

Remarks by Ambassador Samantha Power, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, At a Stakeout on Syria

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The Council heard this morning from the Secretary General on the findings of Dr. Sellstrom and his team of chemical weapons experts. Before I say anything else, let me do as I assume my colleagues has done which is to express the great admiration that the United States has and President Obama has personally for the inspectors who put their lives on the line to try to bring back this evidence so the world would know what happened on August 21st.

It is no secret that they ran into significant security problems on the ground, but that did not stop them from moving forward. And again, seeking and in the end succeeding in bringing this important information back. So we have great admiration for them.

As you have already heard from the Secretary General and from my colleague Ambassador Lyall Grant, the UN report confirms unmistakably that chemical weapons were used in Syria on August 21st.

Now, the mandate of the chemical weapons team, was as you well know, not to investigate culpability, but the technical details of the UN report make clear that only the regime could have carried out this large-scale chemical weapons attack. We will analyze the UN's findings in greater detail, very carefully.

But based on our preliminary review, I will note one particular observation. We have associated one type of munition cited in the UN report – 122mm rockets – with previous regime attacks. We have reviewed thousands of open source videos related to the current conflict in Syria and have not observed the opposition manufacturing or using this style of rocket.

In addition, and I just want to underscore something that Ambassador Lyall

Grant shared, Mr. Sellstrom noted in response to a question from Russia that the quality of the sarin was higher than that of the sarin used in Saddam Hussein's program. Again, higher than the quality of that used in Saddam Hussein's program. Mr. Sellstrom also stated that the weapons obtained on the site, on the scene of this monstrous crime, were professionally made. He said that they bore none of the characteristics of improvised weapons.

We understand some countries did not accept on faith that the samples of blood and hair that the United States received from people affected by the August 21 attack contained sarin. But now Dr. Sellstrom's samples show the same thing.

And it's very important to note that the regime possesses sarin, and we have no evidence that the opposition possesses sarin.

Let me also remind you of what we know coming into today's briefing. In the days before the attack, Assad's chemical weapons experts prepared for an attack. They distributed gas masks to regime troops. They fired rockets from a regime-controlled area into 12 neighborhoods that the regime had been trying to clear of opposition forces. And here again I want to underscore, it defies logic to think that the opposition would have infiltrated the regime-controlled area to fire on opposition-controlled areas. And again, it also is worth underscoring that this is the largest chemical weapons attack in 25 years. And that is something that the Secretary General stressed. The largest attack since Halabja.

As I have found over the last weeks, the more countries around the world are confronted with the hard facts of what occurred on August 21, the more they recognize that the steep price of impunity for Assad could extend well beyond Syria. That is why President Obama sought to mobilize the international community to act to deter and degrade Assad's ability to use or proliferate these weapons.

In one week, the United States has made great progress in our effort to bring these weapons under international control. This substantial progress could not have been achieved without the threat of force and President Obama's decision to explore this diplomatic path.

The framework reached between the United States and Russia provides a path for the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons in a transparent,

expeditious, and verifiable manner, which could end the threat that these weapons pose not only to the Syrian people, but to the region and the world.

Let me say a word, building on Ambassador Lyall Grant's comments, about next steps. Action moves now to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague and here to New York. The United States and Russia are presenting a draft decision to the OPCW, which calls for special measures for stringent verification and an accelerated timeline for destruction.

Meanwhile, the US and Russia have agreed to support a Security Council resolution to reinforce the anticipated decision of the OPCW Executive Council, provide for verification and effective implementation, and request the Secretary General recommend to the Security Council the appropriate UN role in eliminating Syria's CW program. We also agreed, as you know, that in the event of Syria's non-compliance, unauthorized transfer or CW use by anyone, that we will impose measures under Chapter VII.

Let me be clear. The US position has been consistent throughout this process and will remain so going forward. We have insisted on a plan for the removal and destruction of chemical weapons that is timely, transparent, credible and verifiable. The obligations on the Syrian government must be clearly established. And this effort must be enforceable.

We believe the US-Russia framework, if fully implemented, can achieve this. We also think it can lay the foundation for a political solution to the underlying conflict and keep the political process moving forward toward Geneva II. The question before the Security Council today is whether we will shoulder the responsibility of agreeing to take the kind of credible, binding action demanded by this horrible event. And that is the decision we must make.

Thank you and I'd be happy to take a few questions.

Reporter: Ambassador, how do you intend to hold the Assad regime responsible, since your conclusion from the evidence in the report is that the Assad regime is responsible for the attack?

Ambassador Power: Well, first, building on today's findings, we think it's very important for countries inside the Security Council, and outside, to

speak and to make public their conclusions about regime use. I think that you will see, again, that countries that have held back, awaiting the inspector's findings, will be very struck by the comments of Mr. Sellstrom. And again, our impression, although we've only looked at the report at this point in a cursory way in the chamber, our impression, again, is that the technical details will provide even more, or lend themselves to an even more unmistakable conclusion that the regime is behind this attack.

So, that's first and foremost. Then, second, I would note that if this framework is successful and if we can make progress in the first instance at the OPCW and then here at the Security Council, it is critical that Assad would be losing his chemical weapons program. And this is a weapon that he has used multiple times over the last year, and it has provided him – it's no secret – not only with the ability to slaughter civilians but also with a tactical military advantage, so that too is a form of accountability.

Reporter: [Inaudible]

Reporter: Just a follow-up. So you'll be satisfied simply with other countries concluding what you concluded, nothing else, until action is taken on the Geneva understanding. And, you know, given – but forgive me to say that – but given the pattern of the American position in the last couple of weeks, you know – we get to the brink and then back – how do we know you're going to stick to Chapter 7 and what stage? Is it at the beginning? In the middle? Tell us about Chapter 7 in that resolution, when do you see it happening? At the start? Or in stage two?

Ambassador Power: Well, I think Ambassador Lyall Grant addressed some version of this question. What is essential is that any resolution that enshrines this mechanism is binding and enforceable and that it creates a verifiable mechanism and a reporting, a means for reporting, noncompliance back to the Security Council so that further action may be taken under Chapter 7. I think in this instance again our emphasis is on enshrining this framework in something that is binding and that holds all of the countries of the international community to that resolution, but also holds Syria to that resolution. It is no secret that Syria from time to time over the last two years grants compliance and grants cooperation and then withdraws it. It's also no secret now that Syria's responsible for the largest mass casualty chemical weapons attack in 25 years. So the Security Council has to speak, and has to make this mechanism enforceable.

Reporter: One, is it true that President Bashir has requested a visa to come here for the GA? And also, there was an early provision in one of the draft resolutions on Syria which called for the use, Chapter 7. . . appropriate measures under Chapter 7 (inaudible) Article 42, use of force in the event of another chemical weapons attack. Is the U.S. still pushing for language like that in the resolution, or that that been taken out?

Ambassador Power: Let me address the first question first, we have seen those reports that President Bashir intends [inaudible interruption] – Bashir, thank you. I'd be happy to trade places here. But, we have seen the reports that President Bashir intends to travel to New York. President Bashir, as you know, stands accused of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court. Such a trip would be deplorable, cynical and hugely inappropriate. We would suggest that given that he is under those chargers, and that the ICC has indicted him, again, on genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity charges that it would be more appropriate for him to present himself to the ICC and travel to The Hague.

With regard to the various resolutions that have been flying around the internet, I think I'm not going to comment, beyond to say again that we are determined to have an enforceable and binding resolution that obliges the Syrians to comply and beyond also to underscore how important the threat of force has been to bringing us to this moment, a rare moment of promise, at the Security Council, after two and a half years of deadlock and paralysis. Thank you.