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By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State John Kerry says it is imperative for the U.N. Security Council to act on the U.N. inspectors’ report that unequivocally shows a deadly nerve agent was used in an August 21 rocket attack that killed nearly 1,500 Syrian civilians.

“The findings in the [Swedish scientist Åke] Sellström report were as categorical as they were convincing,” Kerry said in a late afternoon State Department briefing September 19. “Every single data point — the types of munitions and launchers that were used, their origins, their trajectory, their markings, and the confirmation of sarin — every single bit of it confirms what we already knew and what we told America and the world. It confirms what we have brought to the attention of our Congress, the American people and the rest of the world.”

The Sellström-led U.N. weapons inspection team presented its findings to U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon last week, and he presented the report to the Security Council on September 16, calling the attack a war crime.

Kerry said the United States has linked the improvised 122-millimeter rockets used in the chemical attack to the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. They were, Kerry said, used in previous Syrian chemical attacks and are under the control of the Syrian army.
He added that there is no evidence in the U.N. report or any intelligence assessment that the Syrian opposition forces had the means, the deadly nerve agent sarin, the munitions or the ability to launch such an attack on its own people from an area in Damascus that is controlled by the Syrian army.

“So, there you have it. Sarin was used. Sarin killed,” Kerry said. “The world can decide whether it was used by the regime, which has used chemical weapons before, the regime which had the rockets and the weapons, or whether the opposition secretly went unnoticed into territory they don’t control to fire rockets they don’t have containing sarin that they don’t possess to kill their own people.”

Kerry said the U.N. Security Council must be prepared to act during the week of September 23–27, the opening of the 68th Session of the U.N. General Assembly, on the findings of the chemical weapons inspection report.

“So I would say to the community of nations, time is short. Let’s not spend time debating what we already know,” Kerry told journalists. “Instead, we have to recognize that the world is watching to see whether we can avert military action and achieve through peaceful means even more than what those military strikes promise.”

“A complete removal of Syria’s chemical weapons is possible here, through peaceful means,” he said.

In response to the chemical attack, President Obama announced that the United States would carry out a limited military response against the Syrian regime if it failed to turn over its chemical weapons to international control under the United Nations. He advised the U.S. Congress that he would await diplomatic efforts before asking for support for the use of a military strike.

In just-completed talks in Geneva, Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov developed a framework that could lead to the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons in an open, quick and verifiable manner. In the aftermath of the attack, the Syrian regime has pledged to sign the international Chemical Weapons Convention and to adhere to the convention's terms.

Related Article: Kerry on Proof of Syria's Use of Chemical Weapons


By Karen Parrish

American Forces Press Service

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md., Sept. 19, 2013 – The mission: build an independent, self-sustaining air force from the inside out, from the ground up. The commander leading that effort calls it the most complex undertaking NATO and the U.S. Air Force have ever tackled.

Air Force Brig. Gen. John Michel leads NATO Air Training Command Afghanistan, the organization charged with training the Afghan air force. He is here this week attending an Air Force conference, and spoke to American Forces Press Service about the Afghan air capability that he maintains no longer is fledgling, but rather is flourishing.

Not only are Afghan pilots now carrying out combat, resupply and medevac missions, he said, the humanitarian capability they bring to their government is helping to legitimize their nation.
country largely inaccessible by road, the general noted, air reach equals government reach. And Afghan aviation dates to 1919, he said.

“It’s a source of national pride,” Michel said. About a month ago, he said, the Afghan air force was called to respond to a flood that had left citizens stranded, “and they saved over 300 men, women and children.”

The force is critical to the Afghan army as well, he said. Close air support, evacuating the wounded, and in many cases, even basic resupply are only possible in Afghanistan with aircraft, Michel noted.

The Afghan air force, he said, “is really the foundational element for legitimacy locally, nationally and internationally.” For example, he said, the core of trained air traffic controllers that will grow up around the air force and ultimately transfer to the civilian world will form part of the infrastructure backbone Afghanistan will need to attract long-term foreign investment.

The air training command’s staff includes some 600 people from 14 coalition nations. They work with their Afghan counterparts on Afghan bases at six locations within the country, training and advising every member of the Afghan air force, from the highest-level leaders down to the newest junior recruits.

Michel pointed out the timeline that makes 2014 the handoff year for combat operations doesn’t apply to his command. The Afghan air force is on a separate timeline from the army and police forces, and is not set for full operational autonomy until 2017, he said. The NATO air training command is set to grow during that time to 1,114 military and defense contractors, plus 530 base support personnel.

Meanwhile, coalition aircrews fly alongside their Afghan counterparts during training missions, combat missions, and joint missions conducting resupply, infiltration, exfiltration, passenger movements and casualty evacuation for the Afghan army. Coalition advisors also train in all the support roles including maintenance, logistics, finance and communications. About 200 Afghan students are now in various phases of the pilot training pipeline, Michel said.

The Afghan air force is divided into three wings, located respectively in Kabul, Kandahar and Shindand, in western Afghanistan’s Herat province. The command center is in Kabul, and the Shindand Air Base is the main training area. The Afghan force currently has a fleet of 92 fixed-wing and rotary aircraft, with 12 more Mi-17 transport helicopters being delivered starting this month. Ultimately, the force’s fleet will include 58 Mi-17s, six Mi-35 attack helicopters, 20 C-208 turboprop airliners, four C-130 transport aircraft and 20 A-29 light attack aircraft.

Michel noted the Soviet influence in Afghanistan dating to the 1920s but dominant from the 1950s to the 1990s extended to the air force, which followed the Soviet model of essentially a client force trained to fly but reliant on its patrons for equipment, maintenance, support and administration.

Command and control will be the essence of the “small, but mighty” air capability Afghanistan plans to grow to a force of 8,000, Michel said. “That was not present in the dependency model,” he added. And while the model encouraged brilliant flying, it omitted “disciplined execution,” the general said, “which is what makes the U.S. Air Force the best in the history of mankind.”

Disciplined execution includes doctrine and an emphasis on safety, Michel said, which his command is training or developing in the growing Afghan force, along with English, military science and a host of other subjects and resources.
“Among those 8,000 people, there are seven specific capabilities and 60 military occupational specialties,” he noted. The mission set for the Afghan air force rests on core capabilities of air movement, aerial fires, aerial reconnaissance, force protection, sustainment and intelligence, Michel said. That integration of capabilities is crucial to the self-sustaining force that Afghanistan needs, he said.

“The maintainer number that we’re going to is sub-1,400,” he said. “And then we’ll have some number less than that for pilots.” The A-29 “Super Takano” program aims at 30 pilots for 20 aircraft, he said, but those 30 will over time “grow out of the cockpit.”

“We’re growing a profession,” he said. Establishing a military education network that will produce professional officers and noncommissioned officers -- Michel called the NCO corps “the secret sauce” of the U.S. military -- recruiting and marketing are all part of the mission, he said.

“Is it hard?” the general said of his mission. “Let’s see; we’re building it from the inside out, the ground up. The more capability we start to garner, the more they want to employ. The more they employ, the less we can train. … And, as of a week from today, we’re adding the first two of four C-130s.”

As capabilities grow, so do costs and complications, Michel acknowledged. The Afghan government may choose to adjust its timeline for some capabilities as its contributors’ budgets tighten, he said, and his command is prepared with a range of options to scale capability to cost as needed.

“I have 39 months from today to finish this mission,” he said. “We’re not building capabilities they don’t need to have.”

Biographies:
Air Force Brig. Gen. John E. Michel

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By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Sept. 18, 2013 – U.S. military assets remain ready to launch attacks if the diplomatic efforts to secure and dismantle the Syrian regime’s chemical arms should fail, senior defense officials said here today.

In a Pentagon news conference, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the military role today is limited.

“The current role of the military is to provide some planning assistance to the Organization for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons … who has the lead, and as well as to maintain the credible threat of force, should the diplomatic track fail,” Dempsey said.

The chairman said he believes forces loyal to Syrian president Bashar Assad have maintained control of the regime’s chemical weapons. The environment inside Syria is “very challenging,” he added.
Still, Dempsey said, he believes it is possible for the international community to work in the country.

“So long as Syrian leaders agree to the framework, which causes them to be responsible for the security, the movement, the protection of the investigators or the inspectors, then I think that … it is feasible,” Dempsey said. “But we’ve got to make sure we keep our eye on all of those things.”

The chairman acknowledged that disposing of chemical weapons is a complicated task.

“The framework calls for it to be controlled, destroyed or moved,” he said. “In some combination, it is feasible, but those details will have to be worked by the OPCW.”

Overall, the conflict in Syria ebbs and flows, the chairman said, and rebel groups in the country are concerned that the focus on chemical weapons will detract from the willingness of partners to support them.

“But … in terms of direct threats to U.S. interests, I think … that the elimination of the Assad regime's chemical capability is right at the top of our national interests,” Dempsey added. “If this process bears fruit and achieves its stated purpose, we will be in a better position.”

Biographies:
Chuck Hagel
Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey


By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — National Security Advisor Susan Rice says that a U.N. chemical weapons investigation confirms a previous U.S. intelligence assessment that Syrian civilians were killed August 21 in the suburbs of Damascus by a lethal sarin gas attack.

“The U.N. team collected a wealth of evidence — including surface-to-air rockets, dozens of environmental and soil samples, and biomedical samples — that tested positive for signatures of sarin,” Rice said in a prepared White House statement September 16.

“Although the team’s mandate was not to determine who was responsible for these heinous attacks, the technical evidence included in the report and in today’s briefing by the U.N. — including the statement that the sarin was high-quality and that a particular type of rocket was used in the attack — reinforces our assessment that these attacks were carried out by the Syrian regime, as only they had the capability to mount an attack in this manner,” Rice added.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon presented the findings of the inspection team to a closed-door session of the U.N. Security Council September 16. Ban said the team probing the use of chemical weapons found “clear and convincing evidence” sarin gas was used in the Ghouta area on the eastern outskirts of Damascus on August 21, killing an estimated 1,429 people, including 426 children.
“The report makes for chilling reading,” Ban told reporters. The report concludes that, on the basis of evidence obtained during the U.N. investigation, “chemical weapons have been used in the ongoing conflict between the parties in Syria, also against civilians, including children, on a relatively large scale.”

The team, led by Swedish scientist Dr. Åke Sellström, also concludes that the environmental, chemical and medical samples collected provide “evidence that surface-to-air rockets containing the nerve agent Sarin were used in Ein Tarma, Moadamiyah, and Zamalka, in the Ghouta area of Damascus.”

Formally known as the Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, Sellström’s team was established on March 21 and was assisted by experts from the World Health Organization and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, according to the United Nations.

Ban told journalists that the results are overwhelming and indisputable, and that the U.N. team confirmed, unequivocally and objectively, that chemical weapons have been used in Syria. The report confirms that 85 percent of blood samples from the sites in Ghouta tested positive for sarin, and the majority of the rocket fragments were also found to be carrying the deadly nerve agent.

“There must be accountability for the use of chemical weapons,” Ban said, adding that “our message today must be more than: Do not slaughter your people with gas. There must also be no impunity for the crimes being committed with conventional weapons.”

“This is a war crime,” Ban said.

Rice said that the just-completed talks between Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Geneva developed a framework that could bring the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons in an open, quick and verifiable manner, which would end the threat these weapons pose to the Syrian people, the immediate region and the world.

5. Russia-U.S. Pact to Expand Collaboration on Nuclear Research (09-17-2013)

Vienna — Russia and the United States have signed an agreement to expand cooperation between the countries in nuclear research.

U.S. Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz and Director-General of Russia’s State Atomic Energy Corporation (ROSATOM) Sergey Kirienko signed the pact on the margins of the International Atomic Energy Agency’s General Conference in Vienna September 16.

The agreement will complement provisions of the U.S.-Russian Agreement for Cooperation in the Field of Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy, which came into force in January 2011 and opened new opportunities to work together on a wide range of issues in this sphere, according to the U.S. Energy Department.

“This agreement supports President Obama’s nonproliferation and climate priorities by providing a venue for scientific collaboration and relationship-building between the U.S. and Russian research and technical communities,” Moniz said. “Jointly, these communities will work to further develop advanced technologies that can address some of our most pressing nuclear energy and nuclear security challenges.”
Potential projects covered by the agreement could include international safeguards, establishment of a Multi-Purpose Fast Research Reactor International Research Center, irradiation of fuels and materials in the fast-spectrum research reactor BOR-60, and defense from asteroids, among others. The United States and Russia are equal partners under the agreement, with each country bearing its own costs.

The United States and Russia have a long history of cooperation on nonproliferation, nuclear security and nuclear energy. This new framework builds upon the success of the 1992 Agreement between the United States of America and the Russian Federation Concerning the Safe and Secure Transportation, Storage and Destruction of Weapons and the Prevention of Weapons Proliferation, commonly known as the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Umbrella Agreement, which expired in June 2013.

Later in 2013, the United States and Russia are scheduled to celebrate the final delivery of low-enriched uranium under a 1993 agreement that provided for the conversion of 500 metric tons of Russian highly enriched uranium from nuclear weapons to non-weapons-usable low-enrichment uranium for use in U.S. commercial reactors.


Washington — U.S. Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Rand Beers traveled to Rome September 12–13 to meet with his Group of Six (G6) international counterparts from France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Beers joined U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder for the G6 Ministerial Meeting, discussing with the European ministers shared goals and trans-Atlantic efforts related to migration, counterterrorism, cybersecurity, and preventing and combating transnational crime.

“The Department of Homeland Security continues to collaborate with our international partners towards our common goals to combat and mitigate threats we all face, including countering terrorism and violent extremism, especially with regard to our international aviation system, as well as cooperating to improve cybersecurity,” Beers said, according to a September 13 Department of Homeland Security news release.

“We must continue to work together to combat these threats and the larger issue of transnational criminal activity, and enhance our common efforts to increase security for the United States and our partners around the world.”

During the G6 Ministerial Meeting, Beers underscored the importance of information sharing, for example, via the Preventing and Combating Serious Crime Agreements, negotiated by the departments of Homeland Security and Justice, which increase critical information sharing capabilities with key partner countries to help prevent terrorism and transnational crime.

Beers also emphasized the importance of the Department of Homeland Security’s international collaboration in law enforcement investigations in areas such as human trafficking, cybercrime and intellectual property rights violations.

Beers also met with French Interior Minister Manuel Valls, German Federal Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich, Italian Interior Minister Angelino Alfano, Spanish Interior Minister Jorge Fernández Díaz and U.K. Home Secretary Theresa May to discuss areas of common interest.

For more information, visit the Department of Homeland Security’s website.

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — An agreement worked out between Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov represents a concrete step toward eliminating Syria’s lethal and extensive chemical weapons program, says President Obama.

Kerry and Lavrov reached agreement September 14 in Geneva on a diplomatic framework to eliminate one of the largest stockpiles of chemical weapons in the Middle East.

In a statement from Washington September 14, Obama said that the agreement reached after three days of intense negotiations “provides the opportunity for the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons in a transparent, expeditious, and verifiable manner, which could end the threat these weapons pose not only to the Syrian people but to the region and the world.”

“The international community expects the Assad regime to live up to its public commitments,” Obama added.

Under terms announced in Geneva, the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad must provide a comprehensive listing of its entire chemical weapons stockpile within one week, Kerry told journalists September 14 at a press conference with Lavrov at Geneva’s Intercontinental Hotel. They agreed to use extraordinary procedures under the 1992 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) for stringent verification of Syrian chemical weapons and their rapid destruction.

And the United States and Russia agreed that the Assad regime must provide the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which administers the Chemical Weapons Convention, and its supporting personnel immediate and unfettered access to inspect all chemical weapons sites in Syria, Kerry added. International inspections teams will be in Syria by November. During that time, all equipment used for mixing and filling chemical weapons are to be destroyed.

Finally, the agreement calls for the complete destruction of all Syrian chemical weapons, including the possibility of removing the weapons from Syria for destruction. Full destruction of the weapons must be completed by mid-2014.

“Ensuring that a dictator’s wanton use of chemical weapons never again comes to pass, we believe is worth pursuing and achieving,” Kerry told journalists.

Syria has been locked in a protracted civil war since March 2011.

This Geneva agreement was reached in the aftermath of a chemical weapons attack by the Syrian regime on civilians early on August 21 in an agricultural neighborhood east of Damascus. The attack killed 1,429 people including 426 children. After that attack, President Obama announced that he was ordering an American military response, positioned U.S. Navy warships in the Mediterranean Sea and asked the U.S. Congress for authorization to use force.

“The use of chemical weapons anywhere in the world is an affront to human dignity and a threat to the security of people everywhere,” Obama said in the September 14 statement. “We have a duty to preserve a world free from the fear of chemical weapons for our children. Today marks an important step towards achieving this goal.”
After a response from Kerry, Russia proposed disarming Syria of chemical weapons and Obama asked Congress to delay an authorization vote until the United States and Russian delegations could reach an accord. Negotiations began September 12 in Geneva with Kerry and Lavrov and significant disarmament delegations from both countries along with U.N. Special Envoy for Syria Lakhdar Brahimi.

If Syria’s Assad regime fails to comply with the terms of the accord, then the United States and Russia can seek a resolution under Chapter 7 of the U.N. Charter, which can authorize the use of force and also nonmilitary measures, Kerry told journalists.

“There can be no games, no room for avoidance or anything less that full compliance by the Assad regime,” Kerry said.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced in New York on September 13 that he would present an “overwhelming” U.N. weapons inspection team report on Syria’s chemical weapons on September 16 to the U.N. Security Council. Syria is known to hold the largest stockpile of chemical weapons in the Middle East, including sarin, mustard gas and VX, and all the munitions necessary to deliver them and the elements needed to make them.

Ban said in a statement from New York that he hoped the agreement reached in Geneva will “help pave the path for a political solution to stop the appalling suffering inflicted on the Syrian people.”

The Chinese government announced September 15 that it welcomed the U.S.-Russian agreement on Syria’s chemical weapons. “We believe this framework agreement has cooled the tense situation in Syria and has opened a new opportunity to use a peaceful means to resolve the chemical weapons issue,” Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said following a meeting with visiting French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, according to news reports.

British Foreign Secretary William Hague said September 14 that the agreement was “a significant step forward.” German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle said “if deeds now follow the words, the chances of a political solution will rise significantly.”

The Chemical Weapons Convention approved by the U.N. General Assembly on November 30, 1992, augments the 1925 Geneva Protocol for chemical weapons, and includes extensive measures such as on-site inspections. The protocol was an outgrowth of the world’s response to the extensive use of chemical weapons during World War I in Europe. As of September this year, 190 states are party to the CWC, though not until the past week had Syria agreed to sign and ratify the treaty.

Related Articles:
Statement by Kerry, Russian FM Lavrov and U.N. Envoy Brahimi
U.S.-Russian Plan for Syrian Chemical Weapons

8. Syrian Chemical Attack Confirmed by Large Body of Intelligence (09-13-2013)

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — In a well-orchestrated barrage of artillery and mortar shells fitted with lethal chemical warheads, the Syrian army attacked the agricultural area of Ghouta, just east of Damascus, during the early morning hours of August 21, killing at least 1,429 civilians, including 426 children, according to senior U.S. officials and supported by information from a large body of independent international sources.
Blood and hair samples taken from victims after the attack confirmed that the lethal agent used was sarin gas — a toxic chemical that attacks a human’s nervous system, causing extreme respiratory distress that leads to coma and death, President Obama says.

“The world saw thousands of videos, cellphone pictures and social media accounts from the attack, and humanitarian organizations told stories of hospitals packed with people who had symptoms of poison gas,” Obama said September 10 in a nationally televised address to the American people.

The United States, Britain and France, along with other allies, have collected information about the August 21 attack from international and Syrian medical personnel; videos; eyewitness accounts; thousands of social media reports from at least 12 different locations in the Damascus area; journalists’ accounts; and reports from credible nongovernmental organizations, according to a White House report based on a U.S. intelligence assessment that has been made public.

The U.S. intelligence community concluded, based on an array of information and knowledge of Syrian military capabilities, that the regime of Bashar al-Assad carried out the poison gas attack against opposition-held elements in the Ghouta suburbs of Damascus, the White House said. “We assess that the scenario in which the opposition executed the attack on August 21 is highly unlikely,” the U.S. assessment said.

The Assad regime has been locked in a civil war with opposition forces since March 2011. More than 100,000 people have been killed in the ongoing civil conflict, which began when the Assad regime used the Syrian army to crack down on peaceful civilian protests, according to the United Nations.

Syria maintains the largest chemical weapons program and stockpile of agents in the Middle East — including mustard gas, sarin and VX — and has thousands of munitions that can be used to deliver chemical warfare agents, according to the U.S. assessment. It denied possessing any chemical weapons until the week of September 9, and it is one of only four nations that have not signed the international Chemical Weapons Convention.

In recent days, the Assad regime has announced it will seek to sign and ratify the Chemical Weapons Convention, following President Obama’s announcement that he was seeking authorization from the U.S. Congress to conduct a military strike against Syrian forces because of the chemical weapons attack.

According to unclassified intelligence reports, the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center (SSRC), which is subordinate to the Syrian Ministry of Defense, manages Syria’s expansive chemical weapons program. In testimony earlier in 2013, James Clapper, director of U.S. national intelligence, told Congress that Syria “remains dependent on foreign sources for key elements” of its chemical weapons program.

The mass of information gathered from multiple sources, the White House says, indicates the following sequence of events and actions by the Syrian army on August 21:

- Syrian chemical weapons personnel from the SSRC began preparing chemical munitions about three days before the early morning attack near an area that the regime uses to mix these weapons.
• Elements of the Syrian army in the area were issued protective gas masks just before the attack.

• Army units fired artillery and mortar shells into 11 neighborhoods that the Syrian military had been trying to clear of opposition forces by conventional means. Weather conditions contributed to the attack by creating atmospheric conditions that helped hold the deadly nerve gas close to the ground.

• The initial attack in the Damascus suburbs began at approximately 2:30 a.m. local time and ended about three hours later. The barrage was launched from regime-controlled areas and fired into opposition-controlled or contested neighborhoods.

• Three Damascus hospitals in the area closest to the attacks reported receiving approximately 3,600 patients displaying symptoms consistent with nerve agent poisoning in less than three hours.

• “The reported symptoms, and the epidemiological pattern of events — characterized by the massive influx of patients in a short period of time, the origin of patients, and the contamination of medical and first aid workers — were consistent with mass exposure to a nerve agent,” the U.S. assessment said, based on reports from international and Syrian medical personnel on the ground. Many medical and first responders to the chemical attack became ill as a result of exposure to contaminated patients.

• Videos and reported symptoms of victims were consistent with exposure to nerve agent poisoning and included unconsciousness, foaming from the nose and mouth, constricted pupils, rapid heartbeat and extreme difficulty breathing.

• Senior officials of the Assad regime reviewed the results of the initial attack, and increased shelling of the same neighborhoods in the days that followed, according to President Obama.

• Intercepted communications from a senior Syrian official familiar with the offensive confirmed that chemical weapons were used by the regime on August 21, and he expressed concern that the U.N. weapons inspectors might obtain evidence.

• On the afternoon of August 21, Syrian chemical weapons personnel were directed by the leadership to halt operations.

• In the ensuing days, the Syrian army intensified its conventional artillery and mortar barrage in the neighborhoods until the morning of August 26.

According to senior U.S. administration officials, there is high confidence in the full intelligence assessment, parts of which are still classified, that a chemical weapons attack occurred and that the Assad regime was responsible. The senior administration officials also said there is ample evidence that the Assad regime has used chemical weapons in the past, though on a much smaller scale.