U.S., Russia Agree on Plan on Syrian Chemical Weapons
Target Is for Damascus to Destroy Stockpiles by Early 2014

By JAY SOLOMON

GENEVA—The U.S. and Russia agreed Saturday on a broad framework for destroying Syria's stockpile of chemical weapons by the first half of next year.

Under the agreement between Moscow and Washington, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad must provide a complete list of the types, quantity and locations of his country's chemical-weapons stockpiles to the Hague-based Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons by next Friday.

The plan will be codified in a U.N. Security Council resolution that won't rely on a threat of military action for enforcement, officials indicated. The U.S., France and Western allies had favored arming any U.N. resolution with a threat of force for noncompliance. But opposition from Moscow forced the Obama administration to drop the demand to pursue a diplomatic outcome and avoid U.S. military action.

Instead of a threat of force, an initial U.N. resolution will put into effect the process of inspection and destruction of Syria's chemical warfare infrastructure. If inspectors complain of noncompliance, a second U.N. resolution could be adopted under a U.N. rules that in some instances allows for the use of force.

However, Russia's opposition to force makes it nearly certain that any U.N. resolution on Syria will avoid military penalties, U.S. officials acknowledge, while reserving the right for military strikes by the U.S. acting on its own or with allies.

U.S. President Barack Obama said Saturday that the agreement marked progress in U.S.-Russian ties and "represents an important, concrete step" toward disarming Syria of chemical weapons. But he also insisted that the Assad regime live up to the agreement and indicated that if it didn't, the U.S. could respond militarily.

"This framework provides the opportunity for the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons in a transparent, expeditious, and verifiable manner, which could end the threat these weapons pose not only to the Syrian people but to the region and the world," Mr. Obama said in a statement. "And, if diplomacy fails, the United States remains prepared to act."

Mr. Obama's chief GOP foreign policy critics, Sens. John McCain of Arizona and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, criticized the deal as "an act of provocative weakness" for avoiding the threat of force out of deference to Russia.
the destruction of much of Syria's production equipment.

The organization implements the international Chemical Weapons Convention. The U.N. secretary-general said Saturday that he received Syria's "formal instrument of accession" to the convention, meaning that Syria will be bound by it in 30 days, on Oct. 14.

Russian and American diplomats said they hoped to completely dismantle Syria's chemical weapons infrastructure by the first half of 2014. They said the destruction of chemicals, mixing agents, munitions and some delivery systems would take place both inside Syria, and in third countries, over that time.

U.S. intelligence officials believe Syria has about 1,000 tons of mustard gas and sarin and VX nerve agents in its arsenal.

"If we can make this framework a success, we save lives in the region and lay the groundwork for more cooperation" between Moscow and Washington, Secretary of State John Kerry said Saturday after three days of negotiations with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov.

"There is no military solution" to the Syrian civil war, Mr. Kerry added. "It has to happen at the negotiating table."

Mr. Lavrov said at a joint news conference that the framework was reached by "consensus and compromise."

"These are Russian and American proposals to the OPCW," he said.

The framework agreement doesn't call for any measures to hold the Syrian regime accountable for allegedly carrying out the Aug. 21 attacks—allegations the regime and Moscow have repeatedly denied.

That omission has raised concerns in France, where President François Hollande has publicly vowed to punish the regime. A French draft of a U.N. Security Council resolution, which was swiftly rejected by Moscow last week, condemned the Assad regime and called for anyone responsible for the attacks to be prosecuted by the International Criminal Court.

"We need to take action against the people who committed the Aug. 21 attacks, which is not covered" by the Geneva agreement, a French official said Saturday. The official added the French government plans to press its case for prosecuting members of the Assad regime when Mr. Kerry and his U.K. counterpart William Hague hold talks on Syria in Paris on Monday.

The French government also expects the release of a report by U.N. inspectors on possible chemical weapons use in Syria to bolster Paris' case for a Security Council resolution condemning the regime. The U.N. inspectors don’t have a mandate to assign blame for the attack in their report. However, the French official said Paris will pore over the report for evidence the regime was behind the attack, such as the potential use of regime munitions to possibly unleash the poisonous gas.

"If the (report) points to the regime, that could change the discussion," the French official said.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said Friday that inspectors had concluded chemical weapons were indeed used in the attacks, although his spokesman later said the secretary-general hadn't seen the report.

The OPCW is empowered to report any acts of noncompliance by Syria directly to the U.N. Security Council, where penalties would then be discussed under Chapter 7 guidelines of the U.N. charter, which in some cases allow for the use of force, U.S. and Russian officials said on Saturday.

Mr. Lavrov, however, made clear that Moscow wouldn't approve any military retaliation against Mr. Assad through the U.N., a continued sticking point between the White House and Kremlin.

"There is nothing said about the use of force, or of automatic sanctions," Mr. Lavrov said of the new agreement forged with Mr. Kerry.

The Obama administration is looking to Mr. Assad’s declaration of his chemical-weapons stockpile as the first litmus test for the process.
"It may be seen as an act of noncompliance if there's not a good declaration," said a senior State Department official traveling with Mr. Kerry.

American and Russian weapons experts came to agreement on the size of Syria's stockpile during their three days of discussion in Geneva, U.S. officials said. The two sides didn't reach a consensus on the weapons' exact locations.

U.S. officials believe Mr. Assad has moved many of his weapons in recent months to government strongholds in eastern and central Syria.

They said this could allow the OPCW greater access as these areas are less embroiled in Syria's 2 1/2-year-old civil war. Still, U.S. officials said they realized that the Syrian government could seek to block access or harass international inspectors, as it has in the past.

U.S. and Russian officials said they would begin working immediately to help the OPCW gather staff to begin deploying inspection teams inside Syria. Washington and Moscow will also work to provide security for the inspection teams.

U.S. officials said they would look for support from allied countries that have expertise in chemical weapons and the means to destroy them. The U.S. and Russia each have extensive technical expertise from destroying their own chemical-weapons arsenals.

U.S. officials said the OPCW and international community could take steps to make Mr. Assad's chemical weapons unusable, even before they are destroyed or shipped outside Syria.

These include burning the less toxic agents that are mixed with other material to create the chemical weapons, or destroying some of the production equipment and ordnance.

"This is less complicated than destroying the agent itself," said a U.S. official who served on Mr. Kerry's delegation.

U.S. and Russian officials said the schedule they had set for ending Mr. Assad's chemical-weapons program was "ambitious." They said that while a general discussion on reducing the Syrian threat had been under way between Washington and Moscow for more than a year, the specifics of the plan were hashed out in just three days.

"This is very, very difficult. But it's doable," said the State Department official.

** Corrections & Amplifications**

The agreement reached Saturday by the U.S. and Russia on a broad framework for destroying Syria's stockpile of chemical weapons does not explicitly address the use of force, and military retaliation against the Assad regime remains a sticking point between the White House and the Kremlin. An earlier version of this article by the Associated Press wasn't clear on this point when it said that Russia and the U.S. will seek a Security Council resolution that could authorize military action.

—Stacy Meichtry, Géraldine Amiel, Kristina Peterson, Carol E. Lee and Joe Lauria contributed to this article.

**Write to Jay Solomon at jay.solomon@wsj.com**