



## Evidence of Syrian Rebel Use of Chemical Weapons Continues to Accumulate

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### DOCUMENTATION:

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*by William F. Wertz, Jr.*

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*While Barack Obama and John Kerry have lied that the Syrian government was responsible for the use of chemical weapons, evidence continues to accumulate that in fact it was the Syrian rebels who were responsible. What follows is an accumulation of reports on rebel access to and/or use of chemical weapons from public media sources, beginning in March of 2013:*

\* **March 19:** Syrian rebels reportedly used chemical weapons in the village of Khan al-Assal, near Aleppo. Syrian Information Minister Omran al-Zoubi said that this use of chemical weapons by the militants was the "first act" of the so-called opposition interim government. He also said that Turkey and Qatar bore "legal, moral, and political responsibility" for the deaths of 25 and injury of more than 80 others, when militants fired rockets containing "poisonous gases."

The Russian Foreign Ministry said: "According to reports from Damascus, the use of chemical weapons was registered in the Aleppo province early in the morning of March 19," killing 16 and injuring about 100 others.

\***March 20:** The Assad government asked UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to form an international mission to investigate the use of chemical weapons by terrorists in Syria.

\* **March 23:** The London *Telegraph* reported that a "trusted and hitherto reliable" senior Syrian Army source had given British Channel 4 reporter Alex Thompson all the circumstances of the al-Nusra's group's apparent firing of a chlorine-carrying rocket against a Syrian Army checkpoint near Khan al-Assal the week before.

\* **April 27:** Syrian Information Minister Omran al-Zoubi accused Turkey of allowing rebels to transport chemical weapons across its border into Syria.

\* **May 6:** A member of the UN Commission of Investigation on Syria, Swiss Judge Carla Del Ponte, charged that the Syrian rebels used the nerve agent sarin gas, adding that there was no evidence of the Syrian government using chemical weapons. "According to the testimonies we have gathered, the rebels have used chemical weapons, making use of sarin gas," Del Ponte, former chief prosecutor for two UN international criminal tribunals, for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda, said in an interview with Swiss radio. "Our investigators have been in neighboring countries interviewing victims, doctors, and field hospitals and, according to their report of last week, which I have seen, there are strong, concrete suspicions, but not yet incontrovertible proof, of the use of sarin gas, from the way the victims were treated," Del Ponte said in an interview with Swiss-Italian television. "This was used on the part of the opposition, the rebels, not by the government authorities," she said.

\* **May 24:** Farhan Haq, a spokesman for the UN Secretary General, announced that Russian journalists had presented evidence to the UN proving that chemical weapons were used by "armed terrorist groups" [i.e., the rebels] in the Khan al-Assal area last March, according to Anastasia Popova, correspondent of the Russian State Television and Broadcasting Company. The materials included videotapes taken from the site, and testimonies of eyewitnesses, doctors who treated the patients, and experts from Aleppo University.

\* **May 29:** Seven members of the Syrian al-Nusra group were detained in Turkey, after police found sarin gas, which was reportedly going to be used in a bomb attack, during a search of their homes, according to Turkish media. A 2-kg cylinder with sarin gas had been found in the homes of the suspects detained in the southern provinces of Adana and Mersin.

The reports said that the al-Nusra members had been planning a bomb attack for May 30 in Adana. Along with the sarin gas, the police seized a number of handguns, grenades, bullets, and documents during their search. U.S.-trained, retired Lebanese Gen. Hisham Jaber said that this is "not the first time" that the deadly chemical weapons were found in the possession of the insurgents. "When we are talking about two kilograms of sarin," General Jaber stated, "we have to remember that one single gram can kill a person and 2 kg can contaminate and kill a lot of people if they are used in a closed area and against civilians or even the Army."

\* **June 2:** The Syrian Army seized two cylinders of sarin during an operation in the city of Hama, according to Syrian and foreign media reports. The operation was carried out against a militant hideout.

\* **June 2:** Iraq's Defense Ministry said that it had broken up a five-person al-Qaeda cell that was working to produce poison gas for attacks in Iraq and nearby countries, as well as in Europe and North America. The group had built two facilities in Baghdad to

produce sarin and mustard gas, using instructions from another al-Qaeda group, government spokesman Mohammed al-Askari said, adding that the members of the cell had been prepared to launch attacks domestically, and also ran a network that smuggled the toxins to neighboring countries. The Iraqi operation was reportedly carried out in cooperation with an unnamed foreign intelligence service.

BBC quoted Askari as saying that remote-controlled toy planes were also seized at the workshops, which were to have been used to release the chemical agents over the target from a "safe" distance of 1.5 kilometers.

\* **Sept. 5:** The McClatchy Washington News Bureau posted an article which reported that in July Russia gave the UN a 100 page report blaming Syrian rebels for the Aleppo sarin attack of March 19. A statement posted on the Russian Foreign Ministry website late Wednesday (Sept. 4) said the report included detailed scientific analysis of samples that Russian technicians collected at the site of the alleged attack, Khan al Asal in northern Syria. The attack killed 26 people.

Russia said its investigation of the incident was conducted under strict protocols established by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the international agency that governs adherence to treaties prohibiting the use of chemical weapons. It said samples that Russian technicians had collected had been sent to OPCW-certified laboratories in Russia.

The Russian report is specific, the ministry statement said. It is a scientific and technical document.

The Russian Foreign Ministry posted the statement shortly after Russian President Vladimir Putin had asked a Russian interviewer what the American reaction would be if evidence showed that Syrian rebels, not the Assad regime, had been behind a chemical weapons attack.

The Khan al Asal incident was the one that the U.N. team now probing the Aug. 21 attack was originally assigned to investigate, and the Russian statement noted that the investigation had been sidetracked by the sudden focus on the later incident.

The statement's summary of the report said that neither the munitions nor the poison gas in the Khan al Asal attack appeared to fit what is possessed by the Syrian government. The statement said Russian investigators studied the site, sent the materials they found to study to the Russian laboratories of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and followed agreed-upon United Nations investigation standards.

According to the statement, the report said the shell was not regular Syrian army ammunition, but was an artisan-type similar to unguided rocket projectiles produced in the north of Syria by the so-called gang Bashair An-Nasr.

The Russian analysis found soil and shell samples contained a sarin gas not synthesized in an industrial environment, the statement said. The report said the chemical mix did not

appear to be a modern version of the deadly agent, but was closer to those used by Western states for producing chemical weapons during World War II.

\* **Sept. 9:** The Christian Science Monitor reported that Iran has warned the US about chemical weapons in rebel hands for more than a year.

According to leaked diplomatic correspondence, Iran has been warning Washington since July 2012 that Sunni rebel fighters have acquired chemical weapons, and called on the US to send an immediate and serious warning to rebel groups not to use them. In a letter acquired by The Christian Science Monitor that was sent sometime in the spring, Iran told American officials that, as a "supporter" of the rebels, the US would be held responsible for any rebel use of chemical weapons.

Iran amplified those year-old warnings over the weekend in its strongest public comments to date linking the rebels with a chemical weapons, echoing Russia's dismissal of American assurances that President Bashar al-Assad's forces were to blame. The comments come as the US Congress prepares to vote on military strikes.

"There is ample intelligence that takfiri [extremist] groups are in possession of chemical arms," Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Sept. 8 during a visit to Iraq, according to state-run PressTV. "Extremists and takfiris are a threat to the whole region." Semi-official Fars News Agency headlined its story: "Iranian FM Refutes US claims on Syria's Use of Chemical Weapons; Multiple Warnings"

Iran says that it warned the United States directly, in mid- and late- 2012, and at least once after that, about the risks of chemical weapons among the rebels. The letter acquired by the Monitor references messages from July 18 and Dec. 1, 2012. According to the English translation that accompanies the one-page Persian document, the letter reads: "Alerting [worrying] news has been published about the preparations of insurgent forces in Syria for using chemical weapons/elements."

Mr. Zarif first revealed that Iran had sent direct warnings to the US via the Swiss Embassy in Tehran in an interview published Sept. 1 by Aseman weekly in Tehran. The Swiss have handled US interests in Iran throughout the 34-year US-Iran estrangement, and have been a conduit for such messages in the past. Zarif said in the interview that Iran sent a memo to the US last December stating that handmade articles of chemical weapons, including sarin gas, are being transferred into Syria. He added: "In the same note, we warned [Washington] that radical groups might be planning to use these chemical agents."

Zarif said the U.S. never responded to the letter.

\* **Sept. 9:** In a detailed article posted on the World Tribune website Sept. 9, Yosef Bodansky, Senior Editor, GIS/Defense & Foreign Affairs, said on the night of Aug. 20/21, 2013, and the early morning of Aug. 21, 2013—a day before the alleged chemical attack in Ghouta — the jihadists Liberating the Capital Front, led by Jabhat al-Nusra, suffered a major defeat during Operation Shield of the Capital. The main units that

suffered the defeat were Jabhat al-Nusra and Liwaa al-Islam. When the jihadist Front collapsed, the jihadist leaders decided that only a chemical strike could both stop the advance of the Syrian army and provoke a U.S. military strike that would deliver a strategic victory for the jihadists. The identification of Liwaa al-Islam under Zahran Alloush as the jihadist force most likely to have conducted the chemical attack raises major questions regarding the Saudi involvement, and particularly that of Intelligence Chief Prince Bandar bin Sultan.

Bodansky, an Israeli-American political scientist who served as Director of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare of the US House of Representatives from 1988 to 2004, cited military and strategic analyst Brig. Ali Maqsoud, who told him that the Liwaa al-Islam forces included the so-called Chemical Weapons Front led by Zahran Alloush — the supreme leader of Liwaa al-Islam. That group possesses primitive chemical weapons smuggled from al-Qaida in Iraq to Jobar, in the vicinity of Damascus. After al-Nusra and al-Islam groups suffered that defeat, chemical agents were then loaded on what Russian intelligence defined as rockets [which] were manufactured domestically to carry chemicals. They were launched from an area controlled by Liwaa al-Islam.

Bodansky says Maqsoud is convinced the chemical weapons strike was launched at the behest of Washington and on Washington's orders. In the end, we can say that this [post-strike U.S.] escalatory rhetoric aims to achieve two things. The first is strengthening [the U.S.] position as leader of the opposition and imposing conditions in preparation for the negotiating table. The second is changing the [power balance on the] ground and stopping the Syrian army's advance, Maqsoud told al-Safir of Lebanon.

Alloush, Bodansky documents, is the Saudi Intelligence chief Bandar bin-Sultan's man. Zahran Alloush is the son of a Saudi-based religious scholar named Sheikh Abdullah Muhammad Alloush. During the 1980s, he worked for then Saudi Intelligence Chief Prince Turki al-Faisal in both Afghanistan and Yemen. Zahran Alloush was involved with the neo-salafi/Wahhabi underground in Syria since the 1990's, was jailed by Syrian Mukhabarat, and released in mid-2011 as part of Bashar al-Assad's amnesty aimed to placate Riyadh. Zahran Alloush immediately received funds and weapons from Saudi intelligence which enabled him to establish and run Liwaa al-Islam as a major jihadist force.

\* **Sept. 6:** Memorandum was sent to President Obama by Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) entitled ["Is Syria a Trap?"](#) [1]

Members of the Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity include the following individuals: Thomas Drake, Senior Executive, NSA (former); Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.); Matthew Hoh, former Capt., USMC, Iraq & Foreign Service Officer, Afghanistan; Larry Johnson, CIA & State Department (ret.); W. Patrick Lang, Senior Executive and Defense Intelligence Officer, DIA (ret.); David MacMichael, National Intelligence Council (ret.); Ray McGovern, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA analyst (ret.); Elizabeth Murray, Deputy National

Intelligence Officer for Middle East (ret.); Todd Pierce, US Army Judge Advocate General (ret.); Sam Provance, former Sgt., US Army, Iraq; Coleen Rowley, Division Council & Special Agent, FBI (ret.); and Ann Wright, Col., US

In the statement they reveal the following:

"There is a growing body of evidence from sources in the Middle East — mostly affiliated with the Syrian opposition and its supporters — providing strong circumstantial case that the August 21 chemical incident was a pre-planned provocation by the Syrian opposition and its Saudi and Turkish supporters. The aim is to have been to create the kind of incident that would bring the United States into the war.

"We are unaware of any reliable evidence that a Syrian military rocket capable of carrying a chemical agent was fired into the area, the analysts said. In fact, we are aware of no reliable physical evidence to support the claim that this was a result of a strike by a Syrian military unit with expertise in chemical weapons.

"In addition, we have learned that on August 13-14, 2013, Western-sponsored opposition forces in Turkey started advance preparations for a major, irregular military surge. Initial meetings between senior opposition military commanders and Qatari, Turkish and U.S. intelligence officials took place at the converted Turkish military garrison in Antakya, Hatay Province, now used as the command center and headquarters of the Free Syrian Army and their foreign sponsors.

"Senior opposition commanders who came from Istanbul pre-briefed the regional commanders on an imminent escalation in the fighting due to a war-changing development, which, in turn, would lead to a U.S.-led bombing of Syria. At operations coordinating meetings at Antakya, attended by senior Turkish, Qatari and U.S. intelligence officials as well as senior commanders of the Syrian opposition, the Syrians were told that the bombing would start in a few days. Opposition leaders were ordered to prepare their forces quickly to exploit the U.S. bombing, march into Damascus, and remove the Bashar al-Assad government."

\* **Sept. 9:** Belgium Journalist Pierre Piccinin da Prata gave an interview to Italy's RTL radio station, after being released by Al Nusra Syrian rebels after 5 months in captivity. "This is my moral duty to tell about this. It is not the Al-Assad government who has used sarin or any other gas. We are sure about this after we accidentally heard a conversation between rebels. It costs me to say so, because I have supported the Free Syrian Army passionately."

\* **August 29:** The Mint Press News reported Aug. 29, in an article entitled "Syrians: Saudi-supplied rebels behind Chemical Attack," written by Dale Gavlak and Yahya Ababneh, that many Syrians interviewed by them believe that the rebels received chemical weapons via the Saudi intelligence chief, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, and were responsible for carrying out the chemical attack in Syria.

Dale Gavlak is a Middle East correspondent for Mint Press News who has reported from

Amman, Jordan, writing for the Associated Press, NPR and BBC and Yahya Ababneh is a Jordanian freelance journalist whose articles have appeared on Amman Net, Saraya News, Gerasa News and elsewhere

"My son came to me two weeks ago asking what I thought the weapons were that he had been asked to carry," said Abu Abdel-Moneim, the father of a rebel fighting to unseat Assad, who lives in Ghouta. Abdel-Moneim said his son and 12 other rebels were killed inside of a tunnel used to store weapons provided by a Saudi militant, known as Abu Ayesha, who was leading a fighting battalion. The father described the weapons as having a "tube-like structure" while others were like a huge gas bottle.

Ghouta townspeople said the rebels were using mosques and private houses to sleep while storing their weapons in tunnels. Abdel-Moneim said his son and the others died during the chemical weapons attack. That same day, the militant group Jabhat al-Nusra, which is linked to al-Qaida, announced that it would similarly attack civilians in the Assad regimes heartland of Latakia on Syria's western coast, in purported retaliation.

"They didn't tell us what these arms were or how to use them," complained a female fighter named K. "We didn't know they were chemical weapons. We never imagined they were chemical weapons."

"When Saudi Prince Bandar gives such weapons to people, he must give them to those who know how to handle and use them," she warned. She, like other Syrians, do not want to use their full names for fear of retribution. A well-known rebel leader in Ghouta named J agreed. "Jabhat al-Nusra militants do not cooperate with other rebels, except with fighting on the ground. They do not share secret information. They merely used some ordinary rebels to carry and operate this material," he said.

"We were very curious about these arms. And unfortunately, some of the fighters handled the weapons improperly and set off the explosions," J said.

More than a dozen rebels interviewed reported that their salaries came from the Saudi government.

\* **Sept. 9:** Mother Agnes Mariam el-Salib, mother superior of St. James Monastery in Qara, Syria told Russia Today in an interview, that she has proof the footage of the alleged chemical attack in Syria was fabricated, and she says that she is about to submit her findings to the UN. She said that she carefully studied the video featuring allegedly victims of the chemical weapons attack in the Syrian village of Guta in August and now questions its authenticity.

In an interview she said:

"I have carefully studied the footage, and I will present a written analysis on it a bit later. I maintain that the whole affair was a frame-up. It had been staged and prepared in advance with the goal of framing the Syrian government as the perpetrator.

"The key evidence is that Reuters made these files public at 6.05 in the morning. The

chemical attack is said to have been launched between 3 and 5 o'clock in the morning in Guta. How is it even possible to collect a dozen different pieces of footage, get more than 200 kids and 300 young people together in one place, give them first aid and interview them on camera, and all that in less than three hours? Is that realistic at all? As someone who works in the news industry, you know how long all of it would take. The bodies of children and teenagers we see in that footage—who were they? What happened to them? Were they killed for real? And how could that happen ahead of the gas attack? Or, if they were not killed, where did they come from? Where are their parents? How come we don't see any female bodies among all those supposedly dead children?

"I am not saying that no chemical agent was used in the area it certainly was. But I insist that the footage that is now being peddled as evidence had been fabricated in advance. I have studied it meticulously, and I will submit my report to the UN Human Rights Commission based in Geneva."

**Links:**

[1] <http://antiwar.com/blog/2013/09/06/veteran-intelligence-professionals-warn-obama-on-syrian-intel/>

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