

# Syria warns U.S. not to intervene militarily

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The Syrian government accused rebels of using chemical weapons Saturday and warned the United States not to launch any military action against Damascus over an alleged chemical attack last week, saying such a move would set the Middle East ablaze.

The accusations by the regime of President Bashar Assad against opposition forces came as an international aid group said it has tallied 355 deaths from a purported chemical weapons attack on Wednesday in a suburb of the Syrian capital known as Ghouta.

Syria is intertwined in alliances with Iran, Lebanese Hezbollah guerrillas and Palestinian militant groups. The country also borders its longtime foe and U.S. ally Israel, making the fallout from military action unpredictable.

Violence in Syria has already spilled over the past year to Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. Battle-hardened Hezbollah fighters have joined the combat alongside Assad's forces.

Speaking to reporters Sunday in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur, U.S. Defense Secretary Hagel declined to say what action the U.S. might take. He said the administration is weighing many factors. These include an intelligence assessment of the attack in Syria, as well as what he called legal issues and the matter of international support for any military response.

Meanwhile, U.S. naval units are moving closer to Syria. U.S. defense officials told The Associated Press that the Navy had sent a fourth warship armed with ballistic missiles into the eastern Mediterranean Sea but without immediate orders for any missile launch into Syria. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss ship movements publicly.