the chemical attack was meant to produce positive tactical effects for the government by a mixture of annihilation, terror and control of the territory. But were these tactical effects also positive on the level of strategy? The following lines examine whether the attack produced the desired results.

### Control

Chemical attack was used tactically to create positive effects by annihilation, terror and control over the territory. The attack resulted in killing dozens and injuring hundreds of people, among which many were severely wounded<sup>16</sup>. Still, these numbers do not

On the Syrian Arab Republic [http://www.ohchr.org/SiteCollectionImages/Bodies/HRCouncil/IIICISyria/COISyria\\_ChemicalWeapon\\_s.jpg](http://www.ohchr.org/SiteCollectionImages/Bodies/HRCouncil/IIICISyria/COISyria_ChemicalWeapon_s.jpg) Accessed: 26.11.2017

<sup>15</sup> UN, United Nations Col Report <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/172/341/8X/PDF/1723418.pdf?OpenElement> Accessed: 26.11.2017

<sup>16</sup> OHCHR, Chemical Weapons' Attacks Documented by the U.N. Commission of Inquiry On the Syrian Arab Republic

indicate the inhibition on the side of the rebels to exercise control over the enemy. Majority of the victims were civilians, which in no way impedes the capacity of opposition forces to continue fighting. So, the tactical effect of annihilation did not produce the positive strategic effect of disarming the enemy and rendering him harmless.

There is no evidence that the effect of terror had a direct impact on the behaviour of the opposition, nor on its ability to exercise control. However, the long-term effect produced by terror is the vulnerability of opposition to the government's future coercion by chemical attack. In this way, the government acquired the second level of control over the opposition, because it could from now on influence the policy of rebels.

The attack failed to produce even the basic requirement for gaining control over the contested territory. Opposition forces continued fighting in the area. The attack, therefore, did not generate any level of control for the government through the control of territory.

#### Freedom of action

The attack demonstrated the possession of a specific type of chemical weapons by the Syrian government, despite their proclaimed destruction<sup>17</sup>. This widened the spectrum of government's possibilities since it could now

use the threat of another attack for the purposes of coercion in the future.

The International response did not incur serious penalties to limit government's possibilities. U.S. launched a missile attack on one Syrian base, but this caused no serious damage to any of the governments' military tools.<sup>18</sup> Economic sanctions targeted at several people associated with the development of the chemical weapons did not limit government's spectrum of possibilities in any way.

#### Summary

Government's use of chemical weapons produced annihilation and terror among portions of the rebels, but it did not produce control over the territory. Furthermore, even these tactical successes did not generate any level of control over the opposition for the government. The attack increased government's freedom of action by adding coercion by the threat of another chemical attack as a possible tool in its arsenal. No consequences occurred to limit the possibilities at government's disposal.

#### Conclusion

The examination of two case studies led to the following findings. In both cases, chemical attacks sought to produce tactical effects by annihilation, terror and control of the territory. Both accomplished these tactical effects to some degree.

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[http://www.ohchr.org/SiteCollectionImages/Bodies/HRCouncil/IIICISyria/COISyria\\_ChemicalWeapons.jpg](http://www.ohchr.org/SiteCollectionImages/Bodies/HRCouncil/IIICISyria/COISyria_ChemicalWeapons.jpg) Accessed: 26.11.2017

<sup>17</sup> UN, Syria rejects report of OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism, [https://www.un.int/syria/statements\\_speeches/syria-rejects-report-opcw-un-joint-investigative-mechanism](https://www.un.int/syria/statements_speeches/syria-rejects-report-opcw-un-joint-investigative-mechanism) Accessed: 26.11.2017

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Trump Orders Missile Attack in Retaliation for Syrian Chemical Attacks, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1144601/trump-orders-missile-attack-in-retaliation-for-syrian-chemical-strikes/> Accessed: 26.11.2017

In the first case, these tactical effects did not translate into the higher level of strategy, and net strategic effects of their use were negative for the Syrian government. None of the tactical effects produced any amount of control for the government, neither did it enhance government's freedom of action. On the contrary, government's freedom of action was reduced because it was not able to use coercion of another chemical attack with any credibility.

In the second case, these tactical effects translated into positive net strategic effects. While they produced the only limited level of control over opposition forces, they enhanced government's freedom of action. By demonstration of existing arsenal and lack of serious punishment from the opposing actors, Syrian government effectively acquired credible threat of chemical attack as another tool in its arsenal.

These findings indicate that translation of tactical effects produced by chemical weapons into positive strategic effects is an immensely difficult task. The only positive strategic effect in any of the cases was the re-acquirement of one possibility, which had been lost precisely as a result of the use of previous chemical attack. These findings suggest that any actor considering the use of chemical weapons should think twice not only because of the moral perspective, but because the generated strategic effects seem to be mostly of psychological nature.



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# Comparison of Western Soft Power Usage after Chemical Attacks in Syria

Michal Myklín & Natália de Figueiredo Coelho Maciel

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## Introduction

The concept of soft power is widely diffused in the liberal theory. As Joseph Nye argues in his article „this second aspect of power - which occurs when one country gets other countries to do what it wants - might be called co-optive or soft power in contrast with the hard or command power of ordering others to do what it wants.”<sup>1</sup> In the last decades, one can observe an increased preference for soft instead of hard power in the actions of state and international institutions, albeit with varying results.

This article aims to analyse the use of soft power in the cases of chemical weapon application occurring in Syria on two specific occasions. The two attacks – August 21, 2013, and April 4, 2017 - were selected because they represented two confirmed cases of the use of sarin in the Syrian conflict. In the aftermath of both of these attacks, the international community strongly condemned and reacted to the use of chemical weapons by Syrian forces. This article will scrutinize the type of soft power used by states and international institutions as a reprisal for the attacks. The aim is to analyse how was soft power employed, how did it influence Syrian actions

and ultimately, whether soft power proved to be effective.

## First Attack

The Syrian Arab Republic under the leadership of Bashar al-Assad was a subject of a number of sanctions and restrictive measures since the beginning of the civil war in 2011. Most of them were results of alleged violations of human rights and violence against the civilian population and targeted individual persons and entities linked to the Assad’s regime.

While human rights violations remained a major source of international opposition against the legitimacy of the Syrian regime, the narrative of the conflict changed considerably since August 2013.

In the morning hours of 21 August 2013, the Eastern and Western Ghouta, suburbs of Damascus controlled by rebels, were hit by a number of rockets containing significant quantities of chemical agent later identified as sarin. The attack resulted in high civilian casualties counting between 281<sup>2</sup> -1729<sup>3</sup> deaths with thousands of affected people displaying neurotoxic symptoms.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph S Nye, “Soft Power”, *Foreign Policy*, Autumn, no. 80 (1990): 153 - 171

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, “Syria/Syrian chemical programme – National executive summary of declassified intelligence”, (2013). url: [https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/Syrian\\_Chemical\\_Programme.pdf](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/Syrian_Chemical_Programme.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The Daily Star, “Bodies still being found after alleged Syria chemical attack: opposition”, (2013). url: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2013/Aug-22/228268-bodies-still-being-found-after-alleged-syria-chemical-attack-opposition.ashx>

Ghouta incident was the deadliest chemical attack since the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and international response was considerable. The international community condemned the attack but both individual states and supranational bodies were divided over the course of action.

United States, France, and the United Kingdom citing their intelligence agencies accused Syria of using chemical weapons and were publicly considering military intervention. Some states (Canada, Turkey) supported military action outright but most were against escalation and called for further investigation.

Ghouta and six other alleged chemical attacks were investigated by fact-finding UN Mission to investigate the usage of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. The mission did not have the mandate to attribute attacks and its purpose was solely to decide whether chemical agents had been used.

Meanwhile, the United States, Russia, and Syria reached compromise to avert military intervention and Damascus agreed to eliminate its chemical weapons stockpiles and production facilities and join the OPCW. Adoption of United Nation's Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2118<sup>4</sup> made the decision binding and the deadline for destruction of the chemical weapons was set on 30 June 2014.

The UN mission report about Ghouta chemical attacks was released on September 16, 2013, and concluded the use of nerve agent Sarin delivered by surface-to-surface rockets.<sup>5</sup>

The final report was published on December 12, 2013, and included final laboratory results from Ghouta attacks (again with positive results on Sarin) and conclusions about six other alleged chemical attacks.<sup>6</sup>

Due to the lack of attribution of the Ghouta chemical attack and Russia's support of Damascus, Syria managed to avoid any major sanctions connected directly to the Ghouta incident. The only major outcome of the attack was a unanimous adoption of UNSC Resolution 2118 and Syria's ratification of Chemical Weapons Convention, with an agreement on the destruction of its chemical weapons stockpiles and production facilities.

## Second Attack

From March 2013 to the March 2017, the Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic identified 20 cases of use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government, mainly, against civilians<sup>7</sup>. The chemical attacks did not cease even though Syria signed the Chemical Weapon Convention in 2013.

On April 4, 2017, Syrian forces used sarin gas once again to attack civilians in the city of Khan Shaykhun, Idlib. Although Syria denied the accusation of attacking Khan Shaykhun,

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 2118 (2013)", S/RES/2118 (2013). url:

[https://undocs.org/S/RES/2118\(2013\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2118(2013))

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, "Report on the Alleged Use of Chemical Weapons in the Ghouta Area of Damascus on 21 August 2013", (2013). url:

<http://www.un.org/zh/focus/northafrica/cwinvestigation.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, "United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic", (2013). url:

<https://unoda-web.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/report.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> United Nations, "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic", A/HRC/36/55 (2017): 14.

investigations conducted by the United Nations alongside with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) concluded with the culpability of the Syrian government for this attack<sup>8 9</sup>.

The international community strongly condemned this chemical weapon attack. The first reaction came from the U.S. On April 6 they launched a cruise missile strike targeting Syrian Air Force airfield<sup>10</sup>. According to the American government, the decision to attack Shayrat Airfield was based on US intelligence information which claimed that this airfield was the place from which the aircrafts departed on April 4. After this clear hard power demonstration, the United States decided to continue the pressure by using less violent methods. The American government announced the inclusion of 271 employees of Syria's Scientific Studies and Research Center (SSSRC) in their already existing sanction list. SSSRC is the agency responsible for the development and production of non-conventional weapons in Syria<sup>11</sup>. The decision to include these employees from Syria government was an attempt to imply the culpability of Bashar-al-Assad's regime for the Khan Shaykhun attack, even when there was no investigation about this incident at that time.

It was not only states that decided to strengthen their sanctions against Syria, as some international organisations, such as the

EU, followed en suite. In July of 2017, European Union adopted restrictive measures against 16 more individuals, extending the sanctions against Syria. By analysing the people included on the list, it can be observed that the EU also decided to sanction some individuals associated with SSSRC<sup>12</sup>, the same measure adopted by the United States just a couple months earlier. Other individuals were sanctioned because of their involvement in chemical attacks; this decision was based on reports from Joint Investigation Mechanism established by the UN.

## Conclusion

In both cases, the use of the „name and shame“ strategy to influence the behaviour of a state can be observed. By the public exposition (name) and subsequent condemnation (shame) of the Syrian government, international actors, such as the US and the EU, attempted to alter their target's attitudes towards the usage of chemical weapons. However, it should be noted that both the US and the EU are partial actors pursuing their own interests and agenda. Because of this, the sanction regimes established by the United Nations (UN) as a universal institution should be investigated as well.

UNSC, as the most powerful institution within the UN, made several attempts to punish the perpetrators of chemical attacks, but to no

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<sup>8</sup> United Nations, "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic", A/HRC/36/55 (2017).

<sup>9</sup> United Nations, "Seventh report of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism", S/2017/904 (2017).

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, "Statement from Pentagon Spokesman Capt. Jeff Davis on U.S. strike in Syria". April 6, 2017

<sup>11</sup> U.S Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Sanctions 271 Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center Staff in Response to Sarin Attack on Khan Sheikhoun", April 24, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> European Union Law, "Council implementation decision (CFSP) 2017/13421 of 17 July 2017 implementing Decision 2013/255/CFSP concerning restrictive measures against Syria",

avail. After the Khan Shaykhun attack, a draft resolution was proposed by the UK and the US in one of the UNSC meetings. The draft resolution (S/2017/315) suggested the cooperation of Syria Arab Republic through provision of information needed for proper investigation and attribution of the attack. However, Russia, a well-known Syria ally, vetoed this drafted resolution<sup>13</sup>. In fact, it was not the first time that Russia used its veto power to prevent the UNSC to adopt restrictive measures against Syria. Shortly before the Khan chemical attack, in a meeting of the Security Council on February 28, 2017,<sup>14</sup> Russia used its veto power to vote against personal sanctions on a list of individuals from Syria.

It is clear that international actors have been resorting to the use of sanctions to force the Syrian government to halt the usage of chemical weapons. By exposing and condemning Syrian regime for the chemical weapons attacks, the international community used their soft power to impose a change of attitudes. The effectiveness of this solution is questionable since even though the unilateral sanctions against Syria are still in force, it did not prevent further attacks. To corroborate on this argument, it can be seen that after April 4, 2017, the U.N Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic documented four new attacks attributed to the Syrian government.<sup>15</sup>

Chemical weapons attacks are a recurrent issue in the Syrian civil war. More than 27 attacks were documented in Syria in the last

four years. Some attributed to the government, others to terrorist groups.

The use of soft power as a tool to make other states to do what the other country desires is well-known and widely used in the international politics. It has been proved to be effective in several cases, but it has also failed. In the Syria case, one can identify the success and the failure. In the aftermath of the Ghouta attack, the international community implemented a number of actions designed to prevent the repetition of this event and even despite the lack of clear attribution achieved some results. In particular, the mutual effort of the United States and Russia led Syria to sign the Chemical Weapons Convention promising gradual elimination of their chemical weapons arsenal. By that time, it was considered a huge success and a first step towards the cessation of chemical attacks in the country. It is worth mentioning that chlorine was not a part of the disarmament agreement although its use is forbidden by Chemical Weapons Convention. This can be considered an oversight, since the majority of chemical attacks allegedly committed by the Syrian government between 2013 and 2017 were perpetrated with use of chlorine gas.<sup>16</sup>

Syria seemed committed to the efforts to eliminate its chemical weapons stocks. By assuming this compromise, Syria proved that they did want to avoid negative publicity caused by international condemnation of the chemical attacks. In other words, the soft power represented in the form of naming and

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<sup>13</sup> United Nations Security Council, "7922nd meeting", S/PV.1922

<sup>14</sup> United Nations Security Council, "7893rd meeting", S/PV.7893

<sup>15</sup> United Nations, "Chemical Weapons' attacks documented by the U.N Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (as of 06 Sept 2017)". url:

[http://www.ohchr.org/SiteCollectionImages/Bodies/HR Council/IIICISyria/COISyria\\_ChemicalWeapons.jpg](http://www.ohchr.org/SiteCollectionImages/Bodies/HR Council/IIICISyria/COISyria_ChemicalWeapons.jpg)

<sup>16</sup> OPCW, "Third Report of the PCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria", S/1230/2014, (2014). url:

[https://www.opcw.org/fileadmin/OPCW/Fact\\_Finding\\_Mission/s-1230-2014\\_e\\_.pdf](https://www.opcw.org/fileadmin/OPCW/Fact_Finding_Mission/s-1230-2014_e_.pdf)

shaming and sanctions against the country seemed to impact the attitudes of the Syrian government. On the other hand, it can be argued that the Syrian decision to give up its chemical weapons was made under the direct threat of a military strike, which could in turn deny the soft power any merit. However, it has to be noted that the call for military intervention came from countries that are not traditionally considered great powers and are not permanent members of the UNSC.

In conclusion, while the success of the soft power can be seen in the Syrian accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention, it is possibly its only tangible achievement. Even despite the Syrian agreement to abide by the convention, the chemical attacks did not stop and several attacks were attributed directly to the Syrian regime after Ghouta. Consequently, countries and international organisations alike reacted by increasing unilateral sanctions against Syria, while the UN tried to impose restrictive measures but failed due to Russian veto in the Security Council. Therefore, it is apparent that while soft power led to a symbolic gesture in the form of signing of the Chemical Weapons Convention it did not produce expected long-term effects in later years.

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# Roles and Contributions of the Major Actors to the Discourse of the Chemical Weapons Use in the Ongoing Syrian Civil War

Jakub Kuchar & Tereza Novotná

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## Introduction

Syrian Civil War (SCW) has proven itself to be a conflict with a high degree of complexity, intertwining a large amount of local, regional, and global actors on a common battlefield. It is therefore of the utmost importance, to be aware of the narratives put forward by each of the sides to the conflict, in order to analyse it objectively and accurately. This article aims to put forward a comprehensible sum of narratives and positions, means of communication, perceptions of reality, and their development, hoping to aid in any such endeavours, with regard to the chosen actors.

In line with the previous articles, this section will also be focusing on the Ghouta and Khan Shaykhun chemical attacks. Alongside the similarities that allow for a side-by-side comparison, presented in realist and liberal sections, both incidents bear two significant comparative indicators for the discursive part as well. One, the immediate response to the alleged chemical attack was fast and extensive on either of the occasions, with many actors joining the exchange of views to express their positions. Two, the impact the events have

had on the discourse of the conflict - igniting the highly scrutinized processes of fact-finding and decision making - are unparalleled in both the scale and scope by any other chemical weapon proliferation during the SCW. Ghouta and Khan Shaykhun incidents are unprecedented hallmarks for any thorough research of the chemical weapons use in Syria.

## Method

Each identified actor will be analysed through their preferred means of communication, developments and changes in the nature of their positions will be highlighted, as well as their contribution to the discourse formation and their stance on the prevailing perception of reality - i.e. *truth*. United Nations (UN), and partly Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) will be occupying a special role in this regard, slightly different from the rest of the actors: UN claims for itself the position of the discursive authority - effectively meaning the *monopoly on truth*.<sup>1</sup> Other parties will, therefore, interact with them in an unusual way, as they will either

confirmed usage. It is the UN that seeks to establish the assessment of blame.

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<sup>1</sup> OPCW cannot be treated as such in the full extent, since the reports it puts forward are not able to point out the perpetrator of a



uphold their authority, be ambivalent towards it, make a move to challenge it or try to influence it.

As mentioned above, the article will be dealing with Ghouta and Khan Shaykhun incidents and will be further split into two subcategories: imminent reactions, and reactions to the reports issued by the UN fact-finding missions (FFM) and the subsequent voting procedures in the related UN bodies.

The entirety of the analysed speech acts, with all the necessary references can be found [here](#).

## Actors and channels

The actors identified by this article as *major*, are the actors studied in the other two parts of this report,<sup>2</sup> and go as follows: United Nations (UN) and their respective bodies,<sup>3</sup> Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Syrian Arab Republic (SAR), Russian Federation (RF), United States of America (USA), French Republic (FR), United Kingdom (UK), and Human Rights Watch (HRW)

### United Nations

The main personality for the UN is undoubtedly the Secretary-General, formerly Ban Ki-moon, presently António Guterres. Throughout the conflict, bodies such as United Nations Security Council (UNSC), Human Rights Council (HRC), Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), and the special commissions also played and continue to play a significant role. The UN heavily relies on its own media capabilities (except for press conferences), mainly a number of web-portals, where it issues everything from

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<sup>2</sup> With the exception of rebel/opposition forces.

statements, through reports, to full-length sessions.

### OPCW

In the context of the surrounding actors, organisation acts more-or-less as a uniform body, using its own web as the primary channel for issuing statements and reports to the public.

### The Syrian Arab Republic

The government presents itself chiefly through the statements of the president, Bashar al-Assad, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Walid Al-Muallem, and Minister of Information, Omran al-Zoubid. The main node is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates web-page, and a state-run Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA).

### Russian Federation

The country is personally represented the most by the President, Vladimir Putin, his spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov. Each prefers his own way of communication: press conferences for Vladimir Putin, the ministry of foreign affairs' web portal for Sergey Lavrov, and direct communication through teleconferences with news agencies such as REUTERS and TASS for Dmitry Peskov.

### USA

The President of the United States, formerly Barack Obama, presently Donald Trump, and its' Press Office is seconded by the secretaries of his government, such as John Kerry for Barack Obama, and Rex Tillerson for Donald Trump - however, compared to his predecessor the incumbent president plays a rather assertive role in this regard. The

<sup>3</sup> Identified further ahead in the text on a case-by-case basis.

Pentagon is also a vital part of the structure, more so in the recent Khan Shaykhun events. The office of the President uses its own White House channels, such as the official web-page, and briefings in the notable James S. Brady Press Briefing Room, while the government also uses its own web and press resources to issue statements. The Pentagon usually communicates via its' spokesperson Cpt. Jeff Davis directly with the news agencies, preferably REUTERS.

## EU

The European Union joins the discourse in a very limited way, mainly through the imposition of sanctions. There is no distinct figure trying to shape the discourse regarding the chemical weapons usage - the EU is overwhelmingly represented by its member states, mainly FR and UK, the permanent members of UNSC, and their figures. EU uses its own apparatus to release the information it deems to be important.

## France

High-level representation considered by this report surprisingly does not cover the President, either François Hollande or Emmanuel Macron - the discourse is shaped chiefly by its foreign ministers, Laurent Fabius and Jean-Marc Ayrault, using either their ministerial web-portal or various news agencies for interview purposes.

## United Kingdom

Prime Minister's office, formerly occupied by David Cameron, recently by Theresa May, plays a vital role in the UK's foreign representation, followed by their respective Foreign Secretaries, William Hague and Boris Johnson. Her Majesty's Government communicates largely through its own structures - the GOV.UK portal-node in particular.

## HRW

HRW joins the dialogue in support of the discursive authority of UN and its affiliates, as a unified body, since it shares its values regarding human rights issues. HRW uses its own website to issue statements and reports regarding the SCW.

All of the abovementioned actors use various media outlets - some in a limited way, some on a more frequent basis - for their statements in the form of interviews. A good example of such would be the Laurent Fabius interview on BFM TV,<sup>4</sup> heavily quoted interview with Bashar al-Assad, undertaken by the French news agency Agence France-Presse (AFP),<sup>5</sup> or even the New York Times' (NYT) interview with Angela Kane.<sup>6</sup>

## Setting

Before delving into the specific discourses surrounding both events, it is important to keep in mind the change in the general narrative that happened during the past four years. The summer of 2013 was the summer

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<sup>4</sup> Laurent Fabius, "Laurent Fabius - 22/08," Interview by Jean-Jacques Bourdin, *Bourdin Direct*, BFMTV, August 22, 2013, <http://www.bfmtv.com/mediaplayer/video/bourdin-direct-laurent-fabius-2208-303809.html>

<sup>5</sup> Bashar al-Assad, "Khan Sheikhoun incident totally fabricated..," Interview by Sammy

Ketz, AFP, April 13, 2013, <http://sana.sy/en/?p=104255>

<sup>6</sup> Angela Kane, "Missed Opportunity in Syria Haunts U.N. Official," Interview by Rick Gladstone and Somini Sengupta, NYTIMES, October 2, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/03/world/middleeast/syria.html>

following the OPCW's Third Review Conference, convening in April. High representatives and academics from around the globe came together and sent out a vision of a better, less violent world. The momentum created by this can be arguably seen in the handling of the Ghouta chemical attack and its aftermath - accession of the SAR to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) has been viewed as a big leap forward in the disarmament community, even more so for those interested in the Middle East.<sup>7</sup> It is arguable that the disarmament community played an important role in the political process of 2013 - bringing to mind the former UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Angela Kane, and her work. USA and RF have just held their first Geneva platform talks - a symbol of the Kerry-Lavrov cooperation. This was also a world unaware of the upcoming military achievements of the Islamic State (IS) and the consequent upsurge of the worldwide terrorist attacks orchestrated by the group. The European Union was far from drafting its' Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, and the events of the ongoing Ukrainian crisis were yet to unfold.

Some of the possible changes of behaviour, positions, and narratives of the actors, regarding the issue of chemical weapons use in the SCW that may have happened during these four years, might therefore be attributed to the change of the mood in the

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<sup>7</sup> Christian Weidlich, "The biggest challenge? Military robotic capabilities," interview by Jakub Kuchar, *Mezinárodní politika*, IIR, December 18, 2014, <http://www.iir.cz/article/weidlich-the-biggest-challenge-military-robotic-capabilities>

<sup>8</sup> Ban Ki-moon, "'Shocked' by Reports from Syria, Reiterates that Any Use of Chemical Weapons Would Violate International Humanitarian Law," *Secretary-General*, UN, August 21, 2013,

international community in general, rather than to a specific trigger event, bound to a specific actor. What would have prompted a swift diplomatic action then, will simply give way to a force measure now. This phenomenon is also prone to a solid understanding through the lenses of discursive analysis, but such would need to venture way beyond the content restrictions of this article. For the purpose of this article, we shall suffice with what has been said above.

## Events and responses

### Ghouta

Upon the arrival of the information regarding an alleged chemical weapons use, Ban Ki-moon "reiterated"<sup>8</sup> that a chemical attack would be a breach of the international humanitarian law. This was also supported by the HRW, in its report from 10<sup>th</sup> September.<sup>9</sup> UN also noted the presence of the professor Åke Sellström and his already-mandated team in the country and made a move for them to swiftly investigate the current events. Secretary-General called for both the SAR and the rebel forces to allow for UN personnel to investigate the matter. SAR denied its responsibility for the attack, through the statement of Minister of Information, Omran al-Zoubid, who called in question even the mere existence of chemical weapons in Syria. RF immediately suggested that the attack was a pre-planned provocation, fiercely denied

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2013/sgsm15227.doc.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Attacks on Ghouta: Analysis of Alleged Use of Chemical Weapons in Syria* (United States of America: Human Rights Watch, 2013) [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/syria\\_cw0913\\_web\\_1.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/syria_cw0913_web_1.pdf)

the claims of SAR being the perpetrator of the attack, and called for a thorough and objective investigation. FR was the first of the western countries to use the word “force”, voiced by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Laurent Fabius, on a BFM TV talk-show Bourdin Direct.<sup>10</sup> UK called upon SAR to allow for a UN-led FFM to investigate the matter immediately. SAR complied with the requests and provided assistance after meeting with the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, dispatched to the country by Secretary-General, although noting that the area is currently rebel-held.

UK, USA, and FR issued their reports on the alleged attack on August the 29<sup>th</sup><sup>11</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup><sup>12</sup>, and September the 3<sup>rd</sup>, respectively, all claiming the perpetrator to be SAR.<sup>13</sup> In order to challenge the discourse authority claimed by UK, USA, and FR, RF promoted the information put forward by Mother Agnes Mariam al-Salib - which were later shaped into a lengthy report, released on 11<sup>th</sup> of September.<sup>14</sup> UK and USA nevertheless

expressed belief in their own analytic capabilities with movements calling for the use of force, undertaken in their countries’ legislative bodies. David Cameron failed to gather enough support in the House of Commons, which put the UK out of the picture; Barack Obama started to pose a significant threat, with his statement, in which he announced the willingness to circumvent the UN procedures, in case he would be given congressional support for the use of force. Extensive telephone communication between John Kerry and Sergey Lavrov, Sergey Lavrov’s negotiation with Walid Al-Muallem, and Barack Obama’s move for congressional approval of the use of force, resulted in an announcement from SAR to access to the CWC, in order to avert the threat of escalation posed by the existing USA’s legislative process; details were agreed upon in a new round of face-to-face talks on the Geneva platform: Geneva II Conference on Syria, resulting in an agreement announced on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Laurent Fabius, “Laurent Fabius - 22/08,” Interview by Jean-Jacques Bourdin, *Bourdin Direct*, BFMTV, August 22, 2013, <http://www.bfmtv.com/mediaplayer/video/bourdin-direct-laurent-fabius-2208-303809.html>

<sup>11</sup> Joint Intelligence Organisation, “JIC assessment of 27 August on Reported Chemical Weapons use in Damascus,” JOI, August 29, 2013, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/235094/Jp\\_115\\_JD\\_PM\\_Syria\\_Reported\\_Chemical\\_Weapon\\_Use\\_with\\_annex.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/235094/Jp_115_JD_PM_Syria_Reported_Chemical_Weapon_Use_with_annex.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> The White House, “Government Assessment of the Syrian Government’s Use of Chemical Weapons on August 21, 2013,” *Office of the Press Secretary*, TWH, August 30, 2013, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/30/government-assessment->

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<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, “Syria/Syrian chemical programme – National executive summary of declassified intelligence,” MAEDI, September 3, 2013, [https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/Syrian\\_Chemical\\_Programme.pdf](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/Syrian_Chemical_Programme.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Mother Agnes Mariam of Cross, “The Chemical Attacks in East Ghouta Used to Justify a Military Right to Protect Intervention in Syria,” The International Support Team for Mussalaha in Syria, September 11, 2013, [http://www.globalresearch.ca/STUDY\\_THE\\_VIDEO\\_S\\_THAT\\_SPEAKS\\_ABOUT\\_CHEMICALS\\_BETA\\_VER\\_SION.pdf](http://www.globalresearch.ca/STUDY_THE_VIDEO_S_THAT_SPEAKS_ABOUT_CHEMICALS_BETA_VER_SION.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> John Kerry and Sergey Lavrov, “Remarks With Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov After Their Meeting,” *Remarks*, Secretary of State and

After the release of the report by the UN, RF attempted to challenge its results through an argumentation based on further promotion of Mother Agnes's report and materials handed to RF by SAR that disprove SAR's involvement in the perpetration, even though the mission itself did not possess the mandate to assign blame; RF ultimately called upon OPCW as an authority in the matters of chemical weapons. Ban Ki-moon confirmed the prominent position of John Kerry and Sergey Lavrov in the discourse regarding the solution, although assuring of UN's vow for severe repercussions against a perpetrator of the chemical attack. UNSC's 7038<sup>th</sup> meeting sealed the deal regarding the SAR's chemical weapon capabilities, with the Resolution 2118,<sup>16</sup> while OPCW also passed their decision on the destruction of SAR's chemical weapons, EC-M-33/DEC.1, on the same day.<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting, that on 10<sup>th</sup> of October, on the occasion of Nobel Peace Prize bestowment, RF named OPCW to be "one of the most effective international structures in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation", further adding, that "the

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Russian Foreign Minister, September 14, 2013, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/09/214250.htm>

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 2118 (2013)," *United Nations Security Council*, UN, September 27, 2013, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2118\(2013\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2118(2013))

<sup>17</sup> Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, "Decision: Destruction of Syrian Chemical Weapons (EC-M-33/DEC.1)," *The Executive Council*, OPCW, September 27, 2013, [https://www.opcw.org/fileadmin/OPCW/EC/M-33/ecm33dec01\\_e\\_.pdf](https://www.opcw.org/fileadmin/OPCW/EC/M-33/ecm33dec01_e_.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "Comment by the Information and Press Department of the Russian Ministry of

chemical weapons elimination process in Syria, is an evident example of this".<sup>18</sup>

## Khan Shaykhun

FR immediately called for an emergency UNSC meeting, which convened at 5<sup>th</sup> April.<sup>19</sup> The meeting was nevertheless unable to produce any resolution or a tangible result with regard to the progress of the discourse. In response, Donald Trump authorized a strike on al-Shayrat air-base, in a gesture to show its willingness to go through with the repercussions stemming from the 2013 deal; although the strike was announced to the RF beforehand, in order to prevent extensive material damage and loss of life, SAR claims the attack still resulted in casualties, accompanied by a severe damage. EU released a declaration supporting UN as a body in possession of the discursive authority, together with OPCW, and reaffirmed its sanction imposing mechanisms against the confirmed violators. Vladimir Putin expressed a strong disbelief of SAR's responsibility for the attack, rather suggesting it to be a false-flag operation put forward in order to legitimize the use of force by the USA, and

Foreign Affairs regarding the question of the mass media about the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the OPCW," *Information and Press Department*, MID, October 12, 2013, [http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/92626](http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/92626)

<sup>19</sup> Jean Marc-Ayrault, "Chemical attack in Syria – Statement by Jean-Marc Ayrault, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development (4 April 2017)," *Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development*, MAEDI, April 4, 2017, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/syria/events/article/chemical-attack-in-syria-statement-by-jean-marc-ayrault-minister-of-foreign>

warned against the possible use of such tactics in the future. Bashar al-Assad labelled the events as a fabrication, pointing out the feasibility of video manipulation, effectively denying government's involvement.

UK and RF clashed during a UNSC meeting at 12<sup>th</sup> of April over the remarks of Matthew Rycroft, who blamed the SAR for perpetration of the chemical attack, citing UK's own investigation, calling upon RF to stop siding with "a murderous, barbaric criminal", while Vladimir Safronkov responded, that he "cannot accept that [Matthew Rycroft] insults Russia".<sup>20</sup> This is indeed a very different picture of the relationship between the two countries than the one that was developing four years ago.

Almost two weeks later, FR reacted with a release of a National Evaluation report, confirming both sarin usage and government perpetration of chemical attack in Khan Shaykhun. SAR struck back the next day, noting amongst other denunciations, that FR has no legal capacity to put forward such conclusions, further referring to the OPCW to provide the objective information regarding the attack.

The USA further escalated the tensions in late June, warning Syrian government against further chemical attacks. This sparked an outrage on the side of SAR, denouncing the USA, and suggesting its support for terrorist forces in Syria and its responsibility for civilian

deaths, as a leader of the coalition against IS. Dimitry Peskov appeared to be puzzled with the USA's assessment of the situation, since he had no information of any possible threat, noting that such statements against SAR are unacceptable.

OPCW issued report from 29<sup>th</sup> of June prompted Boris Johnson to urge for an action against SAR, even though it only confirmed the use of sarin and did not assign blame - Secretary Johnson derived the perpetrator from the already-mentioned UK assessment. This report also marks a major challenge on the discourse authority of OPCW by the SAR, which questioned the methods of research applied by the FFM, did not back down from its claims of having possession of no chemical weapons at all, and yet again condemned the use of such as immoral and unjustified.

On 8<sup>th</sup> of August, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (ICI) under the UN's HRC released a groundbreaking resolution A/HRC/36/55 that confirmed the attack taking place and assigned the blame for the perpetration to the regime forces.<sup>21</sup> RF subsequently decided to veto all of the autumn initiatives, effectively hindering the UN-OPCW JIM, leaving OPCW with only a limited mandate branching out from the 2013 agreements. The issue of chemical weapons proliferation in Syria is therefore put to a stand-still, after the most up-to-date UN document, S/2017/904 with its assessment by the Leadership Panel, explicitly

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<sup>20</sup> United Nations Security Council, "Security Council: Seventy-second year: 7921st meeting: Wednesday, 12 April 2017, 10 a.m.: New York," *United Nations Security Council*, UN, April 12, 2017, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.7921](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.7921)

<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Council, "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic," *Human Rights Council*, UN, August 8, 2017, <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/36/55>

assigning the blame to the SAR, resulting in a statement from the SAR repeating its allegation of FR being responsible for the 2013 Ghouta attack, and calling out an existence of a western plot against the Syrian regime.

## Conclusion

The 2013 crisis resulted in a solution acceptable for all of the parties (as long as a compromise is deemed to be acceptable), effectively meaning neither party had to step-down from their positions regarding the *truth* formation, but maintaining the role of the discursive authority for the UN and OPCW as well, with all of the actors being a part of a positively viewed result.

On the other hand, 2017 events put a wedge between the major parties, splitting western partners with SAR and its allies, prominently USA and RF, which were able to cooperate very effectively in 2013. The challenge to the authority of UN, JIM, and OPCW is unprecedented, not only by the SAR and RF but also by the USA by launching an attack on Shayrat air-base without a proper investigation by the UN mechanisms. The actual consequences of this challenge remain to be seen yet.

Finally, it is imperative to keep in mind the limitations of the narrow research presented above. The role of the media has not been analysed at all, yet, it cannot be disputed that the media represent a significant force shaping the discourse. In order to keep the context of the issue fluid for the reader, let us indulge in a pair of examples, encountered during this analysis. For example, the western media might be a target of bias accusations, when jumping to conclusions of blame assignment, resulting from merely neutral reports. Another notable example of the discourse shaping by the media might be the methodical listing of all of

the U.S.-led coalition attacks, having resulted in civilian casualties, by the SANA - it is hard to enjoy a moral high-ground with regard to the chemical weapons discourse, when your potential adversary tirelessly points out your own humanitarian mishaps. It certainly represents a field of opportunity for a larger and more thorough research into the discourse surrounding the chemical weapons usage in SWC, unfortunately not well-suited for the format of this conflict report.

Hopefully, this article provided the reader with a richer concept of what does the chemical weapons discourse look like when talking about Syria, and that it contributed to the other parts of this report in a complementing manner.

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**Editors:**

Branislav Mičko  
Adriana Oboňová

**Strategic Effects of the Chemical  
Weapons Usage in the Syrian Civil War:**

Radka Roháriková  
Samo Žilinčík

**Comparison of Western Soft Power  
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**Roles and Contributions of the Major Actors  
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in the Ongoing Syrian Civil War:**

Jakub Kuchar  
Tereza Novotná

 [cbap.cz](http://cbap.cz)

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