



[International Watchdog Organization's New Report Finds that the Syrian Regime Used Chemical Weapons Against Civilians in 2018](#)

A new report from an international watchdog has formally accused the Syrian government of using chemical weapons in 2018. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) conducted a thorough investigation into claims made by the Syrian opposition that the Assad regime used chemical weapons shortly after a Russian warplane was shot down by rebels. The investigation included in-person interviews with eyewitnesses on the ground and digital examination of over 400 gigabytes of data. In conclusion, the OPCW ruled that Syrian government forces had dropped cylinders containing chlorine gas in eastern Saraqib, injuring dozens. The OPCW will now move to seek penalties for the Syrian government, including a possible referral to the United Nations Security Council.

It is believed that Syria's use of chemical weapons in Saraqib was in retaliation for a Russian warplane being shot down by rebel forces the day prior. Russia is one of the Assad regime's primary supporters, and actively supported the Syrian government through military and political means during the civil war. However, Russia co-sponsored an agreement with the United States in 2013 to destroy Syria's chemical weapons stockpile, and it is not believed that Moscow sanctioned the attack on Saraqib. Experts have concluded that had Russia been aware of Syria's use of chemical weapons, it would have undermined Moscow's position as a broker in normalizing Syria.

The Syrian government under Bashar al-Assad has always denied using chemical weapons during the civil war, but this week's OPCW report confirms the Assad regime's use of chlorine gas. It is also not the first time that the Syrian government has been caught using chemical weapons. In 2017, the Trump administration sanctioned airstrikes on Damascus after it was confirmed that government forces had used chemical weapons. Despite these two instances of the Assad regime violating international law, Syria has publicly condemned the use of chemical weapons, and claims that they have not been used. In the instance of the attack on Saraqib, government forces have asserted that it was actually the rebels who used the chemical weapons, through dropping a cylinder of chlorine gas from a radio tower. However, the OPCW's report found the radio tower in question is over a mile away, which makes this claim implausible.

The Syrian government did not officially respond to the OPCW's report, although it did comply with the investigation. Over the course of the decade-long Syrian conflict, the Assad regime has earned a reputation for violating international law and rules of war. There are several instances in which the government is accused of using chemical weapons, most prominently the attack on Saraqib in 2018, and during a siege of opposition-held Khan Sheikhoun in 2017 in which sarin gas was used. The OPCW is also currently investigating another potential instance of chemical weapon warfare, during the government's attack on Douma, in which chlorine gas is suspected to have been used. Moving forward, the OPCW's executive council will seek penalties against Syria during a meeting at the Hague later in April. The case could also be referred to the United Nations Security Council for the potential imposition of sanctions and other punitive measures.