

# Syria's Chemical Weapons and UN Security Council Resolution 2118: Reality, Resolutions, Representations

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*"One overall objective of any team is to sustain the definition of the situation that its performance fosters. This will involve the over-communication of some facts and the under-communication of others. Given the fragility and the required expressive coherence of the reality that is dramatized by a performance, there are usually facts which, if attention is drawn to them during the performance, would discredit, disrupt, or make useless the impression that the performance fosters." -Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, London: Penguin, 1990 [1959], page 140.*

While it should not be overstated as a grand victory for anti-imperialism, there is also something about the way that senior U.S. officials have been beating their chests about the passage of [United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118](#), that seems to require sober correction. [UNSCR 2118](#) deals with the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons, or to be more exact, the destruction of all chemical weapons in Syria. One should be cautious about celebrating this apparent victory- not so much a victory for anti-imperialism as such and more as a victory for anti-war - simply because we have been down this road before, of UNSC resolutions against Iraq dealing with weapons of mass destruction, with teams of UN inspectors, and a U.S. that is eager to exploit any little pretext offered by the text of a resolution, or what it prefers to imagine is written between the lines.

We have also been down this path twice - the cases of Iraq and Libya - where a state targeted by the U.S. chooses to disarm, only to then face aggressive military intervention from the U.S. Let's hope that Syria will not be the third such case, or else by necessity many states in the world are going to have to seriously consider developing stockpiles of nuclear weapons.

It was also disconcerting, for some of us anyway, to see how Russia and the U.S. negotiated this deal on Syria, while Syria itself was left in the background, as some irrelevant third party whose only duty was to wait and see how the great powers would determine its future. That it was unlikely that Russia negotiated without input from Syria is one thing, but then the question remains as to why Syria could not be afforded the right to participate directly and openly.

Having said that, U.S. depictions of the passage of UNSCR 2118, as even backed in part by the preamble written by UN staff in their digest for the public, require context and careful understanding. First, we must remember that the U.S.' preferred option was direct military

action, unilateral and illegal if need be. That has clearly been stopped, for now.

Second, Sergei Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister, is being more careful with language than either UN staff or his U.S. counterparts, in precisely and accurately stating that, “the text had not been passed under the Charter’s Chapter VII, nor did it allow coercive measures. Violations of its requirements and use of chemical weapons by anyone must be carefully investigated. The United Nations would stand ready to take action under the Charter’s Chapter VII. Violations must be 100 per cent proven”.

Moreover, U.S. representatives such as the Secretary of State, John Kerry, and the U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, have been speaking of [Chapter VII](#) in terms of coercion, enforcement, and punishment, thereby implying that Chapter VII is all about the use of military force. Read it for yourself, it clearly has numerous articles that pertain to many other, non-military measures—Power simply referring to “[measures](#),” in the stern tone of an Irish nun, cannot rewrite international law. And Russia would also have been right in adding that the use of force would require a new and separate resolution. Any violation of this resolution would not automatically authorize military force.

So if the U.S. chooses not to stand down in the Mediterranean, it is for reasons other than “ensuring compliance,” such as: a) trying to intimidate Syria with a display of military might; b) leaving forces near Syrian shores in the hope of manufacturing some Gulf of Tonkin incident; or, c) to ramp up military expenditures, as a budgetary move in order to defend the need to preserve higher levels of military spending.

Third, Samantha Power has been pretending like this resolution gives the U.S. [even more than it sought](#). I have never known the U.S. power elite to be reserved and restrained in expressing its ambitions. If this resolution had ever been its maximal goal, then it would have sought it from the start. What Power obscures, hoping for a gullible American audience that does not bother to look past her authority, is that this was a Russian plan, and she fails to give credit where it is due.

This is even less acceptable after years of specious propaganda about Russian intransigence at the UN—it is the duty of any state that abides by international law to reject outright any plan for regime change, intervention in another country’s civil war on one side in that war, and that seeks to apply sanctions that would punish the country as a whole. Rejecting such measures is only “intransigent” in that it resists the U.S.’ effort to wholly weaponize the UN, and to treat other nations’ diplomats as mere servants of U.S. power.

Fourth, unlike Samantha Power’s [strange assertion](#), UNSCR 2118 does not create a “new norm” (and if it does, she does not specify which). Conventions against chemical weapons already exist in international law, and in formal agencies of the UN. After all, the document itself clearly names the primary one: the [OPCW](#). If there is a “new norm” to be set, it is to be set not by the Security Council but rather by the General Assembly, as we heard Robert Mugabe [explain here recently](#).

Fifth, UNSCR 2118 clearly neither states nor implies that the August 21 chemical attack was the work of the Syrian government. Not only that, the resolution repeatedly refers to “non-state actors” at work in Syria, and their foreign backers, and their own responsibilities under this resolution. That potentially makes any one of three different parties the target for possible action if this resolution is violated, something U.S. officials have been careful to

avoid mentioning in their press propaganda. Note the prohibitions that have been stacked into UNSCR 2118 that work against the U.S., France, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and any other states working to overthrow the Syrian government by arming the “rebels”:

Recalling the obligation under resolution 1540 (2004) that all States shall refrain from providing any form of support to non-State actors that attempt to develop, acquire, manufacture, possess, transport, transfer or use weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons and their means of delivery....

Decides that Member States shall inform immediately the Security Council of any violation of resolution 1540(2004), including acquisition by non-State actors of chemical weapons, their means of delivery and related materials in order to take necessary measures therefore....

Reaffirms that all Member States shall refrain from providing any form of support to non-State actors that attempt to develop, acquire, manufacture, possess, transport, transfer or use nuclear, chemical or biological weapons and their means of delivery, and calls upon all Member States, in particular Member States neighbouring the Syrian Arab Republic, to report any violations of this paragraph to the Security Council immediately....

Demands that non-State actors not develop, acquire, manufacture, possess, transport, transfer or use nuclear, chemical or biological weapons and their means of delivery, and calls upon all Member States, in particular Member States neighbouring the Syrian Arab Republic, to report any actions inconsistent with this paragraph to the Security Council immediately...

Thus Lavrov was right to point out that UNSCR 2118 “contained requirements for all countries,” and, “especially Syria’s neighbours, which must report on moves by non-State actors to secure chemical weapons”.

Sixth, and counter to the preferred representations of U.S. militarists posing as diplomats and humanitarians, this resolution clearly “stresses” that “the only solution to the current crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic is through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process”. Not a military process, but rather a political process of negotiation. Not foreign military intervention, but rather a Syrian-led process. And not military intervention among other measures—rather, no military intervention at all. That is the “only solution”.

If the U.S. were to continue thwarting Syrian peace talks, then at the very least that would violate the spirit of UNSCR 2118.

U.S. officials might continue to beat their chests, hoping we will be impressed as we are with the photoshopped halo around Samantha Power’s head in her Twitter [profile photo](#), but already their private information contractors (otherwise known as privately owned corporate media), have been relatively little inclined to devote much coverage to this event.

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