

WITH OVER HALF OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS- RELATED STOCKPILE REMOVED, RUSSIA SAYS SYRIAN CW POTENTIAL NEAR ZERO

Yesterday, in describing how Russia has played the US media regarding “threats” to the P5+1 negotiations on Iran’s nuclear technology, I mentioned that continued progress on Syria’s removal of its chemical weapons-related materials was further evidence that Russia intends to cooperate on the Iranian and Syrian nonproliferation issues separately from disputes over the Crimea annexation. Today, with news out that removal of the CW-related materials from Syria has crossed the 50% level, Russia has praised that accomplishment while pointing out that Syria now has virtually no capability of using chemical arms. Oh, and if we need any further confirmation that Russia is ready for the recriminations over Crimea to end, Putin himself has now said that there is no further need for retaliation against US sanctions (although I’m guessing that Dana Rohrabacher is in mourning that he wasn’t included in the list of ten US figures sanctioned by Russia since he even played dress-up and “fought” against the Soviets in Afghanistan).

A press release put out by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons yesterday put the removal of materials from Syria at just under 50%:

The OPCW-UN Joint Mission has verified the delivery of another consignment of Priority 1 chemicals today to Latakia and their removal from the port on a cargo ship, raising the amount of Syrian chemicals that are now out of the

country to nearly half of the total stockpile.

The confirmation came on the heels of an announcement late yesterday by the Joint Mission of two other consignments of chemicals that were delivered to Latakia and removed during the past week. A total of 11 consignments of chemicals have now been transported out of Syria for destruction outside the country. The updated cumulative figures are as follow:

Priority 1 chemicals	
removed:	34.8 %*
Priority 2 chemicals removed:	
	82.6 %
Total chemicals	
removed:	49.3 %

/snip/

** Includes all sulfur mustard, the only unitary chemical warfare agent in Syria's arsenal*

But the UN has slightly different figures, putting the removal over 50%:

More than half of Syria's declared chemical weapons arsenal has been shipped out or destroyed within the country, the head of the international team overseeing the disarmament process said on Thursday.

Sigrid Kaag, head of the joint mission of the United Nations and Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), said 54 percent of the toxins had been removed or eliminated.

The process, which President Bashar al-Assad's government agreed to after a chemical attack killed hundreds of people around Damascus last year, is months behind schedule but Kaag said the new momentum "would allow for timely

completion”.

“The joint mission welcomes the momentum attained and encourages the Syrian Arab Republic to sustain the current pace,” Kaag said in a statement.

Russia welcomed this news and added that Syria now has almost no capability of carrying out an attack with chemical weapons:

The Syrian government has reduced its chemical weapons potential close to zero, state-run RIA news agency quoted an unnamed official at the Russian Foreign Ministry as saying on Friday.

“Chemical weapons production facilities, equipment for mixing (chemicals) and operating (the weapons), as well as the means of their delivery have been destroyed,” the official said, adding that the only gas that had been ready for use in weaponry had been completely removed from the country.

“At the moment, Damascus has de facto reduced its military chemical weapons potential to almost zero.”

Sadly, those who relish a restart of the Cold War are unlikely to stop now, so we are left to wonder what Putin will do in response if the US (especially Congressional meddlers) takes further steps claimed to be in response to the annexation of Crimea. Putin’s statement today that he sees no need for further retaliation can be viewed as reining back in the “threat” delivered by Ryobkov after the P5+1 negotiations ended Wednesday. Further action by the US, though, could end Russian cooperation in both the P5+1 process and the Syrian CW situation, seriously hurting current nonproliferation efforts.

It is my hope that Cold War fans will restrict their threats against Russia to the realm of

what would happen should Putin try to grab more territory beyond Crimea.