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Issue Brief

Syria: The Chemical Blame Game

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On April 4, 2017, a lethal chemical weapon attack on Khan Sheikhoun, a Syrian town in the rebel-held Idlib province left 80 dead and more than 557 badly injured.¹ The town was held by the rebel, al-Nusrafront, a sub group of Taliban. The chemical used was reportedly the sarin gas, the most deadly of the chemical weapons used in the Syrian civil war since the Ghouta chemical attack in 2013.²

American Secretary of State Rex Tillerson strongly condemned the attack and said that “this is third allegation of the use of such weapons in the past month, it is clear that this is how Bashar al Assad operates. Those who defend him should have no misapprehensions about Assad.”³ Furthermore, Tillerson also said that Russia has failed in its responsibility to secure Syria’s chemical weapons under



the 2013 agreement brokered with President Obama.⁴ The White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer made a reckless statement about Assad, comparing him with Hitler. He later apologized.⁵ Such statements create skepticism about America’s role in the Syrian unrest.

President Vladimir Putin rejected all the allegations on the Syrian government⁶ and warned that anti-government forces operating in Syria will be attacking Damascus next and they want to blame the government for this.⁷

On April 6, there was a meeting of UNSC in which the suspected chemical attack in Syria was discussed. A draft resolution condemning the attack was presented by US, UK and France in this meeting. Russia defended its ally in Damascus and said this text was “categorically unacceptable”.⁸

¹ www.cnn.com/2017/04/04/middleeast/idlib-syria-attack

² <https://www.wired.com/2017/04/syria-sarin-chemical-weapons-chlorine/>

³ <https://ge.usembassy.gov/chemical-weapons-attack-syria-statement-secretary-state/>

⁴ <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/apr/6/rex-tillerson-russia-failed-deliver-vow-secure-syr/>

⁵ <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/04/11/politics/sean-spicer-hitler-assad-gas-chemical-weapons/>

⁶ <http://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-syria-chemical-attack-20170406-story.html>

⁷ Ibid

Later, on the same day, the US launched a missile strike on Sharyat airfield which involved firing 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles. This strike was casually affirmed by US President Donald Trump.⁹ Mr. Trump said that¹⁰ no child of God should suffer the horror which was done by Assad's horrific chemical attack. Russia and Iran were extremely infuriated and condemned the US missile strikes and said it is violation of international law.¹¹ Although Mr. Trump reflected sympathetic emotions for the Syrian people, it lacked substance and solid facts. The Syrian military dismissed all allegations as propaganda by rebels.¹²

On April 12, the US Secretary of State made his way to Moscow to talk about the rising tensions in Syria. He met with the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and also the Russian President Putin.¹³ Both sides have shown willingness upon restoring cooperation provided that no more aggression is seen from America's side. Although the talks yielded no breakthrough for the Syrian unrest, the general outcome of the talks was positive.

On April 12, the United States, France and Britain presented a draft resolution that according to them, fortified the ability of international investigators to look into the details of the chemical attack.¹⁴ The resolution was not adopted because of the negative vote by Russia. Nikki Haley, the US ambassador to UN said that Russia by its veto has opposed a resolution for peace in Syria.¹⁵ In response, Russia's ambassador at the UN, Vladimir Safronkov said that the initiatives by the western allies were actually supporting the interests of rebel groups, which have murdered many minorities.¹⁶

Along with this Staffan de Mistura, UN special envoy on Syrian security on 12th March said that Intra Syrian talks will be relaunched in May if there is a serious attempt for ceasefire.¹⁷ No date has yet been

⁸ <https://www.un.org/press/en/content/security-council/meetings-coverage>

⁹ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/04/security-council-meets-syria-gas-attack-170405142736085.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/donald-trump-latest-syria-missile-strike-tomahawk-chemical-weapons-attack-idlib-beautiful-babies-a7671471.html>

¹¹ <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/3293221/russia-and-iran-say-they-will-respond-to-american-aggression-follow>

¹² <http://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-syria-chemical-attack-20170406-story.html> wing-air-strike-in-syria/

¹³ <http://tass.com/politics/941100>

¹⁴ <http://freebeacon.com/national-security/nikki-haley-slams-russia-blocking-resolution-condemning-assad-regime-chemical-attack/>

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0meAdZnZPTU>

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ <http://webtv.un.org/topics-issues/non-governmental-organizations/action-internationale-pour-la-paix-et-le-d%C3%A9veloppement-dans-la-r%C3%A9gion-des-grands-lacs/watch/staffan-de-mistura-special-envoy-on-the-situation-in-syria-security-council-media-stakeout-12-april-2017/5395804434001>

indicated. Mr. De Mistura also said the ultimate solution for future of Syrian political environment is through negotiation and according to resolution 2254, and through a UN-led negotiation.¹⁸

Later, on April 13, 2017 in an interview to BBC, President Bashar al Assad said that the chemical attack in Idlib is “100% fabrication and there is no solid evidence.”¹⁹ Along with this, Assad said that Al Nusra are behind this. He also added that the incident was not investigated and he was only blamed on the basis of allegations.²⁰ The statement by Assad was objective and coherent.

As for Russia and US, one can say that things have started to stabilize and smooth out a little. President Trump said that things “will work out fine” leading to “lasting peace”²¹ after some inconsistent period.

If the current situation is scrutinized, it can be seen that the US is clearly against the Assad regime, and he has often been accused of being a war criminal and a tyrant. Also, the US do not seem very comfortable with Russia’s involvement in Syria. In the Khan Sheikhoun incident, Assad was accused for the chemical weapons strike but no solid proof has been brought forward. Only the disturbing pictures have been put forward to blame the Syrian government. Also, not even a single visit has been paid to Syria by the officials of US, UK and France. Yet very strong and negative statements have been made about Assad. US intelligence analysts believe that in the airstrikes there was involvement of Assad’s warplanes and Russia’s drones.

While when one hears news from the other side, there is a lot to it than the villain Assad and his ruthless army. Even the former policy adviser to Hillary Clinton told the presidential candidate that Al-Qaeda is on the side of the United States in Syria.²² Another statement tells us that Trump administration is framing Assad for Khan Sheikhoun incident because they want to reverse the announcement of not removing Assad. As in 2013, Assad again was blamed for Ghoutta chemical attack, nothing was proved against him and later the rebels freely admitted to Associated Press correspondent Dale Gavlak²³ that they had been given the weapons by some countries but had “handled the weapons improperly and set

¹⁸ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=56552>

¹⁹ <http://theduran.com/breaking-assad-speaks-to-bbc-idlib-chemical-attack-100-fabrication-us-working-hand-and-glove-with-isis/>

²⁰ <http://theduran.com/breaking-assad-speaks-to-bbc-idlib-chemical-attack-100-fabrication-us-working-hand-and-glove-with-isis/>

²¹ <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/04/trump-russia-lasting-peace-237194?cmpid=sf>

²² <http://theduran.com/wikileaks-drops-syria-bomb-email-to-hillary-clinton-assures-her-aq-al-qaeda-is-on-our-side-in-syria/>

²³ <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-ghouta-chemical-attacks-us-backed-false-flag-killing-children-to-justify-a-humanitarian-military-intervention/5351363>

off the explosions.”Also, this incident is considered a ‘false flag’ by many. Robert Parry an award winning journalist, Congressman Ron Paul and Vladimir Putin have called it propaganda against the sovereignty of Syria.

So, when the whole incident is looked at objectively, there is a lot more to it than Assad and Russia’s alarming alliance. US is extremely disturbed by Russia-Syria-Iran alliance. The US policy towards Russia, as well as Syria, is very confusing and it seems as if there is a bigger agenda to it. There have been many incidents in Syria that have been even worse. But this was the one highlighted. The matter was not even investigated and Syria was attacked. Apart from this, on April 15, a car bomb killed above 100 people in Aleppo²⁴and the twin bomb attacks in Damascus²⁵ on April 16, 2017 killed more than 50 people. Both these incidents remained unnoticed by Western government. The question is why? Although Assad cannot be considered an ideal Syrian president and Russia may seem to be plotting with Assad, it does seem that many things are yet to be disclosed. The media statements do not prove anything against the Assad regime. Also, the US involvement is constantly creating uncertainty as it goes against Trump’s own policy. This blame game for now is far from understanding.

²⁴ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/04/15/syria-explosion-evacuations/100500938/>

²⁵ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/worldnews/9257170/Twin-bomb-blasts-in-Damascus-Syria.html>