DISARMING SYRIA

The Chemical Weapons Challenge

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Outline

1 Introduction: why this episode is unique and significant

2 The web of obligations enveloping Syria: 4 regimes, 5 masters

3 The process: accounting, monitoring and verification dismantlement and destruction

4 Syria's chemical weapon capabilities: before & after

5 The challenges ahead

6 Broader implications

7 Implications for IR theory

Introduction: why is the Syria CW episode significant?

Disarmament during armed conflict: unprecedented

Speed, efficiency and effectiveness of international institutions: breathtaking

The diplomatic choreography involved: impressive

Complexity and interwoven nature of the arrangements; astounding

Dizzying speed

August	
18	Ban ki-Moon dispatches UN team to investigate 19 March Aleppo incident at Syria's request
21	Major chemical weapon attack in Ghouta
September	
9	Secretary of State John Kerry offhandedly suggests Syria disarm itself of CW
	Syria announces it will accede to CWC
12	Syria sends instrument of accession to UN
14	Syria accedes to CWC
	Russia and US Framework Agreement concluded
16	UN releases report on CW use in Syria
19	Syria submits initial CWC disclosure to OPCW
23	Syria submits disarmament plan to OPCW
27	OPCW Executive Council agrees disarmament plan
	UN Security Council endorses OPCW plan
October	
1	OPCW inspectors arrive in Damascus
4	Syria submits initial declaration to OPCW
	Inspectors begin to fan out to Syrian CW sites
14	CWC enters into force for Syria
November	
1	Deadline for verified destruction of Syrian production facilities met
14	OPCW considers final destruction plan

Syria enmeshed

4 Regimes

- 1925 Geneva Protocol and 1981 UN Secretary-General's investigative mechanism
- 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention
- 2013 US-Russia bilateral Framework Agreement
- UN Security Council resolution 2118 (2013)

5 Masters

- Russia, US, UN Secretary-General, OPCW and UN Security Council

Regime 1: UNSG's investigation 'mechanism'

- established by UN General Assembly in 1981 to investigate 'yellow rain' in Indochina
- made permanent and subsequently used 12 times
- dispatched by Ban ki-Moon to Syria on 18 August 2013 to investigate multiple CW use allegations: comprised UN, WHO and, for first time, OPCW personnel
- inspectors in Damascus when major attack occurred in Ghouta on 21 August allegedly killing 1400 people; SG ordered it to immediately investigate
- interim report of 16 September: concluded that surface-to-surface rockets containing nerve agent Sarin had been used: strongly implied government's guilt
- team has since returned to Syria to conclude its investigations

Regime 2: 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention

Syria acceded to CWC on 14 September and applied it provisionally until entry-into-force on 12 October. This obliges Syria to:

- declare its CW stocks, production facilities and R&D within 30 days - it did so on 19 September
- destroy its CW holdings as soon as possible
- accept immediate monitoring of its weapons, facilities and destruction
- open its peaceful chemical industry to regular inspections
- accept mandatory challenge inspections initiated by OPCW Executive Secretary (under red light provision)

Non-compliance is subject to referral to UN Security Council

Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

- Implementation/verification body for the Chemical Weapons Convention
- established in 1997; headquartered in The Hague
- almost universal membership: 190 states (non-signatories Angola, DPRK, Egypt, South Sudan; non-ratifiers Israel, Myanmar)
- governed by Executive Council of 41 (Ukraine current chair)
- budget: EUR 75 million (2010)
- Technical Secretariat staff: 500
- inspections in 2011: 16,821 inspector days; 257 facilities
- Director-General: Ahmet Üzümcü (Turkey)
- verified chemical disarmament by Albania, India, Iraq, South Korea and is continuing to do so in Libya, Russia, US

Regime 3: US/Russia Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons, 16 September 2013

- agreed to submit to OPCW Executive Council draft decision on special procedures for rapid destruction of Syria's CW
- agreed to table Security Council resolution to support OPCW
- arrived at 'shared assessment' of Syria's CW capabilities
- committed themselves to immediate international control of Syria's CW and destruction by 1st half of 2014
- agreed that best method may be removing 'largest amounts feasible' under OPCW supervision and destroying them outside Syria
- agreed that Syria should grant unfettered access to all sites and personnel necessary
- agreed that P5 should provide experts to assist OPCW

OPCW Executive Council decision on Destruction of Syrian CW, 27 September 2013 and compliance to date

Syria to:

- ✓ provide additional declaration of its CW in 7 days
- ✓ destroy no later than 1 November all CW production and mixing/filling equipment
- ✓ cooperate fully with OPCW inspectors (so far, so good)
- ✓ designate a main point of contact with OPCW (this and more)
- complete elimination of all of its CW in first half of 2014 (to be seen)

OPCW Secretariat to:

- ✓ begin inspections in Syria by 1 October
- ✓ inspect within 30 days all declared facilities
- ✓ hire additional experts as needed
- ✓ report monthly on implementation

Executive Council to:

- ✓ urgently consider funding arrangements
- meet within 24 hours if Syria procrastinates or fails to cooperate (not yet required)

Regime 4: UN Security Council resolution 2118

- adopted unanimously on 27 September 2013
- called CW use a threat to international peace & security
- condemned ‘any use of CW in the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR)’, but obliged only government to disarm
- obliged SAR to cooperate fully with OPCW and UN including ‘immediate and unfettered access’ to inspectors’ to ‘all and any sites’ and to ‘individuals’
- dispatched advance team of UN personnel to assist OPCW
- urged all Syrian parties and member states to ‘arrange for the security of the monitoring and destruction mission’

In case of non-compliance…

Resolution 2118 not adopted under Chapter VII

- references Article 25 of UN Charter, which obliges all member states to obey Council decisions
- decides ‘in the event of non-compliance with this resolution, including unauthorized transfer of CW, or any use of CW by anyone in the Syrian Arab Republic, to impose measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter’.

Iraq resolution 1141 (2002) adopted under Chapter VII

- decided that Iraq had been and remained ‘in material breach of its obligations under relevant resolutions’
- but that Iraq would be afforded ’a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations’
- recalled, ‘in that context, that the Council has repeatedly warned Iraq that it will face serious consequences as a result of its continued violations of its obligations’.

The process: verification, monitoring, dismantlement, destruction

- destruction/dismantling process will be ‘quick and dirty’: no elaborate destruction plants
- started with rendering production/filling facilities inoperable and destruction of delivery systems, especially rockets/artillery shells
- munitions/warheads filled with agent will be destroyed in Syria (with Russian assistance?)
- bulk agents and precursors will apparently be removed from Syria by ship (through Latakia?) for destruction elsewhere by US mobile labs or at sea
- all of this subject to continuous on-site and in-transit monitoring and verification until complete
- joint OPCW/UN operation involving OPCW inspectors; national experts; 100-strong UN operation, led by Sigrid Kaag, based in Damascus and Cyprus, providing security and logistics

Syria's chemical weapon capabilities

According to OPCW Syria has declared:

- 1,000 metric tons of Category 1 chemicals: mustard gas, Sarin and VX nerve agent (cf. US original stockpile of 31,500 tons), mainly precursors (i.e. not weaponized)
- 290 tons stocks of Category 2
- 1230 unfilled munitions (+ 2 cylinders not belonging to government)
- 41 declared CW production and storage facilities at 23 sites, all in central and western Syria, some near major cities: a dispute over the number has been resolved
- 8 'mobile' production units
- several dedicated R&D facilities but also some dual-use

Syria's main CW facilities

Challenges

Security

- unprecedented risks: inspectors/UN officials/OPCW transport could be attacked by rebels/Syrian forces or be caught up in fighting
- inspectors could be taken hostage by rebel groups or CW hijacked in transit (Syrian National Council has given reassurances)
- access across conflict zones to be negotiated, involving local ceasefires

Safety

- dangers to inspectors from chemicals, destruction process, heat (inspectors in protective masks and suits)
- risk of accidents to inspectors and general population, esp. in transport

Verification

- incomplete declarations: undeclared stocks/weapons
- dual-use problem: chemicals and delivery systems
- Syrian government obstruction, harassment of inspectors or process

Destruction

- location and method: on land/at sea; incineration/hydrolysis; disposition of waste
- legal questions
- environmental questions

Why is this working so well?

Serendipitous convergence of interests

- ✓ US: a way out of its threat to use force
- ✓ Russia: avoid US attack on its ally and raise its own stature
- ✓ Syrian government: avoid US attack; rid itself of pesky weapons; ingratiate itself with international community; preserve Russian support
- ✓ Rebels: avoid having CW used against them and avoid trouble and expensive of defensive and counter measures
- ✓ Security Council: chance to show its relevance
- ✓ UN Secretary-General and Secretariat: chance to display its disarmament role and credentials
- ✓ OPCW: chance to prove its relevance and competence

Broader implications for international affairs

- old-fashioned diplomatic choreography can still work
- international organizations can act swiftly and competently given political support, mandate and resources
- proves worth of establishing standing global governance structures in advance for worst case scenarios
- may induce movement on Syria peace conference, progress towards a Middle East WMD-free zone?
- unanticipated, almost accidental, collaboration between Russia and the United States reminiscent of Cold War, but another harbinger of US decline?

Implications for international relations theory

- Realists: will claim it confirms their state-centric view: US and Russia largely stage-managed the process, including bullying Syria
- Liberal multilateralists: will note the role that existing treaties, organizations and mechanisms played in facilitating the outcome
- Constructivists: will point to the virtually universal norm against chemical weapons use as key reason for global unanimity on what Syria should be required to do
- Critical theorists (and cynics): will see ‘chemical disarmament’ as political semaphore: hurting no-one’s interests and simply making Syria safe for conventional warfare