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Syrian Chemical Disarmament Begins

By Jason Ditz

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The disarmament of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal officially began Sunday, when inspectors from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) oversaw the destruction of warheads and other equipment.

20 inspectors arrived in the country on Tuesday to do the first logistics planning for a bigger team expected this week, but with the effort going better than expected, they were able to get the destruction underway.

Warheads, bombs and chemical mixing equipment were all destroyed today using cutting torches and angle grinders, according to the OPCW statement, saying that Syrians do the actual destruction in the presence of the inspectors, per the terms of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which Syria ratified last month.

With the vast majority of Syria's arsenal in the form of "unweaponized" chemicals, the destruction of mixing gear will render it virtually unusable, and the early efforts are likely to focus on this, with the efforts to neutralize the chemicals themselves coming later.