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## TABLE OF CHEMICAL ARGUMENTS

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At a news conference in Damascus, Syrian Foreign Ministry spokesman Jihad Makdissi threatened that Syria may use chemical weapons in the event of foreign aggression. At the same time, he vowed that [Syria's] existing arsenal of weapons of mass destruction "will never, never be used against civilians." It is not clear, however, how the Syrian top officials, besieged in their own residences, define "civilian" in a country without a single peaceful corner left, and where the two largest megalopolises, which had been almost unaffected by the civil war - the capital and Aleppo - have turned into battlefields. President Bashar Assad's regime describes his adversaries as "gangs of foreign terrorists and mercenaries." That does not exactly fit the definition of "civilian."

A bomb attack in Damascus last week killed or seriously injured many in the top command of security services and the military, including members of the Assad family - people well known in Moscow, who have collaborated with the Russian military and special services. In retaliation, the elite 4th Motorized Division under the command of Assad's younger brother has been cracking down relentlessly on Damascus suburbs, cleansing them of militants from the Syrian Free Army who have infiltrated the area, in the style of the Russian attack on Grozny in January 2000, using artillery and assault aircraft, and turning urban sectors into a wasteland. But the rebels, doing

their best to avoid concentrated strikes by the Army, which has firepower far superior to theirs, promptly shifted their main efforts northward, to Aleppo. The regime's forces are dangerously spread out and obviously unable to retain control over different parts of Syria at the same time. The Syrian middle class in Damascus and Aleppo, relatively loyal until recently, is now fleeing cities and the country in droves, going wherever they can - Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, etc. Even if both Damascus and Aleppo are brought under control, the prosperous cities will be in ruins. Syria is on the brink of total collapse and a humanitarian catastrophe, while the regime, in a state of panic, is threatening to use weapons of mass destruction - and may in fact use them, as Saddam Hussein did against Kurdish insurgents in 1988.

The Syrian military has chemical weapons (*yperite, sarin, soman* and other nerve agents), as well as delivery systems: artillery shells, airborne dissemination containers and "special" warheads for tactical ballistic missiles. Since the arsenal was prepared primarily for a war with Israel, in which case the adversary would have total air supremacy, the most important part of the arsenal for the Syrian military were chemical warheads for the Soviet-made Luna-M 9M21 missiles with a range of 70 kilometers (Syria has 18 systems), the Tochka 9M79, a more advanced and high-accuracy missile with a range of 70 km (18 systems) and the R-17 8K14 (Scud-B) with a range of 300 km (more than 20 launchers). The Syrians also have several Scud-C systems with a range of 550 km, manufactured in North Korea on the basis of the Soviet R-17. Syria's numerous multiple rocket launch systems, including the Grad and the Urgan, are also basically capable of serving as delivery vehicles for chemical weapons of mass destruction.

The Scud-B (R-17) is a reliable weapon system carrying a 1-ton warhead, but is very inaccurate. That is why in our Armed Forces, the R-17 system was regarded first and foremost as a delivery system for chemical and nuclear WMD. However, the R-17, Luna-M and Tochka missiles were officially exported with a high-explosive fragmenting warhead, including to Syria. But the Syrians could have converted them for WMD delivery either on their own, or with the help of North Korea or Iran. Whether that is indeed the case is no longer important today: After Makdissi's threats, Syria's neighbors (primarily Turkey and Israel) should assume the worst - a direct threat of missile strikes with chemical (and possibly biological) WMD. Besides, the zone of effective engagement includes the US Air Force's largest strategic base in Incirlik, Turkey, with a garrison of 5,000 service personnel, as well as their families. Incirlik is located near one of Turkey's largest cities, Adana, 120 km from the Syrian border and 200 km from Aleppo, where fierce fighting continues. There are two schools for children of US service personnel in Incirlik. There are up to 70 B-61 tactical thermonuclear bombs in Incirlik's underground bunkers, with variable yields of 0.3 to 170 kilotons, 50 of which are designed for US carrier aircraft that would be redeployed to the region in case of a crisis, and up to 20 B-61s for the Turks - to use in strikes with prepared F-16 fighter jets. All of that is now under threat of a possible Syrian chemical missile strike, and right now, there is nothing to fully protect Incirlik or Turkish territory.

Last month, a Turkish Air Force RF-4E reconnaissance plane fell into the sea, and both pilots died after it came under fire from a Syrian air defense system in Syrian airspace [*see Current*

*Digest, Vol. 64, No. 26, pp. 7-9].* According to informed sources, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan urged his NATO allies to immediately introduce a "no fly zone" in Syria, as well as a "security zone" for refugees on the border with Turkey. In other words, the idea was to wipe out Syrian aviation and missile defenses, and establish total air supremacy. However, without the US, the Turks would be unable to penetrate the Syrian anti-aircraft system or do anything about the missile threat.

At present, there is no immediate threat of outside intervention in the Syrian conflict. First, NATO allies (read: the US) would have to deploy a regional anti-aircraft system by redeploying Patriot PAC-3 anti-aircraft missile systems to Turkey to protect the Incirlik air force base, along with Turkish cities and troops. US warships with the Aegis command and control system and SM-3 interceptor missiles would need to be brought in. Nuclear submarines and surface ships with hundreds of cruise missiles would also be necessary for the first disabling strike on particularly important and well-protected targets. Combat aviation, reconnaissance and EW systems and tanker aircraft would need to be deployed at bases in Turkey and sovereign British bases in Cyprus. Families of US service personnel would also have to be evacuated from Turkey. Even at a very fast pace, all of that would take between 10 and 14 days, taking into account the fact Turkey is evidently ready to provide the bulk of ground forces, while everything else can be redeployed relatively quickly by air and sea. However, so far, there is no concentration of allied (US) forces in the region, the Pentagon generals do not want to become involved in Syria, and Barack Obama has absolutely no need for a new exotic war ahead of elections. A month ago, Erdogan and his plan for NATO intervention were strongly rebuffed.

But now, the situation is changing: US allies in the region, as well as the Americans in Incirlik, are faced with the threat of WMD. The Pentagon has vehemently told the Syrians to not even think about resorting to chemical weapons, but this time, words alone probably won't be enough: They will have to start the redeployment of forces - first, missile defense systems, then this, that and the other thing. Once the forces are deployed, a single incident could instantly trigger a large-scale confrontation and there will be plenty of those willing to strike the match. In a panic, the Damascus regime seems to have started an accelerated countdown to its own demise. Therefore, it's time for Russia to quickly do what it should have done a long time ago - i.e., evacuate its citizens and military specialists from Syria.

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