

Inspectors' Visit to Syria Gas Attack Site Delayed

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – A visit by chemical weapons inspectors to the site of an alleged gas attack in Syria was delayed on Monday, British and Russian officials said, as Western powers and Russia traded accusations in the aftermath of U.S.-led missile strikes.

Moscow, the main ally of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, condemned the United States, Britain and France for refusing to wait for the findings of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) inspection team on the alleged attack on Douma before they launched the strikes.

OPCW inspectors arrived in Damascus on Saturday and had planned to head to Douma, on the outskirts of the capital, on Monday. But the British delegation to the OPCW said Russia and Syria had not yet allowed the inspectors



The flag of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in front of their building in The Hague, the Netherlands

access to Douma.

Britain's Ambassador Peter Wilson said at a news conference in The Hague that the United Nations had cleared the inspectors to go.

Russia's deputy foreign minister

said the delay was due to the Western strikes.

OPCW inspectors arrived in Damascus at the request of the Syrian government to determine whether chemicals were used in Douma

near the capital Damascus.

The Western trio fired more than 100 missiles at Syria in the early hours of Saturday, for the declared purpose of crippling the county's chemical production facilities over the alleged gas attack.

On Monday, Russia vowed not to interfere with the OPCW fact-finding mission in Syria.

"Russia confirms its commitment to ensure safe (sic) and security of the mission and will not interfere in its work," the Russian Embassy in The Hague posted on its twitter account.

The embassy also censured the U.S., noting that Saturday's bombing of Syria was a bid "to undermine the credibility" of the mission.

The Syrian government surrendered its chemical weapons stockpile during a process monitored by the OPCW in 2013.

an arms embargo and a ban on dealings with the Syrian central bank to travel bans and asset freezes on Syrian officials, military, business people and scientists.

In a separate session, ministers discussed Iran's role in Syria's war, but there was no breakthrough on whether to adopt new sanctions proposed by Britain, France and Germany on Iranians accused of helping the Syrian government.

EU diplomats said there was no discussion on Monday of targeting Russian military figures who, along with Iran, have helped Syria recapture terrorist-held territory.

EU diplomats cautioned that until European governments had more idea of what the United States was planning, it was not possible to quickly follow suit. In the past, EU measures have sometimes come months after Washington's.

Russia is Europe's biggest gas supplier and, while the EU has imposed significant sanctions on Moscow's financial, energy and defense sectors over the crisis in Ukraine, close ties between Russia and some EU members complicate discussions about new punitive measures.

The EU is due to hold an international donor conference for Syria next week.

"There will be a solution involving everyone who has influence on the region," German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said in Luxembourg.

Arab...

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confidence and promote stability in the region. He also urged them to base their policies upon realism, interaction, contemplation, logic, dialogue, goodwill and far-sightedness.

The Arab League summit's final communique called for more international sanctions on Iran and urged it to withdraw "its militias" from Syria and Yemen.

"The summit condemned Iranian interference in the internal affairs of Arab countries, either through igniting sectarian strife or planting militias in Arab countries such as Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen, and harboring al Qaeda terrorists," Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Jubeir told a news conference.

Iran has repeatedly denied such accusations.

'Turkey-Russia Ties Not So Weak to Be Separated'

ANKARA (Xinhua) – Turkey's relations with Russia are not so weak to be separated as the French president claimed, said Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Monday.

Speaking at a joint press conference with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in Ankara, Cavusoglu said that Turkey's ties with Russia were not an alternative to its ties with NATO, France

and the United States.

His comments came in response to an earlier remark from French President Emmanuel Macron, who claimed that the U.S.-led strikes on Syria had "separated" Turkey from Russia.

"With those strikes we have separated the Russians and the Turks on this. The Turks condemned the chemical weapons," Macron said on Sunday.

Bekir Bozdag, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister and government spokesperson, said earlier Monday that Turkey does not stand by any country on Syria, and its policy in the region is different from that of Iran, Russia and the United States.

On Saturday, the U.S., Britain and France launched strikes on a number of targets in Syria in response to the alleged chemical attack in the Douma district in Eastern Gh-

outa last week.

During the press conference, Cavusoglu also unveiled that Macron wanted to be part of the trilateral summit of Turkey, Russia and Iran held in Ankara in early April. Ankara has consulted with the other two countries. Russia welcomed the participation of France but Iran preferred to host France at a separate meeting, and Macron did not attend the summit, he said.

'Three Turkish Soldiers Killed in Kurdish Militant Attack'

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey (Reuters) – Kurdish militants attacked Turkish security forces in southeast Turkey early on Monday, killing three soldiers and wounding one, security sources said.

They said the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants staged the attack in the Kuyutepe military base area of Sirnak province.

The militants have been fighting a decades-long war against Ankara in quest for an independent state in southeastern Turkey, in which around 40,000 people have been killed.

Since January, Turkey has also been waging a concerted operation against Kurdish militants known as People's Protection Units (YPG) in northern Syria. The Turkish administration says the YPG is associated with the PKK.

The Syria attacks have, however, forgone Damascus' approval. They have also pit Turkey against the United States which supports the militants.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says thousands of YPG militants had been "neutralized" since the beginning of an operation in Turkey, meaning they had either surrendered or been killed or captured.



Turkish-backed Syrian militants advance during the fight to seize control of the town of Jandairis, in Syria's Afrin region, on March 8, 2018.

Syrians...

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Shaaban noted that the U.S.-led airstrikes had not intimidated the Syrians and instead sent covering Zionists scrambling into air raid shelters.

"Instead of the Syrian people going to shelters, they went to the rooftops to watch Syrian forces shoot down scores of Trump's missiles before they could reach their goals. This, while the settlers of the Zionist entity fled to their shelters," Shaaban also rejected Pentagon chief Jim Mattis's allegations that installations linked to the production of chemical weapons had been bombed.

"The Center of Science and Research which provides knowledge to the best Syrian students every year was targeted," she wrote. "Trump is destroying this institution, which has no connection to producing any weapons. This is the lie of war about chemical weapons that Trump created."

On Monday, British Prime Minister Theresa May was to face angry lawmakers for authorizing the strikes without a vote in Parliament.

Qasemi further said a U.S.-led attack on Syria on Saturday was a repeat of Washington's use of lies to fulfill its interests in line with its expansionist policies.

"The U.S. has shown that it takes such measures in various countries from time to time based on lies and hollow pretexts in line with its expansionist policies to achieve its goals and is likely to repeat this behavior," he said.

The U.S., Britain, and France used an alleged chemical attack near Damascus to hit several targets in Syria early Saturday, ignoring a demand by the Syrian government that inspectors visit the site to investigate the allegation.

Qasemi said the coordinated attacks were against international principles and a testimony to the "expansionist and warmongering" policies of the United States.

"Today, everything that is seen in the abnormal situation of the region and the current world is due to the blatantly strategic mistakes of the United States over the past decades, which has always made the region suffer from a serious instability," he said.

The spokesman also stressed that "the aggressive action of the three Western countries in Syria will have no bearing on the regional and global policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

Qasemi said the U.S. was dismayed at not being present in the Astana Talks on Syria, and thus launched the recent strikes to divide Iran, Russia and Turkey, the guarantor states of a ceasefire in the war-torn state.

EU Dialogue to Continue

Qasemi said that EU sanctions over its human rights record were due to "differing values" but that they should not derail dialogue with Europe.

"We have certain differences of opinion with European countries and the European Union," he said.

"That is due in part to differing values between our region and the Islamic republic of Iran and the European Union, notably as concerns human rights," he said.

The EU Thursday extended by a year sanctions against 82 individuals and an entity accused of "serious human rights violations in Iran".

Qasemi said long-running dialogue with the EU should continue, focusing on areas of agreement and in "a constructive atmosphere of good will".

"In the coming months, there will be several delegations to discuss different subjects and not just human rights," he said. "I hope that this can happen in a more positive atmosphere."

The EU sanctions - first imposed in

the wake of the crackdown on the 2009 protest movement in Iran - block exports of equipment "which might be used for internal repression and of equipment for monitoring telecommunications".

Russia...

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EU Sanctions

European Union foreign ministers on Monday threatened new sanctions against Syria, but held off from joining expected new punitive U.S. measures against Russia.

After Britain and France joined the United States in missile salvos on Syria, EU foreign ministers discussed steps to mount pressure on the Syrian government.

France's Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and his British counterpart Boris Johnson earlier briefed fellow ministers on the airstrikes on Saturday.

"It is very important to stress (the strikes are) not an attempt to change the tide of the war in Syria or to have a regime change," Johnson told reporters.

Any new sanctions on Syria would build on a series of such EU measures since 2011, which range from

"Then the Prophet of Allah added: By Him who sent me as a prophet with the truth! Whoever approaches one of the doors of evil and disobedience to God on this day, hangs on to one of the branches of the Tree of Zaqqum and is drawn toward hell." Then he said, 'By Him who sent me as a Prophet with the truth! Whoever is negligent of his obligatory prayers on this day and misses them is one who clings to one of its branches. Whoever misses a fast that was obligatory on him on this day is one who clings to one of its branches. Someone who is approached on this day by a weak and indigent person whose wretched condition he knows and he is able to change it without suffering any harm, and there is no one else who may help him and act in his stead, and were he to leave him to languish and perish and fail to give him a helping hand, then he is one who clings to one of the branches of the Zaqqum Tree. Whoever that does not accept the apology of someone who has done him a wrong and instead of keeping the punishment of the offender within the limits of his offense transgresses those limits, he is one who clings to one of the branches of the Zaqqum Tree. Whoever that creates ill feeling between a husband and wife, a father and son, two brothers, two relatives, two neighbours, two friends or two strangers is one who clings to one of its branches. Whoever presses his demand hardly and harshly against someone in a pinch, knowing his predicament, thus adding to his distress and affliction, is one who clings to one of the branches."

"Whoever denies a debt that he owes and transgresses against his creditor forcing him to forgo his claim, such a one clings to one of the branches. Whoever mistreats an orphan, torments him or unjustly appropriates his property, is one who clings to one of the branches; whoever that compromises the honour of his brother-in-faith and prompts other people to do so, is the one who clings to one of the branches of the Tree. Whoever that engages in unlawful singing on this day that prompts sinful actions, is one who clings to one of the branches of the Zaqqum Tree; whoever that sits and recounts his ugly deeds in a confrontation or his wrongful actions against God's servants and boasts about them, he is one who clings to one of that tree's branches. Someone who has a sick neighbour and he does not pay him a visit due to making light of his rights, such a person is one who clings to one of the branches of the tree. Whoever that fails to take part in the funeral of his neighbour for not giving significance to him is one who clings to one of the branches. Whoever is undutiful toward his parents or one of them is one who clings to one of the branches. Also someone who has been undutiful toward his parents and in spite of being able to make them pleased with him again on this day, does not do so, in one who has caught hold of one of the branches. Similarly, whoever that commits any of the various kinds of evils on this day is one who clings to one of the branches of the Zaqqum Tree."